

THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

A PERSONALIST DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE:

KARL BARTH'S *CHURCH DOGMATICS* III.3

IN CONVERSATION WITH PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY

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DARREN M. KENNEDY

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I present a critical explication of Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III.3. I argue that Karl Barth's doctrine of providence developed throughout *CD* III.3 represents a 'personalist' revision of Reformed orthodoxy which can only be understood through his *ad hoc* use of philosophical resources. I claim that critics and supporters alike have missed the depth of Barth's revision of Reformed providence by failing to perceive his *ad hoc* use of contemporaneous philosophical tools of the personal. Barth's doctrine of providence remains theology proper, and not philosophy, but cannot be understood without philosophy. By setting Barth in conversation with three philosophical theologians, Vincent Brümmer, John Macmurray and Austin Farrer, I attempt to show how far Barth is from pre-modern understandings in his articulation of the doctrine of providence. These conversations equip the reader to discern continuities and discontinuities of Barth's thought with 20th century personal, relational philosophy, thereby making sense of many of Barth's counterintuitive claims. For Barth, human life is the continual double-agency of human self-determination and divine determination. This life in covenant before God (*coram Deo*) constitutes the God-given opportunity of human personhood. Seen in dialogue with personalist philosophical thinkers, Barth's doctrine of providence overcomes problematic aspects of traditional Reformed views and grants limited time and space for personal development. Providence sheds light on Barth's 'eternalizing' eschatology in that election establishes the objective reality of salvation for all creatures, while providence explicates God's active lordship in the human's self-determination of personal identity in history (the subjective formation of the person who is objectively saved). Election describes God's salvific work on behalf of creation solely in the work of Jesus Christ. Providence determines the identity of those creatures in relation with the personal God. The conversations I propose with philosophical theologians enable the reader to discern a greater philosophical coherence in Barth's doctrine of providence. Through contrast with the philosophical theologians, Barth's christocentric and Trinitarian articulation gains clarity and significance. Building on these philosophical comparisons, I attempt to assess Barth's elaborations on

entrenched debates concerning history as determined by divine action, human freedom under divine providence, and the problem of evil in world-occurrence. I argue that Barth's 'personalist' post-Enlightenment providence as seen in the whole of III.3 points to absolute confidence in God's determination of all world-occurrence, limited human autonomy of action under God's universal providence, and an explication of evil that strengthens the Christian in the face of suffering and injustice.

Signed Declaration

I, Darren Michael Kennedy, hereby declare that I have written this thesis and that the work it contains is entirely my own. I furthermore declare that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Signed _____

Date _____

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>CD</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> (4 volumes, 13 parts)
<i>CCKB</i>	<i>The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Captured by the Crucified: The Practical Theology of Austin Farrer</i>
<i>DA</i>	<i>Divine Action: Studies Inspired by the Philosophical Theology of Austin Farrer</i>
<i>FSW</i>	<i>For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology</i>
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>I.1</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume I.1
<i>I.2</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume I.2
<i>II.1</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume II.1
<i>II.2</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume II.2
<i>III.1</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume III.1
<i>III.2</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume III.2
<i>III.3</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume III.3
<i>III.4</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume III.4
<i>IV.1</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume IV.1
<i>IV.2</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume IV.2
<i>IV.3.1</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume IV.3.1
<i>IV.3.2</i>	<i>Church Dogmatics</i> , volume IV.3.2
<i>JMCP</i>	<i>John Macmurray: Critical Perspectives</i>
<i>KD</i>	<i>Kirchliche Dogmatik</i> (4 volumes, 13 parts)
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The central claim of this thesis is that Karl Barth's doctrine of providence in *Church Dogmatics* III.3 must be understood as entirely personal. Specifically, human life is the continual double-agency of human self-determination and divine determination. This life in covenant before God (*coram Deo*) constitutes the God-given opportunity of human personhood. Seen in dialogue with personalist philosophical thinkers, Barth's doctrine of providence overcomes problematic aspects of traditional Reformed views and grants limited time and space for personal development. Moreover, providence sheds light on Barth's 'eternalizing' eschatology in that election establishes the objective reality of salvation for all creatures, while providence determines precisely who these human persons are that will be saved. It is specifically these persons—determined in world history under providence—who face God's mercy and judgment and participate in God's eternal life. Election describes God's salvific work on behalf of creation solely in the work of Jesus Christ. Providence determines the identity of those creatures in relation with the personal God.

This thesis is a critical reading of the providence of God in III.3. Brian Hebblethwaite describes providence as a non-credal doctrine which underlies 'all the actual doctrines of the creed'.¹ As such, neglect of providence comes with great risks to dogmatics. Positively, a proper understanding sheds light on the doctrines it supports. In conversation with three philosophical theologians, I argue that Barth uses personalist philosophical forms to articulate a thoroughly theological, personal providence.² Thus III.3 is a 'personalist' revision of Reformed orthodoxy which can only be understood through Barth's *ad hoc* use of philosophical resources.

Critics and supporters alike miss the depth of Barth's revision by failing to perceive this *ad hoc* use of personalism. Barth's doctrine of providence remains

¹ Brian Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical Theology and Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 132.

² McDowell and Higton helpfully offer a challenge for more careful 'conversation' with Barth. I have attempted throughout this thesis to engage Barth with Brümmer, Macmurray and Farrer along these lines, particularly with regard to difference. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton, 'Introduction: Karl Barth as Conversationalist,' in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 1ff.

theology proper (and not philosophy), but cannot be understood without philosophy. By setting Barth in conversation with Vincent Brümmer, John Macmurray and Austin Farrer, I show how far Barth is from pre-Enlightenment suppositions. These conversations equip the reader to discern continuities and discontinuities of Barth's thought with 20th century personal, relational philosophy, thereby making sense of many of Barth's counterintuitive claims. Further, the conversations enable the reader to discern a greater philosophical coherence in Barth's theology. Building on these philosophical comparisons, I assess Barth's reformulations of providence regarding history as determined by divine action, human freedom under providence, and evil in world-occurrence. I argue that Barth's personalist, post-Cartesian/Kantian providence as seen in the whole of III.3 points to absolute confidence in God's active sovereignty in world-occurrence, humanity's personal freedom in relation, and an explication of evil that strengthens the Christian in the face of suffering and injustice. Moreover, Barth's doctrine of providence in human life carries significant implications for eternal life.

While sharing many theological values with his predecessors in the Reformed Tradition, Barth hopes to significantly alter its articulation of providence. Barth introduces his tome claiming,

In the doctrine of providence, which I desire should be regarded as the real substance of this volume, I have found it possible to keep far more closely to the scheme of the older orthodox dogmatics...than anticipated. The radical correction (*Die durchgehende Korrektur*) which I have also undertaken will not be overlooked.³

Barth makes two significant claims here which are often overlooked. First, Barth deals with providence *throughout* III.3. While comprised of four paragraphs, the part-volume retains its focus on providence. At present, no significant study has assessed Barth's doctrine of providence looking at III.3 as a whole.⁴ Second, Barth understands himself to be radically revising Reformed orthodoxy. However, his hopes that this 'radical correction' would 'not be overlooked' have gone unrealized.

³ III.3, xii (VI).

⁴ Overviews of the entire *CD* do cover III.3 as a whole, but their scope does not allow for the depth of Barth's argument. See Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979), 141ff; William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 91ff; Otto Weber, *Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics: An Introductory Report on Volumes I:1 to III:4*, trans. Arthur C. Cochrane (London: Lutterworth Press, 1953), 165ff. Whitehouse summarizes the whole of III.3. W. A. Whitehouse, *The Authority of Grace: Essays in Response to Karl Barth*, ed. Ann Loades (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 33ff.

Both of these claims are underscored in the discussion of secondary literature in Chapter II. Both can be seen most clearly in Barth's use of the personal.

Chapter II sets the discussion of III.3 in its wider context. I begin with pragmatic clarifications and delimitations. Next, a literary review of critics and supporters of Barth's doctrine of providence summarizes the chief criticisms of III.3. In both cases, writers miss much of Barth's meaning by overlooking his *ad hoc* use of contemporaneous philosophy in his theological enterprise. Barth's comprehensive reformulation of Reformed orthodoxy, I argue, is best illuminated by use of hermeneutical tools borrowed from philosophical theology. Second, I outline five trends present in traditional Reformed providence. While necessarily brief, the discussion highlights Barth's points of departure and the depth of his reformulation. Finally, I offer a brief justification for bringing philosophy in general into conversation with Barth despite his polemic against philosophy.

Chapter III brings Barth into conversation with South African born philosophical theologian Vincent Brümmer. Brümmer's basic frameworks of personal and causal relations clarify common objections to traditional Reformed providence as deterministic, particularly in relation to eschatology. Brümmer's minimal requirement for a 'person' and his diagrammatic presentation of divine and human persons illumine continuity and discontinuity with Barth. For Barth, election—solely in Jesus Christ—eliminates any contributory influence from other humans, but opens opportunity in providence. *Because of election*, humans can love God, omnipotence is not raw power, and humans have self-determination in correspondence with the determinative action of God's 'right and left hand'. Based on the particularity of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, Barth describes the triune God as '*the person*' and all other personhood derivative from this original. This asymmetry allows Barth to share Brümmer's theological and philosophical values while constructing a very different doctrine to articulate those values.

Having better explained Barth's christologically determined persons of providence, I turn to Scottish moral philosopher John Macmurray and his 'form of the personal.' Carefully explicating the dangers of Cartesian dualism, Macmurray uses personal agency to move beyond historic debates which equate determination of all things with determinism. The discussion helps dispel critiques of Barth as a hyper-dualist and indicates the form of divine-human relations. Macmurray's understanding of the *singular* intention of God in creation illumines Barth's puzzling use of election in relation to providence. It also assists in understanding Barth's

insistence that the free, living God is fully determinate in Jesus Christ. I conclude the chapter with an assessment of Barth's personal providence based on his theological exegesis in II.2.⁵ While the community and individuals contribute nothing to election, their thinking, speaking and action *witness* to election through the providential determination of God's right and left hand.

The final conversation with philosophical theologian Austin Farrer shows greater continuity than the previous two. Farrer's case for double-agency argues for the veracity of 'religious knowledge' against charges of faith's irrationality. Nevertheless, an agnosticism remains.⁶ Barth never uses the term 'double-agency', but describes a similar divine action in every creaturely-occurrence (on the physical, animal and personal levels). Although Barth's emphasis on election differs, his christological double-agency is illumined by Farrer. The personal, living God never ceases to act in, through and with the limited creature. Like Farrer's, Barth's thought presents a human agent factually in continual encounter with God, whether the human subjectively comprehends this or not. Barth's double-agency portrays the personal God's omnicausality while rejecting any claim of God's sole-causality.

In light of these conversations, I turn to III.3 in Chapters VI-IX. Critically explicating each of the four paragraphs, I use the tools from personalist philosophical theology discussed above to show the extent of Barth's revision of Reformed orthodoxy. In this light, Barth's doctrine of providence holds far more coherence than previously acknowledged and presents new answers to some of the most intractable questions arising from providence: Is Christian providence necessarily deterministic? Does a strong providence make God the author of sin? Is Christian providence pastorally effective in the face of evil and suffering? Finally, how does Barth's doctrine of providence shed light on his unfinished eschatology? While not beyond criticism, Barth's comprehensive efforts in III.3 to present the providence of the triune God in personal relation with His creation make great strides beyond Reformed orthodoxy, while preserving its theological values.

Starting with §48 in Chapter VI, I describe Barth's form and order for providence against 'older theology'. All world-occurrence finds its meaning and

⁵ Barth seldom gives concrete examples in his theology. However, his discussion of the determination of the community and the individual in II.2 offer specific portraits of providence in action. While witnessing to election, these are all strictly examples of providence, not election proper.

⁶ I use the term 'agnosticism' in reference to the 'not knowing' ($\alpha + \gamma\nu\omega\sigma\iota\varsigma$) explicit in both thinkers' providence. It does not refer to an uncertainty regarding the existence of God (as in its common use), but in the inability of believers to discern divine action in particular world-occurrence.

basis in election. As such, the Christian sees God's will in Christ and attempts to discern all things in relation to this certainty. The triune God determines all things, not from a static blueprint of history, but in relation to election. Since humans face only the binary option of obedience or disobedience, God determines with the right hand or left hand respectively. This is the co-determination of the human person whom God alone saves in election.

Chapter VII details these claims in §49. While following the formal structure of Reformed orthodoxy's three-fold providence, Barth fills it with christological, and therefore fully personal, content. *Conservatio* breaks from Reformed orthodoxy regarding human immortality and, most essentially, Barth connects providence to his distinctive understanding of eternal life. *Concursus* develops Barth's double-agency as God rules over a world of freedom without interference. *Gubernatio* secures the integrity of the creature within the claim that all things must return to God. Here, Barth speaks of the signs of providence while continuing to assert his particular agnosticism. Finally, Barth develops the pastoral strength of providence discussing the Christian under God's lordship.

Chapter VIII takes up Barth's understanding of evil as *das Nichtige*. Nothingness constitutes one of Barth's most difficult sections in *CD*, but also gives further attention to his ordering of election and providence. §50 does not offer a modern theodicy, but does offer insight into the whole of III.3 as well as Barth's defense against the charge of making God the author of sin. Under God's personal providence, impersonal nothingness has no future and personal human sin is fully determined by God's left hand. While not a solution to all the difficulties of §50, the discussion allows Farrer and Macmurray to shed light on Barth's claims.

Chapter IX re-reads §51 in light of personal providence. I argue that Barth's discussion of heaven and angels explicitly addresses questions of divine agency in the creaturely nexus. In light of the earlier discussions, Barth's argument attempts to give detail to his rejection of dualism, his understanding of the 'causal joint', and his explication of limited human freedom in contrast with angels. Each point furthers Barth's ability to portray providence as God's personal rule over a world of freedom.

I conclude by turning back to the themes of traditional Reformed providence as well as the modern critiques of III.3 to assess Barth's reformulation. While questions and challenges remain, Barth's reformulation of providence as seen through the lenses of philosophical theology is both radical and appropriately engaged with contemporary concerns.

CHAPTER II

PROLOGOMENA

In offering a critical reading of III.3 using tools from philosophical theology, some clarifications are necessary. First, I am not suggesting that Barth followed or even read the three authors discussed in this thesis; he almost certainly did not. Brümmer, Macmurray and Farrer offer useful discussions of the personal that bring III.3 greater clarity.¹ Thus this choice is pragmatic rather than historical.

Second, the philosophical conversations and a focus on Barth's materials leading up to III.3 constitute the majority of the thesis, before reaching the discussion of III.3 proper.² Following Bruce McCormack's claim that Barth's mature theology emerged in *CD* II, I concentrate on materials between II.1-III.4 in my reading of III.3 (particularly in Chapters III, IV and V).³ My reasons are two-fold. First, Barth's personalist providence demands the purging of some of the most entrenched presuppositions in western thought.⁴ He does much of this work preceding III.3. Barth's straight-forward meaning is incomprehensible unless its foundation is clear. Second, III.3 developed in the whole of *CD*. Setting it in its wider context guards

¹ While using German contemporaries in philosophical theology might arguably add more specificity to my discussion of Barth, the three thinkers used here effectively bring out new details in Barth's theology. In essence, I hope that the results justify the comparison.

² One consequence of my ordering is that significant discussions of providence occurring after III.3 are omitted. See for example IV.3.2, 681ff.

³ McCormack argues convincingly that II.1 reflects a break from Barth's methodology outlined in *CD* I and that one result is that 'that there could be no independent doctrine of creation and providence'. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 454. While I am not legalistic in this restriction, I weight the discussion heavily on *CD* II and III. This focus allows for a greater patience and care in reading Barth while the span of 11 years (from II.1 in 1940-III.4 in 1951) protects against a 'flat' reading.

⁴ Brümmer, Macmurray and Farrer lament the depth of impersonal philosophical presuppositions in Western thought generally. Brümmer writes, '...western thought has suffered from a systematic blind spot for relations'. Vincent Brümmer, *The Model of Love: A Study in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 33. Macmurray claims that 'the crisis of the personal' constitutes 'the emergent problem for contemporary philosophy'. John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 17ff. Farrer laments Aristotle's influence on causal doctrine and claims '...his error has endlessly misled Christian Europe'. Austin Farrer, *Faith and Speculation: An Essay in Philosophical Theology containing the Deems Lectures for 1964* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1967), 174.

against a flat reading of III.3. I understand the dangers of both addressing too much or too little. My analysis attempts to avoid both extremes.⁵

Third, my use of ‘personalism’ requires elaboration. I am aware of the tremendous diversity of thought characterized as ‘personalist’.⁶ F. LeRon Shults refers more broadly to ‘the philosophical turn to relationality’, in which he includes Barth.⁷ Throughout this thesis, I use the term personalism to point to Barth’s *ad hoc* use of personalist philosophical tools in articulating his christocentric and trinitarian theology. Like personalism, Barth understands ultimate reality to be irreducibly personal, relational, theistic, dynamic and moral. Unlike most philosophical personalism, Barth sees the trinitarian God revealed in Christ to be that Person, grounding each other aspect. Thus while Barth believes that ‘person is the ontological ultimate...for which personality is thus the fundamental explanatory principle’, he does so christocentrically.⁸ Admittedly, the term falls prey to Barth’s own criticisms of ‘isms’ in III.3. Seen in the provisional, *ad hoc* way described here, I believe it still proves helpful in interpreting Barth. I use the term in reference to Vincent Brümmer, John Macmurray and Austin Farrer as well.

Personalism, broadly defined, has experienced something of a revival in recent years. I draw on a recent study by Robert Spaemann here to outline my usage of the term in referring to broad patterns of thought in Barth as well as the three philosophical theologians. First, personalism accentuates individuality through communal relationships. Spaemann claims, ‘Persons are singular in an unparalleled fashion...Yet self-identification cannot occur solipsistically. It necessarily implies the existence of others...’⁹ Personalism integrates the importance of the individual *in relation* to the Other and the community. This relationality allows personalism to

⁵ To the possible charge that my focus on III.3 precludes important discussions of providence elsewhere in Barth’s corpus, I reply ‘*mea culpa*’. My limits arise from the nature of a thesis on the one hand and the volume and richness of Barth’s thought on the other. To charges that III.3 is too broad, again, ‘*mea culpa*’. I necessarily rush past remarkable claims made in subsections in an attempt to outline the carefully constructed whole of providence in III.3.

⁶ Yandell and Olof concur on three broad categories of personalism: atheistic personalism, absolute idealistic personalism, and theistic personalism. See Jan Olof Bengtsson, *The Worldview of Personalism: Origins and Early Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 31; Keith E. Yandell, ‘Personalism,’ in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 667. This thesis confines itself entirely to theistic personalism.

⁷ F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 117ff.

⁸ See John H. Lavelly, ‘Personalism,’ in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Paul Edwards (London: Collier-Macmillan, 1972), 107.

⁹ Robert Spaemann, *Persons: The Difference between ‘Someone’ and ‘Something’*, trans. Oliver O’Donovan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 35.

preserve individuality without individualism or abstraction. All four of the thinkers here share this ordering of individual integrity in relation to others. Barth's doctrine of providence in particular stresses the creature's individual importance in relation to the triune God and others.

Second, Spaemann's reference to solipsism indicates a rejection of personal identity as *merely* rational self-consciousness. Barth and the three philosophical theologians lament the overly speculative tendency in the Western tradition. Personalism asserts that 'person' cannot be separated from her body or the world around her. She interacts with other embodied persons in the physical and animal world. Spaemann explains, 'Solipsism, then, is incompatible with the concept of the person. The idea of a single person existing in the world cannot be thought, for although the identity of any one person is unique, personhood as such arises only in a plurality.'¹⁰ Likewise, a holistic view of the person leads to a more integrated view of the person's connection to impersonal creatures as well. Spaemann writes,

Persons are not something *else* the world contains, over and above inanimate objects, plants, animals, and human beings. But human beings are connected to everything else the world contains at a deeper level than other things to each other. That is what it means to say that they are persons.¹¹

In this way, personalism emphasizes both the holistic nature of the personal creature and that person's relations to the wider creation. This feature of personalism plays an important role in Barth's opposition to dualism throughout his providence.

Third, personalism asserts the irreducibility of the person. While persons share characteristics with other creatures, persons cannot be deconstructed into the sum of their attributes. Spaemann explains, 'The point is simply that though the abstraction is possible only because human beings have qualitative attributes, qualitative attributes do not define personal identity. *Who* we are is not simply interchangeable with *what* we are.'¹² This reality is often missed in speaking abstractly of God as the Almighty or of human beings generally. While persons exist in community, it is a community 'where each member occupies a unique and distinctive position entirely his or her own.'¹³ I discuss this aspect in greater detail later as 'actualistic ontology'. Barth and the philosophical theologians discussed

¹⁰ Ibid., 40. Like Barth, Spaemann links his thought directly to the Trinity, 'That is why philosophical monotheism is invariably ambiguous: either it is [*sic*] advances to become trinitarianism, or it slips back into pantheism.' Spaemann, *Persons*, 40.

¹¹ Spaemann, *Persons*, 4.

¹² Ibid., 11; emphasis Spaemann's.

¹³ Ibid., 4.

here stress the particularity of human persons under providence and warn against fictional abstractions.

Finally, personalism integrates philosophy or theology with ethics. Since theory and practice remain united in personal action through intentionality, personalism evaluates the rightness of action. Thus Spaemann demonstrates the logic of the personal moving from ‘the ontological into the moral.’¹⁴ While the philosophical theologians here focus primarily on creaturely interaction, Barth’s doctrine of providence stresses the obedience or disobedience of the human person in relation with the personal God revealed in Christ.

While these four aspects of personalism can be found to varying degrees in other views, their centrality and importance sets them apart in the ‘personalism’ discussed here. I thus use the term, not to denote a formal school of thought, but as short-hand for the common use of the features above.

Survey of III.3 Critiques

III.3 receives less attention than other volumes of *CD*.¹⁵ One possible reason for this relative neglect is its seemingly eclectic composition: two paragraphs on providence, one on Nothingness, and a final paragraph on heaven, angels and demons. Few scholars have approached III.3 as a sustained discussion on providence proper (with Nothingness and angels contributing constructively to the argument). This seems one cause for missing Barth’s *ad hoc* use of contemporary personalist philosophy. The following represent the most common readings.¹⁶ While not exhaustive, they give an indication of the primary complaints and difficulties in reading III.3. The irony of these critiques is that Barth shares the underlying concern in each case, but addresses it in an unexpected (yet thoroughly theological and personal) manner.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁵ Mangina writes, ‘Barth’s theology of creation is not what made him famous.’ Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth : Theologian of Christian Witness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 87.

¹⁶ I have notably left Tanner’s insightful analyses out of this survey as they lack a central critique of Barth. While Tanner’s discussions prove helpful on a formal level, her largely appreciative reading of Barth (like other readings) misses the heuristic importance of the personal. Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), 77ff; Kathryn Tanner, ‘Creation and Providence,’ in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 111ff.

In 1969, Charles Duthie wrote a brief summary of Barth's doctrine of providence.¹⁷ He consistently criticizes Barth for the incoherence of his claim that God is fully transcendent and sovereign even as the human agent acts freely. Duthie asks, 'In his endeavour to do justice to the lordship of God, does [Barth] do less than justice to human freedom and activity?'¹⁸ Duthie reasons,

Barth does not take proper account [*sic*] of what may be called the tensional because truly personal relationship between God and man. It is a relationship which by its very nature gives to man the opportunity either to co-operate or to resist. He can say yes or he can say no to God.¹⁹

Duthie's use of 'tensional', 'co-operate' and 'resist' all indicate an understanding of the divine and human agents in competition or conflict. In such a framework of conflict, Duthie concludes that Barth's emphasis on divine sovereignty must lead to the conclusion that nothing is left for the human agent: genuine freedom is an illusion. Duthie reasons that the human person is lost in Barth's doctrine of providence.²⁰

Duthie's concluding remarks reveal his own presuppositions and over-riding concerns,

...we find it disappointing because it does not correspond to what we take to be reasoned and reasonable Christian apologetic. We find it too often to be full of confident assertions which are not properly grounded.²¹

This passage adds more criticisms. Barth's doctrine of providence does not fit Duthie's *presupposed* conception of 'reasoned and reasonable Christian apologetic.' Essentially, Duthie claims Barth's doctrine of providence lacks rationality.²²

Duthie further accuses Barth of expounding a truth which 'is left suspended in the air, unrelated to the life which we live on earth'.²³ He reasons that unless God can be brought into the causal nexus of our lives, there cannot be any rational talk of God's agency in the world. This philosophical critique challenges the pastoral value

¹⁷ Charles Duthie, 'Providence in the Theology of Karl Barth,' in *Providence* ed. Maurice Wiles (London: SPCK, 1969), 62ff.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁰ Hartwell is more sympathetic to Barth, but comes to the same basic conclusion: 'The proposition that man's acknowledgement and acceptance of God's grace in Jesus Christ is man's own free and responsible decision and action implies [*sic*], contrary to Barth's teaching, a co-operation of some sort on the part of man. In his legitimate endeavour to make quite clear that in the relationship between God and man God works everything and man can add nothing to it, Barth goes too far in denying any co-operation on man's part.' Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 186.

²¹ Duthie, 'Providence,' 75.

²² Ironically, Barth's harshest critics simultaneously criticize him for both repetitiveness and incoherence, when serious analysis of the repeated claims reveals Barth's coherence.

²³ Duthie, 'Providence,' 75.

of providence. Such a doctrine cannot comfort a suffering Christian. Barth consistently references the 1755 Lisbon earthquake as the experience which destroyed older, more optimistic understandings of providence, lamenting their pastoral deficiency.²⁴ Therefore, the pastoral value is important to Barth and the critique would be devastating if valid.

In her 1986 analysis, Sheila Greeve Davaney comes to similar conclusions.²⁵ Davaney claims, 'Barth's intention is clear: to maintain both the all-determining scope of divine power, and the freedom and responsibility of creatures with the notions of divine love and purpose acting as the bridge between the two.'²⁶ According to Davaney, Barth fails to coherently describe the God-world relation because 'he does not conceive of it as entailing any of the social dimensions normally associated with relationship: reciprocity, mutual conditioning, and social interaction.'²⁷ Evaluating Barth's 'dichotomized view,' Davaney complains,

...even when Barth does want to utilize the same notions...to characterize both God and the world, he must do so in such fundamentally different ways that such common usage is confusing and ultimately highly questionable. Hence, divine freedom entails creativity and choice among alternatives, while creaturely freedom is equated with obedience. Or again God's love is fully gratuitous, never responsive or receptive, while creaturely love is always reactive in nature.²⁸

If God and humans must relate to one another in Davaney's 'social' way, Barth's view is insufficient at best and tyrannical at worst. Here, social interaction is fully defined and understood from the standpoint of human interaction.²⁹

Davaney's reading of Barth conjures the image of Promethean humans striving against the divine, but ultimately failing in the face of overwhelming power. She sees a tremendous threat to humanity in the structure of Barth's supposedly gracious theology:

The end result is that claims of creaturely integrity, power, freedom, and responsibility always stand in danger of being rendered meaningless in the face of the underlying and more primary assertion of God's omnipotence and ontic and noetic independence.³⁰

²⁴ Cf. II.1, 114; III.3, 33, 298.

²⁵ Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Divine Power: A Study of Karl Barth and Charles Hartshorne*, Harvard Dissertations in Religion, vol. 19 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹ Davaney sees the divine-human relation as a subset of relations in general. As such, she cannot make sense of Barth's claims in regard to God's sovereignty without rejecting *any possibility* of genuine interaction.

³⁰ Davaney, *Divine*, 232.

As her title suggests, power dominates Davaney's analysis. When assessing God's action in competition with creaturely power, only monistic or dualistic options remain. Davaney prefers the latter over the former, but claims that Barth's view of power falls into monism with no relationship possible.

A fifth critique is captured by Caroline Schröder's lament, 'It could be concluded from reading III/3 that nothing new exists under the sun.'³¹ Barth's doctrine of providence merely restates the outdated claims of historical theology without acknowledging the difficulties of modern philosophical and practical life.³² Where Schröder sees weakness, Benjamin Farley finds strength in Barth's commonality with historic views.³³ Farley highlights continuity between Barth and the Reformed tradition, without seeing the full impact of his discontinuity. While quick to acknowledge details where Barth breaks with the past, readers like these deem III.3 far less innovative than Barth's other doctrinal reformulations. Viewed as negative or positive, the underlying claim is that III.3 is not the 'radical correction' that Barth believed it to be.

Schröder criticizes Barth's 'removal of providence from any possible connection with a worldview.'³⁴ This 'could be seen as breaking off discussion, as questionably restricting theology's area of responsibility...'³⁵ Schröder particularly laments the damage done to dialogue with science, citing Christian Link's similar criticism, 'Barth transposed providence to a level where it can no longer be discredited by the modern demand for the verification of hypotheses. It no longer stands in service of explaining the world.'³⁶ The essence of this complaint is that Barth fails to bring providence into relation with a neutral worldview

³¹ Caroline Schröder, "'I See Something You Don't See': Karl Barth's Doctrine of Providence,' in *FSW*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 132.

³² Similarly, Whitehouse laments, 'What he has to say is not excitingly novel...It is not a new story, but an old one, drawn out in its full depth...' Whitehouse, *Authority*, 33f.

³³ See Benjamin Wirt Farley, *The Providence of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988); Benjamin Wirt Farley, 'Providence of God,' in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. Donald McKim (Louisville: WJKP, 1992).

³⁴ Schröder, 'See,' 133. This is a common complaint lodged against Barth. Even more sympathetic readers of Barth such as Whitehouse and Love lament Barth's refusal to incorporate his view of providence into some sort of worldview. Cf. Gregory William Love, 'The Role of the Holy Spirit in Barth's Understanding of the Conjoining of Divine and Human Activity in Divine Providence' (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1996), 458; Whitehouse, *Authority*, 37. I argue that Barth's personalism precludes impersonal worldviews from taking the personal God's place in theology.

³⁵ Schröder, 'See,' 133. Peacocke describes the division between 'infallible religion' and 'all-embracing science' explaining, '...some theologians, too, notably Karl Barth, also retreated into the citadels of their own construction, and echoed similar sentiments from the other side of the no-man's-land.' A.R. Peacocke, *Creation and the World of Science: The Bampton Lectures, 1978* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 13.

³⁶ Schröder, 'See,' 134; Translation Schröder's.

(*Weltanschauung*). Schröder presupposes the all-encompassing nature of scientific thought and complains that God's agency cannot be verified in this way. Schröder and Link thus both accuse Barth's doctrine of providence of an incompatibility with science.

Moreover, according to Schröder, Barth's doctrine of providence leads to the most unacceptable of all conclusions: that Christians proclaim to the world, 'We see something you don't see...because the object appears only to us and not to you...'³⁷ This conclusion expresses Schröder's understanding of both the heart of Barth's doctrine of providence and its dangerous failure. Schröder explains,

Isn't this an expression of spiritual arrogance combined with a lack of self-understanding?...One who believes in his or her own invulnerability will tend to belittle the vulnerable and be incapable of sharing their pain...As if countless chapters of church history would not speak against the claim that Christians have an advantage over others.³⁸

If Barth's doctrine of providence prompts a Christian arrogance, it seems particularly harmful in the context of contemporary global politics and offensive in light of his historic context.³⁹

Finally, Schröder questions the coherence of Barth's specific phrasing in providence. She asks, 'And what does it mean to participate in providence "from within"? That one's own will is congruent with the will of God? Doesn't this agreement transgress the necessary boundary...between God and the Christian?'⁴⁰ If Barth cannot answer these questions, his providence falls into contradictory incoherence. This last critique of Schröder's belongs with Duthie's challenge to the rationality of Barth's doctrine. I state it here because these specific questions cause a stumbling block for readers.

Clearly there is overlap between many of the critiques above. Moreover, virtually all of the critiques reveal the philosophical and cultural presuppositions of the 20th century post-Enlightenment world. I argue that Barth shares these concerns and intentionally reformulates providence with these in mind. The basic criticisms can be summarized in the following seven points: 'Barth's doctrine of providence...

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid. Davies makes a similar critique with far more appreciation. Davies claims that Barth's doctrine of providence needs to acknowledge that the *Deus revelatus* often appears in 'the disteleological events in personal, family, or national life [as] a hidden God...' Horton Davies, *The Vigilant God : Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 169.

³⁹ If in 1950 Barth believed in his 'own invulnerability' and was 'incapable of sharing' in the pain of those who suffered under Hitler, his providence hardly seems worth reading.

⁴⁰ Schröder, 'See,' 134.

1. Excludes authentic human personhood
2. Lacks rationality
3. Lacks pastoral strength
4. Falls into monism which precludes divine/human relationality
5. Merely repeats the outdated providence of the tradition
6. Is incompatible with modern science
7. Prompts Christian arrogance

In my view, all of these critiques would substantially undermine Barth's doctrine of providence if valid. While providence demands a level of mystery which precludes definitive answers in various locations, I argue that Barth's personalist providence provides answers in creative and innovative ways which his critics consistently overlook. Having reviewed these readings of Barth, I briefly describe providence in Reformed Orthodoxy to establish a starting point from which to judge the extent of Barth's departure from it.⁴¹

Historic Reformed Providence

In order to assess Barth's reformulation of providence, I look to the broad strokes of providence in Reformed orthodoxy. A comprehensive survey lies beyond the scope of this thesis, so I will instead describe five general themes of the tradition. Admittedly, I am emphasizing the themes which Barth specifically opposed. Nevertheless, if Barth accurately portrays Reformed orthodoxy and if he differs from it regarding these five themes, the resulting providence constitutes a 'radical reformulation'.

First, using the substantialist ontology of the Aristotelian tradition, Reformed theologians formulated providence along the lines of causality.⁴² While operating on

⁴¹ I am acutely aware of the difficulties of this task. The breadth of the tradition and the subtlety of many theologians make such a summary challenging. Nevertheless, I believe these themes reflect aspects shared by the major voices of the tradition.

⁴² Shults convincingly explores the implications of Aristotle's thought on Western theology. See F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 12ff. Barth explicitly notes Aristotle's influence over 'older theologians' in his discussion of the causal concept. Cf. III.3, 94ff. Brümmer explains, 'Aristotle developed a logic of subjects and predicates: the subject term in a proposition is a name for a substance or thing and the predicate term is a name for an attribute or quality belonging to this substance.' Vincent Brümmer, *Speaking of a Personal God: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 85. Barth critiques Aristotle and Thomas's use of his philosophy in III.3. Cf. III.3, 103. Deegan helpfully explains: '...Barth's theology is no mere reprobation of older orthodoxy. One of the principal difficulties he finds is the renewed appropriation of Aristotle on the part of the Reformed and Lutheran theologians at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries. Older Protestant orthodoxy was not sufficiently critical of the Aristotelian cosmology and the arguments concerning God's relation to the world which derived from it.' Daniel L. Deegan, 'Church Dogmatics by Karl Barth, Volume III Part 3,' *SJT* 15 (1962): 75.

totally different planes, God is the primary cause of all world-occurrence, with creatures constituting the genuine secondary causes. This strategy overtly attempts to overcome dualism while simultaneously asserting God's sovereign control of all world-occurrence and human responsibility for sin. Nevertheless, Aristotle's emphasis on subjects and predicates leaves no room for the dynamic relations which actually shape creatures in action.⁴³ As such, 'persons' are not seen as beings-in-action/relation but as 'things'.⁴⁴

Second, providence describes God's general care for creation, which includes the crucial case of election (or God's passing over in reprobation). Thus providence carries eschatological implications for individual, *immortal* humans.⁴⁵ Election becomes the most important species within the genus 'providence'.⁴⁶ Moreover, traditional double-predestination divides all humans into two categories: elect and reprobate.⁴⁷ The result is that the history of salvation occurs within the wider history of the world, but does not affect all of it. For the non-elect, God's general providence effectively upholds and directs the history of damnation.⁴⁸ While the question of election remains difficult, the doctrine makes God's relation to damnation even more so. Either God's will fails to achieve its goal or God's intention is that some of His creatures were created for the purpose of eternal

⁴³ Brümmer explains, 'The problem [with Aristotle's ontology] is that this leaves no room for relations given that a relation between substances is neither an attribute of one of these substances nor a third substance. If problems are formulated in terms of this sort of logic, the result is that relationships are inevitably reduced to qualities. Brümmer, *Speaking*, 86.

⁴⁴ Barth accentuates this danger in his treatment of the causal concept in III.3, 101f.

⁴⁵ There is an asymmetry between these two: election is God's active will, while reprobation is understood to be God's passing over (*praeteritis*). Notably, this view 'presupposes the dualistic construction of the human person' comprised of an immortal soul and a mortal body. Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen*, trans. Jeff Hoffmeyer (Louisville: WJKP, 1997), 82ff. Such immortality, which Barth rejects, greatly influences the discussion of providence in relation to eschatology.

⁴⁶ Zwingli's claim, 'Providence is the kind of parent of predestination.' Ulrich Zwingli, *De vera relig.*, 282 as quoted in Heinrich Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G.T. Thompson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1950), 252.

⁴⁷ 'By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death...These angels and men...are particularly and unchangeably designed...' 'Westminster Confession of Faith,' in *Creeeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 610.

⁴⁸ While Reformed theologians consistently resist speculating about the damned, the ordering of election and providence logically demands a similar ordering with God's rejection. Significantly, this is rarely done christologically. Calvin discusses 'God's administration of justice toward the reprobate' with no reference to Christ in III.xxiv.12. He uses the terms 'God' and 'the supreme Judge' throughout the passage. It seems indicative of the strength of Barth's critique that one can hardly imagine Calvin speaking of Christ as the mirror in which others might contemplate their reprobation. See John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: SCM, 1961), III.xxiv.

damnation. Berkhof defends the doctrine of reprobation and supports it from confessional documents.⁴⁹ In this view, a dualism arises within the will of God. The distinction of elect and reprobate creatures logically means that God created the latter with the personal intention of their eternal damnation for God's glory.⁵⁰

Third, in Reformed thought the mystery of evil comes to be closely associated with God's providence over *evil creatures*. Created ontologically good, various creatures are ontologically transformed by sin. The Fall—as Adam and Eve's rebellion—changed the nature of the entire creation. Schreiner describes Calvin's view:

In agreement with the exegetical tradition of the church, Calvin argued that nature itself was changed in the fall: the earth was no longer as fertile and such things as briars and locusts came into being...Scorching heat, the deluge of rains, earthquakes, noxious and savage animals, and terrible winds are all evidence that our sin has overturned the order of nature...⁵¹

Traditionally, Satan and demons have played a central role in Reformed providence. Weber notes that Calvin 'was particularly concerned with Satanology in the context of his doctrine of providence.'⁵² Professed as fallen angels, Satan and his legions seek to oppose God in the world.⁵³ Turning back to Aristotle's ontology, Satan and demons were subjects (created things) whose predicates changed through rebellion

⁴⁹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1939), 115ff. Berkhof cites the Reformed distinction between *preterition* and *precondemnation*. The former is 'purely passive' while the latter is 'efficient and positive' (116). Being passive, *preterition* cannot render God 'the author of sin' (117). Barth defends Dort with precisely this logic. Since the 'nonelect' are simply those passed over, 'The idea that "God is the author of sin"...can in this way be successfully rebutted. Unbelief bears the guilt. The relationship with God remains a living one. It does not become mechanical.' Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions: 1923*, trans. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: WJKP, 2002), 215.

⁵⁰ The relation of providence to damnation has long presented theologians with difficulty. Samuel Hopkins is commonly cited in his demand that Christians be willing to be 'damned for the glory of God'. While Conkin rightly qualifies the discussion, the combination of providence, ontology and eschatology in Reformed orthodoxy logically lead to the conclusion that from God's perspective, some are damned for the glory of God. Cf. Paul K. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1995), 109.

⁵¹ Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1991), 28.

⁵² Otto Weber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, trans. Darrell L. Guder, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 490, n. 71.

⁵³ Calvin writes, '[demons] were, when first created, angels of God, but by degeneration they ruined themselves and became the instruments for the ruin of others. Because this is profitable to know it is plainly taught in Peter and Jude. God did not spare those angels who sinned and kept not their original nature but left their abode.' Calvin, *Institutes*, I.14.16. Calvin acknowledges that Scripture leaves the details of this fall undisclosed. As Farrer notes, seeing the fall of humanity as facilitated by Satan only heightens the difficulty of the origin of evil rather than lessening it: 'If Satan could inexplicably revolt against his own happiness, and throw heaven away, so could Adam; the story can start with him; we have no need of Satan, to tempt him to it.' Austin Farrer, *Love Almighty and Ills Unlimited* (London: Collins Sons & Co., 1962), 134ff.

(from angelic to demonic). Both Lucifer's and humanity's fall—with all their awful results for creation—raise difficult questions regarding God's primary causation of these events.⁵⁴

Third, Reformed orthodoxy distinguishes between *providentia ordinaria* and *providentia extraordinaria*. In the former, 'God works through second causes in strict accordance with the laws of nature...But in the latter He works immediately or without mediation of second causes in their ordinary operation'.⁵⁵ As such, ordinary providence is natural while extraordinary providence is supernatural, setting aside second causes.⁵⁶ Berkhof claims, 'Older Reformed theologians did not hesitate to speak of [miracles] as a breach or a violation of the laws of nature.'⁵⁷ In modern times, science brought tremendous philosophical challenges to the coherence of this distinction.

Finally, Reformed theologians describe the providential God along the lines of classical philosophy.⁵⁸ The God of providence is omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, timeless and non-spatial.⁵⁹ Providence is generally appropriated to the Father with little reference to the Son (or Holy Spirit).⁶⁰ Barth believed 'the tragedy of the Reformed doctrine of providence' occurred here, by using 'purely formal concepts of God and His will and work' without material content from Christology.⁶¹

While the profundity of Reformed theologians would necessitate particular qualifications to each of these themes for greater accuracy, I believe they represent a fair portrayal of the tradition as well as Barth's understanding of it. The points above highlight the general nature of the doctrine in contrast with Barth's emphasis on the

⁵⁴ Cf. 'Westminster,' 612-613.

⁵⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic*, 176.

⁵⁶ Heidegger explains, 'Miracles are works of God exceeding all the power and force of creatures of any kind' Cited in Heppe, *Reformed*, 264f.

⁵⁷ Berkhof, *Systematic*, 177.

⁵⁸ Cf. II.1, 327ff. Barth contrasts his view with the theological tradition's conception of God: '...that God is first and properly the impersonal absolute, and only secondarily, inessentially and in His relationship *ad extra* the personal God of love with the attributes of wisdom, justice, mercy, etc.' *Ibid.*, 349. In essence, Barth claims that the person of God dictates discussion of attributes rather than the reverse.

⁵⁹ "'God's infinity" means two things: (1) the absolute perfection of the moral attributes and (2) the timeless and non-spatial character of God.' Heppe, *Reformed*, 65. See Rohls, *Reformed*, 46f.

⁶⁰ This is not to say that references were not made to the trinity, but such references fail to show significant influence of the doctrine. Barth brings election, providence and trinity together to critique the tradition: 'In the older Reformed theology the doctrine of the decree was generally placed directly after the doctrine of the Trinity. But when this was its starting-point how could it possibly continue in the form of a general doctrine of providence?—as if the doctrine of the Trinity had no practical significance, and all haste must be made (as if nothing happened) to take up the thread again at the point where it had been left—unsatisfactorily enough!—in the doctrine *De essentia Dei*.' II.1, 521.

⁶¹ III.3, 115.

intensely personal nature of providence in Jesus Christ. Focused on the specificity of election in Christ, Barth attempts to shape providence such that the personal, Trinity grounds and relates with personal humans in world history.

Theology, Philosophy and Barth

The claim of this thesis is that readers such as the critics above fail to understand Barth's *ad hoc* use of personalist philosophical tools. In this argument, I am careful not to collapse theology into philosophy. Barth's arguments against philosophy and natural theology are well known.⁶² Nevertheless, a few examples are illustrative:

From my standpoint, all of you...represent a large-scale return to the fleshpots of Egypt...you are once again surrendering theology to philosophy.⁶³

Directly, in all the three areas of theological enquiry philosophy, history, psychology, etc. have always succeeded in practice only in increasing the self-alienation of the Church and the distortion and confusion of its talk about God.⁶⁴

...Thomas has given us philosophy and not theology...fundamentally and as a whole he simply offers us a classical example of how not to proceed in this matter.⁶⁵

Readers rightly note the strength of Barth's polemic against philosophy as either a basis of theology or as a world-view which obscures the free testimony of Scripture.⁶⁶ As Krötke explains for Barth, '...the business of theology must under no circumstances be tied in principle to that of philosophy.'⁶⁷ Throughout *CD*, Barth critiques thinkers of all types for precisely this error.

⁶² Bultmann criticized Barth's approach to philosophy as dangerously neglectful, so that in ignoring it, Barth would inadvertently be controlled by it. See Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Prof. Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No" by Dr. Karl Barth* (Eugene: Wipf, 2002), 38f; McCormack, *Critically*, 400f. In the formative process of writing on Anselm just before starting *CD*, Barth claimed that Christian dogmatics must be freed 'from the last remnants of a philosophical or anthropological justification and explanation of Christian doctrine'. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 206. Hebbelthwaite laments, 'Barth's strong opposition to natural theology and to any 'points of connection' between theology and philosophy has reinforced and sustained the theologians' suspicion of the Christian philosophers, even where they share a commitment to mainstream Christian doctrine.' Hebbelthwaite, *Philosophical*, 5.

⁶³ Letter to Rudolf Bultmann, 5 February 1930 quoted in McCormack, *Critically*, 410.

⁶⁴ I.1, 6.

⁶⁵ III.3, 393.

⁶⁶ Cf. Hartwell, *Theology*, 53ff; Wolf Krötke, *Sin and Nothingness in the Theology of Karl Barth*, ed. David Willis, trans. Philip G. Ziegler and Christina-Maria Bammel, *Studies in Reformed Theology and History*, vol. 10 New Series (Princeton: Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 11f; Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: an Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: SCM, 1962), 148ff.

⁶⁷ Krötke, *Sin*, 11.

That said, ten years before his death, Barth wrote an article for a *Festschrift* honoring his brother, philosophy professor Heinrich Barth. Busch summarizes Barth's basic argument in this essay,

Barth thought that the real difference between the philosopher and the theologian was not in their subject matter but in the 'order' and 'sequence' of their concern for knowledge. As he strives for knowledge the theologian thinks from above (from God) downwards (to man) and only in this way from below upwards, whereas the philosopher adopts precisely the opposite approach.⁶⁸

By acknowledging the similarity of subject matter in contrast with methodology, Barth opens the way for conversation of the disciplines without confusion.⁶⁹ His strong comments above address *how* rather than *if* philosophy is used. Barth writes,

...if we are not to dispute the grace and finally the incarnation of the Word of God, we cannot basically contest the use of philosophy in scriptural exegesis [*sic*] Where the question of legitimacy arises is in regard to the How of this use.⁷⁰

Barth uses philosophy *constantly*, explicitly and implicitly, in his theology and understands its necessity in relation to faith.⁷¹ While many philosophers might object both to Barth's claims concerning theology and their implications, his understanding of philosophy leaves room for meaningful conversation.

Moreover, Barth realized the impossibility of fully purging theology of its philosophical vestiges. In his *Göttingen Dogmatics* Barth confesses,

I do not pretend to be any better than the rest. I only contest the right of the rest.... None of us can do this. Of none of us is it true that we do not mix the gospel with philosophy.⁷²

⁶⁸ Busch, *Barth*, 435. It is both interesting and saddening to note the tensions between Barth and his brother Heinrich throughout their lives. It also gives an indication of how strongly Barth felt regarding philosophy's attempts to stand above theology. Cf. J.C. McLelland, 'Philosophy and Theology—A Family Affair (Karl and Heinrich Barth),' in *Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium 1972*, ed. Martin Rumscheidt (Waterloo, Ontario: CPASRC, 1974), 30ff.

⁶⁹ Torrance notes, 'Theology operates, therefore, with the same tools, as well as the same field, as philosophy, but it fulfils its task in developing the understanding of its object in its own way, through its acknowledgement of divine revelation, and therefore in a way that philosophy does not and cannot undertake.' Torrance, *Early Theology*, 149. Drawing on Torrance's language, I argue that contemporary philosophical theology offers the 'tools' to understand Barth's doctrine of providence more thoroughly.

⁷⁰ I.2, 729f.

⁷¹ Barth writes, 'If we open our mouths, we find ourselves in the province of philosophy.' Karl Barth, *Credo*, trans. J.S. McNab (New York: Scribner's, 1962), 183. Diogenes Allen helpfully distinguishes between Barth's claims against natural theology and philosophy. Moreover, Allen claims, 'Not only was Barth very sophisticated philosophically, but he employed reinterpreted philosophical concepts in his theological work very much as did the early Church Fathers.' Diogenes Allen, *Philosophy for Understanding Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 8.

⁷² Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 259.

In this sense, Barth's theological method requires conversation with philosophy, if only to better discern gospel and philosophy. In a more positive light, Barth writes, '...there is every reason why we should consider and as far as possible learn from the typical philosophical thinking of the day.'⁷³ Thus while Barth remains alert to dangers, philosophical theologians like Brümmer, Macmurray or Farrer have a legitimate place in theological conversation.

Brümmer similarly acknowledges limitations of philosophy *vis-à-vis* theology. The tools of philosophy hold potential for theological inquiry if used in a faithful manner. Brümmer explains one of the tasks of philosophy this way, 'The philosopher's task, then, is to examine concepts in order to ascertain within what forms of life, or 'language games', or categories they belong, and by this means to free us from the category mistakes which hold us captive.'⁷⁴ Many of Barth's critics are held captive by various presuppositions or category mistakes. The conversations with philosophical theology attempt to probe these categories more carefully. On this basis, I seek philosophical resources that allow theology the freedom of more coherent discourse. Brümmer wisely limits the scope and utility of his enterprise,

The task of philosophical theology is not to provide proofs of the truth (or falsity) of the Christian faith, or to find neutral rational grounds on which to justify accepting (or rejecting) the Christian, or any other faith. Instead the philosophical theologian asks semantic and hermeneutical questions about the meaning and interpretation of the faith: what are the implications and presuppositions of the fundamental concepts of the faith, and how could the claims of the faith be interpreted in a coherent and relevant way? In this sense philosophical theology has an essential contribution to make in the theological quest of faith seeking understanding.⁷⁵

Echoing Anselm's axiom, Brümmer indicates enough common ground for the conversation to proceed. It is precisely this peculiar combination of continuity and discontinuity that makes these comparisons useful. Barth's polemic against philosophy is a two-edged sword. While Barthians have helpfully used one edge to cut philosophy's bonds of power *over* theology, Barth's significant use of philosophy as a servant of theology demands that the other edge release theologians from dearly held presuppositions.⁷⁶

I turn now to Brümmer's diagrammatic representation of causal and personal relations in an effort to gain philosophical clarity into Barth's personalist providence.

⁷³ III.3, 334.

⁷⁴ Vincent Brümmer, *Theology and Philosophical Inquiry: An Introduction* (London: MacMillan, 1981), 76.

⁷⁵ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 3.

⁷⁶ These presuppositions will become clearer throughout this thesis, but include at least the nature of eternal life, humanity's role in salvation, and the eternal significance of every moment of life.

Brümmer's lucidity and structure offer an entry into the long-standing debates concerning divine-human interaction. In looking forward to discussing III.3, I focus the conversation on Barth's claims regarding divine-human asymmetry, history and eschatology as well as the binary nature of human choice *coram Deo*. While Barth's doctrine of providence differs from Brümmer's conclusions, he shares the philosopher's chief concern of honoring the authentic personhood of the agents involved.

CHAPTER III

THE PERSONS OF PROVIDENCE IN BARTH AND BRÜMMER

This thesis pivots on Barth's personalist understanding of providence. Barth—like many philosophers and theologians of his time—can broadly be understood as a participating in a turn to relationality.¹ This chapter engages Barth with Vincent Brümmer to gain clarity regarding the reality of the 'persons' in providence. In the first section, I present Brümmer's 'games-theoretical matrix' and its continuities and discontinuities with Barth. Brümmer's discussion of the dynamics of an individual human's decision for or against eternal salvation with God brings into sharp focus many of the difficult questions of providence.² Brümmer accentuates the strengths, weaknesses and logical implications of both causal and personal models. Using Brümmer's discussion, I attempt to engage Barth in dialogue centered on five issues. By reading Barth in light of Brümmer's frameworks of interaction, Barth's theological values and method become clearer.³

The second section addresses Barth's answer to the essential two-fold question raised in the first section: What is meant by the personhood of God specifically and created persons generally?⁴ Barth's answer to this question in *CD* II.1 helps to explain why his providence fails to fit neatly into Brümmer's frameworks. Further, these answers remove the possibility of competitive understandings while not erasing a provisional opportunity for human agents to act (though never in abstraction from the living God). Barth's answers here bring clarity to many of his counter-intuitive claims in III.3.

¹ Shults, *Reforming Theological*, 35. While differing strongly at many points, Barth's theology gains clarity in conversation with this larger movement.

² Brümmer's discussion implicitly accepts a 'once-for-all' decision as definitive for eschatology. From the standpoint of acceptance, one moment of life determines an individual's eternal life with God, while the absence of this moment determines an equally eternal separation. This gives history significance in that the moment is historical, but it leaves the rest of human life largely irrelevant.

³ My use of Brümmer is both pragmatic and selective in the effort to understand Barth. While I have sought to present Brümmer's thought on providence carefully, I make no such claim regarding the wider scope of his corpus. The directness of the diagrams brings the challenges of philosophical theology to Barth's theology into focus.

⁴ Barth uses 'personality' and 'personhood' interchangeably throughout this section. In light of modern English usage, I find 'personhood' more helpful indicating Barth's meaning. Nevertheless, I follow Barth's usage in my own.

Brümmer’s Diagrammatic Presentation of Causal and Personal Relations

Brümmer draws on philosophical theology to gain coherence in thinking about God and humans as *personal agents*. In essence, he attempts to explicate providential interaction. Using the matrix below, Brümmer contrasts causal and personal models for understanding the divine-human relation.⁵ The diagrams and analysis demonstrate, first, Brümmer’s presuppositions concerning the nature and definition of a ‘person’ as opposed to the senseless ‘blocks and stones’ concept which even the *Cannons of Dort* rejected, and second, the limited eschatological options available to theology based on this understanding of ‘person’.⁶

Table 1⁷

		GOD			
		Game 1: Personal relation → played with persons		Game [2]: Personal relation → played with [one person and one robot]	
		YES	NO	YES	NO
HUMAN BEINGS	YES	OUTCOME A	OUTCOME C	OUTCOME E	OUTCOME G
	NO	OUTCOME B	OUTCOME D	OUTCOME F	OUTCOME H

Game 1 represents the relationship between two persons. Brümmer defines ‘persons’ minimally as those ‘who can choose whether to say Yes or No to each other.’⁸ Game 2 represents a purely causal relation in which ‘only one of the players is a person, who can say Yes or No. The other is a robot programmed to say Yes in

⁵ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 62.

⁶ Ibid., 63. Grace ‘does not act in people as if they were blocks and stones...’ ‘Canons of the Synod of Dort,’ in *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. II, part 4, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 587.

⁷ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 62. I have taken the liberty of correcting two clear mistakes in printing: Game 2 on the right was mistakenly labeled ‘Game 1’ and described as ‘played with persons’ instead of one person and one robot. I have bracketed my alterations in the diagrams.

⁸ Ibid. Rahner similarly claims, ‘Freedom is the freedom to say “yes” or “no” to God...’ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1978), 100f. While Brümmer’s minimalist definition here has merit, it also raises difficult questions related to the full humanity of infants or individuals with severe mental handicaps. Farrer offers insight for both Barth and Brümmer in his ‘Imperfect Lives’ appendix discussion of ‘imbeciles’ and ‘speechless infants’. Farrer, *Love*, 181-191.

response to a Yes, and No in response to a No.’⁹ This threat of transforming the human into a robot is the great problem of deterministic views of providence.

i) Discussion of Outcomes

According to Brümmer, God must choose which ‘game’ to play with humanity. Outcome A presents ‘a personal relationship of mutual love’ where God leads with a Yes to humanity. Within this framework, the human faces a choice of response: she can say Yes and reciprocate God’s love, resulting in outcome A, or she can say No and reject God’s love, resulting in outcome B. Responding to the human agent’s Yes, God will guarantee outcome A by maintaining his original Yes. Here, Brümmer makes the sensible claim: ‘We can count on it that God will not withdraw his Yes and reject those who come to him (outcome C).’¹⁰ Outcome A reflects the ideal result in which God’s desired goal and human personhood stand together in intentional fellowship. If the theologian only assesses this outcome, the difficulties of providence and human responsibility vanish, though Brümmer leaves the details of this mutual consent undeveloped.

The picture becomes more complicated when humans reject God’s Yes. Brümmer claims, ‘We have every reason to choose A, and yet we choose B: the ‘impossible possibility’ of sin.’¹¹ Here, Brümmer claims God has three options. First, God can react to rejection with rejection and bring about outcome D. Brümmer dismisses this possibility as incompatible with the Biblical God.

Second, God could overrule the human No and *cause* the human response desired by God.¹² In Brümmer’s view, this indicates a move from Game 1 to Game 2 with the resulting de-personalization of the human to the status of a ‘robot’. If God causes a human Yes, then the outcome will be E. If God chooses to force a human No, then the outcome will be H. Outcomes G and F are—by definition—not possible because the one acting person (God) takes the binary choice of Yes or No

⁹ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 62.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 63. Throughout Brümmer’s discussion, he depends on revelation for the personal character of God.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 62. Both Barth and Brümmer use ‘impossible possibility’, but do so differently. Brümmer helpfully elucidates four senses of the modal concept ‘impossible’ in relation to the irresistibility of grace: ‘1. conceptually impossible, 2. factually impossible, 3. normatively impossible and 4. rationally impossible’. Brümmer concludes that ‘turning our backs on God is rationally impossible.’ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 68ff. Barth describes sin as an ‘ontological impossibility’. Based in election, ‘We are actually with Jesus, i.e., with God.’ Sinning, the human acts as ‘godless’ or in ‘a mode of being contrary to our humanity’. Sin is therefore ‘impossible’ in the sense that the human who is objectively in covenant with God only subjectively acts *as if* she was godless. III.3, 134-136.

¹² Brümmer uses ‘cause’ here to mean force, coerce or manipulate without regard to the other.

with a mechanical certainty of a corresponding result. According to Brümmer, if God chooses the option of causing the human Yes or No, outcome A is logically impossible and the best outcome available is outcome E. Brümmer rejects this possibility, ‘Given that God is not a Promethean manipulator, he finds no satisfaction in outcome E and thus does not choose this move.’¹³ In Brümmer’s view, outcomes E and H represent the two logically coherent possibilities within the causal framework. While qualifications may soften this claim, I believe Brümmer is correct in concluding that these two options represent the fundamental limitations of the causal concept.¹⁴

Finally, Brümmer presents God’s third option in response to the human’s No: maintaining the divine Yes ‘in the hope that we may withdraw our No and eventually say Yes.’¹⁵ In the space and time of creation, God can act in persuasive and even powerful ways that attempt to motivate and inspire the human to eventually respond positively.¹⁶ Brümmer hints at the dynamism of the living God within the world saying, ‘God can reveal his love to us in his Son and, through his Spirit, *inspire* us to return his love.’¹⁷ Brümmer claims that the personal relation framework precludes force and coercion as violations of the personhood of the other. Taking this option, God leaves the possibility of outcome A open (as opposed to exerting coercive force and opting for the possibilities of Game 2), but necessarily also leaves the possibility of outcome B available as well.

ii) *Corresponding Eschatologies*

Brümmer continues his discussion by connecting each outcome to a reciprocal eschatology. Brümmer’s implicit point is that in Christianity certain

¹³Brümmer, *Speaking*, 63. While Brümmer’s rejection of God as a ‘Promethean manipulator’ seems supportable in my view, the use of a single verse in Zechariah seems removed from its contextual moorings and does not ultimately support his claim. Barth’s own treatment of Zechariah 4:6 comes in the larger conversation of Barth’s rejection of ‘power in itself’. See III.4, 391. Barth continues his discussion going to the New Testament, where ‘...“power in itself” is possessed only by those angelic caricatures, the powers of chaos, which are called ἐξουσία and are active in the impotent strength of falsehood, but which are already condemned to fall in Jesus Christ, and have indeed fallen, so that they are no longer worthy of respect or fear’.

¹⁴ While Brümmer’s model and assessment offer insights to the conceptual coherence of the causal concept, they do not seem to allow for enough of the nuance of the theological tradition, particularly for theologians such as Augustine and Aquinas. Nevertheless, Brümmer’s logic influences and underpins my critique of Barth’s acceptance of the ‘causal concept’ in Chapter VI.

¹⁵ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 63.

¹⁶ Here the clarity of Brümmer’s tool comes by excluding many of the most challenging questions relating to divine-human interaction. The complexity of these issues will become clearer in our discussion of Farrer and double-agency below.

¹⁷ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 63; italics Brümmer’s.

providential interaction in earthly life has eternal implications. The seemingly benign Yes or No will result in eternal life with God or eternal separation. Game 2 presents a straightforward ‘eschatology of strict deterministic predestination.’¹⁸ This determinism could result in universalism (with all people in outcome E) or a form of double-predestination (with all humans eternally divided between outcomes E and H). While Game 2 fails to grant what Brümmer considers to be true personhood to humans, he concedes that it has the strength of being thoroughly theocentric.¹⁹ Regardless of the outcome, Brümmer claims that both of these options deny human personhood and therefore conceptualize humans as robots. If this is the case, history loses its significance and human actions prove inconsequential. Equally importantly, humans cannot logically be responsible for their own sin. As a result, God becomes the author of sin.

Having rejected Game 2 due to its degradation of humanity and God, Brümmer turns his attention back to Game 1. Here, questions arise from ‘the impossible possibility’ that humans actually do reject God’s Yes and reply to it with a No. In the face of this rejection, God can continue to keep the possibility open that the human will eventually respond with a Yes. In terms of eschatology, Brümmer asks the logical question: ‘How long does God keep this possibility open?’²⁰ He sees two conceivable answers.

First, ‘it could be argued that God will not accept a No from anyone, and therefore holds open the possibility of repentance for *every* individual until that individual has turned to God.’²¹ In other words, death does not represent a point of no return in regard to responding to God’s Yes. Both outcomes A and B remain for individuals after death. According to Brümmer,

Hell is then a place of purification (or purgatory) where people stay until they have turned to God. This option implies a universalism: ultimately everyone will achieve salvation, nobody is excluded for all eternity. This means that God does not accept the final consequence of the fact that he has made us persons. The freedom required in order to be a person includes the freedom to reject the love of God permanently and decisively. In this case, therefore, God would ultimately fail to take the rejection of his love seriously.²²

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 87. Brümmer explains, ‘...I have tried on the one hand to show that a bad tool is being used here for a good purpose. The use of a causal model implies that it is factually (or causally) impossible to resist the grace of God, and this is in direct contradiction to the constituent conditions for a personal relationship between us and God.’

²⁰ Ibid., 64.

²¹ Ibid., 64; italics Brümmer's.

²² Ibid. This is the logic behind much of the criticism of Barth’s supposed (and logically necessary) *apokastasis* discussed in Chapter VII.

The second possibility is that the human agent can permanently and finally reject God's Yes. Brümmer implies that death constitutes a point of no return after which the human can no longer change their No to a Yes: 'In this case God accepts our No in the long run and does not keep the possibility of salvation open, so that outcome D can be achieved.'²³

iii) Critiques

Brümmer presents a diagrammatic representation of the two games and six possible outcomes open to theology *in regard to salvation*. According to Brümmer's philosophical theology, a shift away from the causal concept necessarily means giving up Game 2 and understanding God to take on the inherent risks of Game 1.²⁴ Game 1 opens the door to achieving God's goal of outcome A but necessitates a percentage of humans unreasonably but freely choosing for outcome B. In this sense, God's gift of salvation in the divine Yes is fully successful and effective with humans who respond positively. Alternatively, the human No finally triumphs and God's 'risk of our rejecting his love' results in the worst-case conclusion.²⁵ Disturbingly, this means that mathematically 100% of humans saying Yes to God achieve outcome A while 100% of humans saying No achieve outcome D. While Brümmer's logic differs in regard to the divine and human experience, such percentages open the possibility of a reversion to Game 2, but with God in the role of the robot.

This leads to a second critique of Brümmer's thought. By focusing on the specific occasion of the human's Yes or No to God, Brümmer risks discounting the importance of the remainder of life. While carrying eternal consequences—and thus making history matter—this is one of innumerable decisions in a lifetime. At the risk of simplicity, consider three individuals in Scripture: Peter and the two thieves on either side of Christ's cross (Luke 23:39ff.). Peter's long years of following Jesus (before and after the crucifixion) make him an example of outcome A, with its corresponding eschatological outcome. The unrepentant thief (by all indications) represents outcome D. The repentant thief, however, escapes into outcome A in the final moments of his life. Since for Brümmer eternal life includes personal

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 65. Barth does not shy from using 'risk' in relation to God, though in a very different way: 'There is a sure and certain salvation for man, and a sure and certain risk for God.' II.2, 162. Nevertheless, Barth believes this risk to Godself precludes the risking of humanity's salvation. Brümmer moves in the opposite direction.

²⁵ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 65.

development without the capacity to sin, then eventually the distinctions between Peter and the saved thief will be erased in the ocean of eternity. In this sense, history as a whole loses meaning and significance.

Brümmer's structure follows the historic Reformed ordering of predestination as a crucial component within the larger genus of providence. I argue that Barth's counter-intuitive reversal of this ordering brings greater dignity and significance to all of human history, without sacrificing the doctrine of *sola gratia* or the relative importance of conversion.

A final critique arises in regard to the discontinuity between earthly and eternal life. Apparently, personal life in this world *demand*s the ability to say Yes or No to God; however, at death, the human ceases to be a person in this sense.²⁶ Hell either becomes 1) annihilation without personal decision or 2) a Dives-like existence calling out from hell to a non-responsive God (making outcome C inconceivable in history but necessary into eternity?).²⁷ The picture of heaven seems equally de-personalized (in Brümmer's terms). Presuming that heavenly life is sinless, humans can no longer say no to God. Death ends with the human's Yes to God, but thereafter, both God and human are locked into their decisions. Eternal, heavenly life fails to be *personal* and both God and humans seem to be 'turned into sinlessly programmed robots' (since neither continues to have the capacity to say Yes or No to the other into eternity).²⁸ While Brümmer's diagrams fit his understanding of historical life, they seem less hopeful when applied to eternal life. This line of critique opens possibilities for interpreting Barth's eschatology in relation to providence with its emphasis on the eternal preservation of humans' historical time and space in participation with Christ.

Continuities and Discontinuities between Barth and Brümmer

Barth's theology does not fit neatly into Brümmer's frameworks. Nevertheless, Brümmer's emphasis on the personal accentuates Barth's theological values. Five points in Brümmer's discussion prove particularly significant in relation

²⁶ Ibid., 62. Brümmer's view seems to require some sort of magical transformation of the personal and agency in eternal life. Undoubtedly, a change must happen for mortal life to become eternal. The nature of this change carries significant implications for both providence and election. I return to this discussion below regarding Barth's *conservatio*.

²⁷ Cf. Luke 16:19ff.

²⁸ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 63.

to Barth's understanding of personal relations between God and humans under providence.

i) Eternal Destiny as Paradigmatic

Brümmer's analysis argues that the question of humanity's Yes or No to God regarding eternal destiny distinguishes 'the most important aspects of the use of a personal model for our relationship with God'.²⁹ Barth's theology moves in the opposite direction. Salvation for Barth focuses on the work of God in and through *Jesus Christ*. McCormack explains, 'Jesus Christ is both the Subject of election and its Object, the electing God and the elect human.'³⁰ In this one person, God reveals His 'twofold will, containing within itself both a Yes and a No.'³¹ This election precedes all creation so that humans have no more capacity to say Yes or No to it than they do to being born.³² Such an ordering—based on verses such as Ephesians 1:4 and Romans 8:29-30—precludes the possibility of caprice or manipulation, since there was nothing to manipulate before creation. It also forms the basis of what McCormack helpfully identifies as 'covenant ontology'.³³ As I understand Barth's election, all creatures—including all humans—are objectively saved in Christ without regard to actions.

I will return to the decisive role of election in Barth's doctrine of providence, but it must be noted at present to show a key disagreement with Brümmer's frameworks. Brümmer's model follows the traditional ordering of election to eternal destiny as one (crucially important) case in the larger set of providential care. Barth rejects this view and understands providence as God's consistent determination of human persons in positive or negative relation to election. All people are saved in Christ; providence is the codetermination of the personal identity of these saved people.

Ironically, while Brümmer's frameworks do not work for Barth's salvation, they shed light on Barth's understanding of every moment of creaturely existence in a personalist providence. Created in covenant with God, humans live their entire

²⁹ Ibid., 65.

³⁰ Bruce L. McCormack, 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology,' in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 93.

³¹ 'And because the eternal divine predestination is identical with the election of Jesus Christ, its twofold content is that God wills to lose in order that man may gain.' II.2, 162.

³² McCormack, 'Grace,' 101-104.

³³ Ibid., 99.

lives *coram Deo* in encounter with God.³⁴ While human consciousness seldom acknowledges this reality, it does not change the objective truth: the human *always* acts in relation to God. Thus neutrality fades and each moment presents an opportunity to ‘say Yes or No to God’. Barth’s doctrine of providence pivots on this reality. Herein lies the root of Barth’s rejection of the traditional concept of *adiaphora*.³⁵ No moment of creaturely occurrence happens apart from the human encounter with God; this is the determination or development of the person who is objectively saved. The same reality underlies Barth’s theological ethics under the rubric ‘the command of God’.³⁶ Encountering God’s grace in covenant, the human also encounters God’s command.³⁷ Busch explains Barth’s understanding of Gospel and Law,

The gospel speaks about God’s will *for* us and the law tells us what God wills *from* us. They are two things, but in both it is the same God who has to do with the human and with whom the human as to do. Hence the two are not to be separated.³⁸

Such a view shows the applicability of Brümmer’s binary framework to illumine providence, in spite of Barth’s rejection of its applicability for salvation or election. Under providence, the human lives each moment saying Yes or No to God in her words, thoughts and actions.

Salvation lies in God’s hands alone through the eternal election of Jesus Christ.³⁹ Individual humans are not coerced or manipulated during their time and space on earth, but—elected in Christ before creation—they will return to God at death. According to Barth, these limits take nothing from human dignity and are instead God’s ‘special, exalted, rich and glorious giving.’⁴⁰ Human time and space, therefore, create genuine opportunity to correspond and witness to the work of God

³⁴ While Barth only cites ‘*coram Deo*’ in passages from other theologians, the description works well for Barth’s understanding that the creature constantly lives ‘before God’. Other scholars find the term useful as well. See Wolf Krötke, ‘The Humanity of the Human Person in Karl Barth’s Anthropology,’ in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 164; Walter Lowe, *Theology and Difference: The Wound of Reason* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 141f.

³⁵ Since humans live life *coram Deo* without the possibility of neutrality, humans either act in obedience or disobedience (with no third option). The concept of *adiaphora* presupposes a neutral space which Barth’s doctrine of providence precludes. Barth writes, ‘There is, therefore, no “nature-reserve,” for among his actions there are none which are neutral or indeterminate in character; there are not *adiaphora* in which he can act apart from the question of good and evil, of obedience and disobedience.’ IV.1, 496. Cf. I.2, 770ff.

³⁶ Cf. I.2, 782-796; II.2, 509-781; III.4.

³⁷ IV.1, 497.

³⁸ Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 152.

³⁹ Cf. McCormack, ‘Grace.’

⁴⁰ III.4, 568.

in the world. This opportunity is for the formation of the person in covenant with God. Returning to the example of Peter and the thieves, Barth's theology understands all three as elect in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, there is no leveling down after death. Thus while each participates eternally in the life of God, they do so in the honor of their identity corresponding with their covenant identity and the shame of their rebellion against it (though fully forgiven in Christ). Forgiveness remains different than honor, though punishment is excluded.⁴¹ In this way, every moment of human life takes on eternal significance.

ii) Aiming Towards a Personal Relationship of Mutual Love

Brümmer sees outcome A as the ideal goal towards which God is aiming: a 'personal relationship of mutual love.' Defining God as the one who 'loves in freedom,' Barth sets God's loving freedom at the center of his theology.⁴² This primary fact shapes Barth's understanding of humanity in covenant with God. Significantly, Barth's discussion of the 'personality of God' assessed below flows from his discussion of fellowship.⁴³ Barth writes, 'God's loving is concerned with a seeking and creation of fellowship (*Gemeinschaft*) for its own sake.'⁴⁴ Throughout *CD* fellowship could be described in Brümmer's terms: 'a personal relationship of mutual love.'⁴⁵

In a crucial discontinuity with Brümmer, Barth grounds humanity's ability for loving mutuality in God's triune being.⁴⁶ In creating humans for relationships, God does not arbitrarily pick a choice from a myriad of options. Rather, God's own being in loving relationship manifests the meaning that humanity is made in the image of

⁴¹ Cf. IV.1, 596ff.

⁴² II.1, 257-321. §28 'The Being of God as the One who Loves in Freedom' deals directly with this theme, though the thought recurs throughout *CD*.

⁴³ Barth uses 'personality' and 'personhood' as essentially interchangeable throughout this discussion. I follow Barth in the use of these terms.

⁴⁴ II.1, 276 (310).

⁴⁵ Barth's 'fellowship' might be summarized in Brümmer's terms 'aiming towards a personal relationship of mutual love.' Hunsinger helpfully develops the concept of *κοινωνία* in relation to Barth's trinitarian doctrine and the action of the Holy Spirit in uniting humanity to Christ. George Hunsinger, 'The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,' in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 188-190. Mangina identifies the import of the concept in relation to divine agency: '[Barth] argues that what God centrally does is to establish communion or fellowship'. Mangina, *Witness*, 64.

⁴⁶ Barth's trinitarian and christocentric providence contrasts strongly with much of Reformed orthodoxy as well as philosophical theology. Johnson rightly notes the magnitude of Barth's trinitarian theology in relation to humanity: 'That God's trinity relates to human experience is of paramount importance. God is both the acting subject that enables humanity's redemptive experience and the very act itself...One can hardly imagine a more radical way of formulating this than Barth's: God *is* what God achieves in human beings...' Johnson, *Mystery*, 50.

God (*imago Dei*). Humanity *reflects* the being of God in relation. True humanity, acting in loving relation with God and others, corresponds to God's inner, trinitarian life.⁴⁷ Barth writes,

In God's own being and sphere there is a counterpart (*Gegenüber*): a genuine but harmonious self-encounter and self-discovery; a free coexistence and co-operation; an open confrontation and reciprocity. Man is the repetition of this divine form of life; its copy and reflection...Thus...the analogy between God and man, is simply the existence of the I and the Thou in confrontation. This is first constitutive for God, and then for man created by God. To remove it is tantamount to removing the divine from God as well as the human from man.⁴⁸

By grounding humanity's 'form of life' in relation to the Other in God's own being, Barth grants human personhood a tremendous importance. In Brümmer's terms, choosing to say No to God is not a necessary possibility for humans, but the forfeiture of personhood. In the action, the individual rejects his own humanity by rejecting the other. While sin and evil present particular threats to human actuality, Barth stands in agreement with Brümmer's description of God's goal for humanity.⁴⁹ Formulated in this way, the asymmetry of personhood in Barth comes through God's trinitarian being is primary while human personhood is derivative; the repetition, copy and reflection of God's personal life *ad intra*.

Significantly, Barth's doctrine of providence in III.3 assumes a basic structure that presents personal relationships of mutual love between God and humanity as normative, with sin, evil and broken relationships entering the discussion as a necessary qualification afterwards. While not ignoring the reality of evil or sin, Barth spends the first 288 pages of his lengthy discussion on providence *presupposing* outcome A is normative, in spite of all creaturely perception to the contrary.⁵⁰ Only at the beginning of §50 does Barth address the possibility—and in a sense, reality—of broken relationships that do not reflect mutual love.⁵¹ Barth

⁴⁷ Werpehowski helpfully develops the connection between this claim and Barth's politics. Humans correspond to their destiny in covenant 'by living with others in fellowship, therefore, 'normative human life is never expressed in lonely isolation, where one would seek to find fulfilment in neutrality or hostility towards one's fellows. It is rather a being-in-encounter in which one's distinctive life is qualified by and fulfilled in connection with the life of the other.' William Werpehowski, 'Karl Barth and Politics,' in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 234.

⁴⁸ III.1, 185 (207). The ordering of Barth's theology is reflected throughout this passage. God's own being most clearly reflects Brümmer's ideal of persons in relation. Within God, there is a reality of saying Yes to the Other. This original reality constitutes the grounds that makes human personhood possible. Cf. Johnson, *Mystery*, 186.

⁴⁹ In this way, Barth goes much further than Brümmer in aiming towards personal relationships of mutual love. While trinitarian theology may not be philosophically *necessary* for grounding human personhood, it adds a great deal of specificity and logic to the form of the personal.

⁵⁰ 326 pages in *KD*.

⁵¹ Barth mentions Nothingness briefly under *conservatio*. See III.3, 76ff.

writes, ‘There is in world-occurrence an element, indeed an entire sinister system of elements, which is not comprehended by God’s providence in the sense thus far described...’⁵² While I return to ‘nothingness’ later, his primary concept of providence presupposes mutual, loving relationships between Creator and human creatures.⁵³ Only after describing proper relationships does Barth deal with the brokenness of those relations.

In this regard, Barth sets the path to outcomes B, D and H in a different context than outcome A. Like Brümmer, Barth sees outcome A as the logical and best situation in the divine-human encounter. Unlike Brümmer, Barth sees any conclusion apart from outcome A as a contradiction of the objective reality between Creator and creature which is realized in Jesus Christ. Outcomes A and B cannot be systematized in Barth’s theology in a way that allows them to be presented as two valid options. Any outcome other than A necessitates a third, ‘alien factor’ that corrupts the basic relationship of providence, with detrimental consequences to the human person. Thus Brümmer and Barth can be seen in agreement regarding the goal of mutual loving relations between God and creature while disagreeing regarding the eschatological options open if this outcome seems to be thwarted.

iii) Opposition to Raw Power

Brümmer’s discussion reveals the inadequacy of views portraying God as a ‘Promethean manipulator’ using overwhelming power to achieve a goal. Here too, Barth agrees with Brümmer.⁵⁴ Barth consistently opposes claims that God’s power might be merely abstract, ultimate power used in an arbitrary and capricious manner.⁵⁵ Power ‘in itself’—unshaped by the personal identity of its agent—does not reflect an aspect of the Christian God.⁵⁶ In describing authentic human power, Barth speaks of divine omnipotence:

⁵² *Ibid.*, 289.

⁵³ Barth claims all creatures stand in relation to God but only humans do so in personal relationship, as ‘a “Thou” whom God can confront as an “I”...’ III.1, 181ff.

⁵⁴ ‘Power’ is a primary stumbling-block for readers of III.3. Barth’s treatment of raw power ties in closely with his description of evil as nothingness. See Chapter VIII. The omnipotence of the personal, Triune God has nothing to do with the chaotic and impersonal ‘power of impotence’ (*Macht der Ohnmacht*) apart from God. See II.1, 531 (597).

⁵⁵ Many of the critics fail to see how God can ‘determine’ world-occurrence without simply overwhelming creation with divine power. While acknowledging Barth’s prose against God acting as a Promethean manipulator, these critics finally judge him guilty of precisely this error. See Davaney, *Divine*; Duthie, ‘Providence.’ The success or failure of Barth’s personalist reformulation of providence hinges on the assessment of the power of God defined in christological terms.

⁵⁶ Barth explicitly anchors omnipotence in the divine Person: ‘The divine profundity of true omnipotence consists in the fact that it is itself the omnipotent person of God (*die allmächtige Person*

Thus it is not an abstract question of power in itself and as such. Not even the omnipotence of God—indeed, this least of all—is power of this kind, power over all things and everything. Only the evil impotence which is an attribute of nothingness, chaos, falsehood and its “powers” is indefinite power, power over all things and everything. Unqualified power (*Unqualifizierte Macht*) is *per se* the power of negation, destruction and dissolution.⁵⁷

For Barth, true power is ‘for’ the other and *therefore limited*. God’s power revealed in Christ is definite, and qualified by the divine intention. The personal God revealed in Jesus Christ does not (and cannot) act as a capricious tyrant.

Ordering power as he does, Barth demonstrates a shift away from the causal framework and its philosophical presuppositions in order to articulate the Biblical concept of covenant and the relationality it implies. While Barth maintains God’s omnipotence, his prose has a decidedly different tone than that of his Reformed predecessors.⁵⁸ Barth’s doctrine of providence presents omnipotence as able to accomplish the divine intention *without manipulation or cancellation of creaturely action*, but through it and with it ‘in one way or another.’⁵⁹ Webster explains:

For Barth, the real enemy is divine sole causality...Barth seeks to exclude sole causality on the part of either God or the human agent, proposing instead that the moral field is a diverse pattern of correspondences or analogies...⁶⁰

Barth’s opposition to sole-causality relates directly to his opposition to raw power. Unbridled power cannot be personal power in service of the other. Throughout *CD*, Barth draws a sharp line between the *loving* omnipotence of the triune God and any philosophical or theological conception of absolute power. Divine omnipotence is God’s determinate, loving power revealed in Jesus Christ and therefore (and in this sense) absolute. Thus in discussing the power of God in election, Barth writes,

Its freedom is indeed divine and therefore absolute. It is not, however, an abstract freedom as such (*abstrakte Freiheit als solche*), but the freedom of the One who loves in freedom...If we seek it elsewhere, then we are no longer talking about this election. We are no longer talking about the decision of the divine will which was fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We are looking beyond these to a supposedly greater depth in God (and that undoubtedly means nothingness, or rather the depth of Satan).⁶¹

Gottes). It is in this alone, and therefore never at any time impersonally, without consciousness and will, that it is omnipotence, and mighty and effective. In this it is wholly omnipotence, but solely and exclusively in this.’ II.1, 598 (674).

⁵⁷ III.4, 391 (446).

⁵⁸ Omnipotence is more about personhood than power for Barth: ‘...true omnipotence consists in the fact that it is itself the omnipotent person of God...never at any time impersonally...’ II.1, 598.

⁵⁹ Barth frequently uses the phrase ‘*so oder so*’ to indicate the positive and negative determination of God; e.g., *KD* II.2, 288.

⁶⁰ John B. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 177.

⁶¹ II.2, 25 (26).

For Barth, abstract theories elevating ‘power’ or ‘freedom’ to the infinite, apart from the specificity of God’s personal identity revealed in Christ, do not reflect the depth of God but Satan.

God’s power is grounded ‘in the love and freedom of the divine person.’⁶² With Brümmer, Barth will not affirm undefined, ‘Promethean’ power that manipulates or acts upon human persons without limitation or regard to personhood. But Barth’s reasoning for this rejection has implications that bring him into conflict with Brümmer’s understanding of power and the human ‘capacity’ to say Yes or No to God. In a sense, Barth’s trinitarian God does not meet Brümmer’s requirements. Having decided to be God for us from before the foundations of the world, God cannot say No to humanity in Brümmer’s sense.⁶³ The nature of God’s power precludes the possibility of this ‘No’.

This ordering of definitions in relation to God applies not only to divine power, but to all power. Thus just as God’s power must be defined by the divine Person, so also must the human power of self-determination be seen in a derivative relationship to God’s self-determination. Gunton explains,

The outcome is that, according to Barth, one must be determined in order to be free. But unless it is God who determines, we are under the power of a demon, not the truth. This determination, because the work of the personal God, is a determination that liberates for true self-determination.⁶⁴

In Barth’s theology, the derivative relation of both human power and self-determination in relation to God indicates a crucial divergence from Brümmer. Brümmer’s diagrams do not allow for the proper asymmetrical ordering of human self-determination in relation to its Creator and Redeemer. As it stands, the diagram portrays divine and human agency as mere species within the larger genus of ‘agents.’ Barth’s theology rejects this assumption and the resulting ordering as portrayed in Brümmer’s analysis.

Brümmer’s rejection of divine ‘Promethean manipulation’ reflects a theological value shared with Barth. The examples cited show Barth’s rejection of Brümmer’s Game 2. That said, they also indicate that Barth does not simply affirm

⁶² II.1, 526.

⁶³ The asymmetry of election include both Yes and No, ‘But the No is said for the sake of the Yes and not for its own sake. In substance, therefore, the first and last word is Yes and not No.’ II.2, 13. Judgment remains—even for Christians. Forgiveness is not the amputation of personal history: ‘Forgiveness obviously does not mean to make what has happened not to have happened...The man in whose life what had happened came not to have happened would not be the same man. He is this man in the totality of his history...The man who receives forgiveness does not cease to be the man whose past...bears the stain of his sins.’ IV.1, 597.

⁶⁴ Colin Gunton, ‘Barth, The Trinity, and Human Freedom,’ *Theology Today* 43, no. 3 (1986): 321.

the schematic presentation of what Brümmer considers the only possible eschatological options in Game 1 (all humans ending with outcome A or D, but with neither outcome constituting 100% of humanity). Both theologians reject the Calvinist presentation of double-predestination and would be in broad agreement that Game 2 reflects the implications of such an approach's basic claims.⁶⁵

iv) *The Impossible Possibility of Humanity's No*

Brümmer's diagrams and discussion indicate that if God chooses to aim for outcome A, the door must be left open for outcome B. Here Brümmer describes the human agent's capacity to 'reject the love of God permanently and decisively' as an essential component of personhood.⁶⁶ The discussion of 'the personality of God' (below) describes Barth's disagreement with many presuppositions underlying Brümmer's logic, particularly regarding salvation. However, Barth would agree that humans frequently say No to God. For Barth too, this is '*die unmögliche Möglichkeit*' of sin.⁶⁷ As discussed above, Barth acknowledges the presence of 'nothingness' and therefore the threat to the divine-human relationship of mutual love. Nevertheless, Barth sets this claim in a much larger context which limits its implications in ways which Brümmer cannot accept. In particular, these differences highlight their respective understandings of salvation in relation to providence.

The distinction between outcomes A and B in Brümmer's diagram is the Yes or No of the human agent. Barth rules out outcomes C and D based on the certainty of God's electing Yes to humanity in Jesus Christ. Barth writes,

It is, therefore, a Yes which is unconditional in its certainty, preceding all self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) and outlasting any change in self-determination on the part of the creature.⁶⁸

God's freedom and identity assure that God can and will say Yes to humanity. That said, God's Yes *precedes* and *outlasts* the creature's self-determination (it does not *cancel* it). Two conclusions arise from this claim. First, Barth speaks meaningfully of a limited self-determination of the creature. Second, this self-determination cannot be seen in isolation: God acts and wills before, during and after the creature's limited time and space for self-determination.

⁶⁵ See Brümmer, *Speaking*, 64; II.2, 188ff.

⁶⁶ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 64.

⁶⁷ *KD* III.3, 405.

⁶⁸ II.2, 31 (32).

The first of these points raises the question of determinism in Barth's theology. At present, no scholarly consensus exists in answering if Barth was or was not a 'determinist.'⁶⁹ While Barth does not want to sacrifice God's sovereignty to human autonomy, he consistently affirms the time and space in which creatures can act both with and against God.⁷⁰ Barth does not call this 'freedom' as such but rather refers to it as life or existence.⁷¹ He calls sin 'the impossible possibility' but the paradoxical nature of this statement need not take away from the truth of its provisional reality. In speaking of the covenant between God and humanity, Barth explains,

To be sure, there may be an actual antithesis. The covenant-partner of God can break the covenant. Real man can deny and obscure his reality. This ability for which there is no reason, the mad and incomprehensible possibility of sin, is a sorry fact.⁷²

Barth concedes the 'fact' that humans—even Christians—behave contrary to the will of God. Thus, in some sense, Barth concurs with Brümmer that outcome B must be left open—at least in the general flow of human life, if not regarding salvation. However, the context of Barth's comment is the covenant of God already accomplished in Christ. Thus sin is not the outcome of one of the two essential options for a human (Yes or No), but a denial of humanity.⁷³

Crucially for Barth, this human capacity to utter No in the face of God's Yes does not fall outside of the 'will of God'. This is essential to Barth's doctrine of providence. Barth claims that both divine and human willing in world-occurrence

⁶⁹ Tanner concludes that Barth does not expound determinism (carefully defined): 'In short: no synergism (as if God and creatures were agents on the same plane); no monism (as if God were the only actor); no determinism (as if God pulled creatures away from their own best inclinations).' Tanner, 'Creation,' 125. Likewise, Hunsinger rejects both indeterminism and determinism: 'Indeterminism exalts the creature at the expense of God; determinism exalts God at the expense of the creature; and dialectical identity exalts the two at the expense of each other (insofar as the creature is divinized or God is humanized as the cost of systematic coordination).' George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 224. In contrast, Schröder expresses doubts about talk of true human agency in Barth due to his emphasis on God's agency: 'God remains the real author, the actual agent. In that case it would not be talk of God's agency that is inauthentic, but talk of human agency.' Schröder, 'See,' 123. McGrath's assessment of Barthian 'sin' rests on a deterministic view: 'It is simply impossible to accommodate the existence of sin and evil...[if] the historical process is absolutely determined by what is already perfected at the beginning of time.' Alister McGrath, *Iustia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 365.

⁷⁰ See II.1, 418ff; III.3, 61f.

⁷¹ See Karl Barth, *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963), 15; III.1, 153ff.

⁷² III.2, 205.

⁷³ Neder notes that technically 'human sin' cannot be, for the creature is less than human in his sinning. Adam Neder, "'A Differentiated Fellowship of Action': Participation in Christ in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*" (Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 168ff.

can take two—and *only* two—distinct meanings based in the established covenant of election. Barth uses the rubric of the right and left hand of God for this two-fold willing.⁷⁴ Barth writes, ‘Clearly that God will make us obedient and set us at His right hand, but no less clearly that even in our disobedience, when we must stand on His left hand, nothing except His will may be done to us.’⁷⁵ Barth explains the two-fold willing of God this way,

God’s willing something can therefore mean that He loves, affirms and confirms it, that He creates, upholds and promotes it out of the fulness of His life. His willing it can also mean that in virtue of that same love he hates, disavows, rejects and opposes it as that which withstands and lacks and denies what is loved, affirmed and confirmed by Him and created, upheld and promoted by Him.⁷⁶

Accordingly, Barth can write, ‘God wills everything’ (i.e., in this twofold fashion) without implying that God *wants* everything to happen that happens. Clearly, if God wills by rejecting and opposing something, this action cannot imply guilt. Likewise, far from determinism, Barth sees God’s willing as a positive or negative determination of creaturely occurrence; there is no neutrality. Solidly anchored in God’s electing will in Jesus Christ, God wills by affirming and confirming creaturely occurrence or disavowing and rejecting it. Either way, no creaturely-occurrence happens without God’s active determination.

That God’s will ‘determines’ sin through hating, disavowing and rejecting it sets Barth at a safe distance from making God ‘the author of sin’. The human, not God, remains responsible for sin, though both act in double-agency.⁷⁷ When God wills in this way,

He still wills it in the sense that He takes it seriously in this way and takes up this position over against it. He wills it in so far as He gives it this space, position and function. He does not do so as its author (*Urheber*), recognising it as His creature, approving and confirming and vindicating it. On the contrary, He wills it as He denies it His authorship...In this way, then, in His turning away from it, He wills what He disavows. It cannot exist without Him.⁷⁸

The dynamic and relational aspect of this description is clear. God acts and wills in action.

⁷⁴ Ruerher notes the importance of Barth’s use of ‘God’s left hand’ and its connection with ‘Barth’s systematic preference for personalist categories...’ Rosemary Radford Ruether, ‘The Left Hand of God in the Theology of Karl Barth,’ *The Journal of Religious Thought* 25 (1968): 26.

⁷⁵ II.1, 558. The concept of God’s right and left hand described here is essential in understanding the determination of providence in III.3, particularly in regard to §50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 556.

⁷⁷ I discuss Barth’s double-agency in conversation with Farrer in Chapter V.

⁷⁸ II.1, 556-557.

On the creaturely side there is an analogous two-fold option. While humans may believe that freedom consists in the ability to do anything, Barth claims, ‘We deceive ourselves if we think we can will infinitely much.’⁷⁹ Human volition remains real, but ‘is in fact fixed by the will of God and fixed in such a way that only that can be willed which is either affirmed and accepted by God’s will or denied and rejected by it, i.e., the possible or the impossible, the good or the bad.’⁸⁰ Life, in all its complexity, is lived in this binary relation to God. Barth draws on Luther’s imagery describing this two-fold action as the right and left hand of God.⁸¹ Barth writes,

We can adopt an independent attitude to the divine Yes and No. We can hate what God loves and love what He hates. We can accept what He rejects and reject what He accepts. This is our sinful will...Besides willing and deciding for God or against Him there is no third possibility of choice or decision.⁸²

In this way, Barth affirms something akin to Brümmer’s assertion that humans must be able to say Yes or No to God, but this affirmation finds its grounding in relation to God and not on some fictional, neutral foundation. Like creation, covenant has an objective reality regardless of the humans’ attitude towards it. Whether the human knows it or not, she is already in relation to God.

This second point—setting human self-determination in relation to God’s ongoing willing and acting—shapes the implications of human action. Barth sees the “Divine Accompanying” or *concursum* as God’s active involvement before, during and after the creature’s act. He claims that humans have time and space in limitation, but continues to affirm that divine agency is not limited in this same way. Barth’s theology accounts for human spontaneity, unfettered by mechanical divine determinism in a strict one-to-one correspondence, but it sets this spontaneity in the larger context of God’s past, present and future rule. No human can ever face a situation that presents an infinite number of possibilities. God gives the creature limits in time and space, but also in the circumstances of any given act. Ultimately, however, every moment is a Yes or No, obedience or disobedience in encounter with God. Life, in all its complexity, is lived in this twofold reality.

Based on the preceding discussion, I propose an adapted version of Brümmer’s framework to represent Barth’s doctrine of providence:

⁷⁹ Ibid., 556.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ See III.3, 551-552.

⁸² II.1, 557.

Table 2

		GOD	
		Game 3: Asymmetrical personal relation → played with one human person and God	
		YES	NO
HUMAN BEINGS	YES	OUTCOME I (God acts and determines with God's Right Hand)	OUTCOME J
	NO	OUTCOME K	OUTCOME L (God acts and determines with God's Left Hand)

Admittedly, I am using Brümmer's framework differently than intended. However, the causal framework of Game 2 can be modified (Game 3) to portray Barth's doctrine of providence ordered by election. At any moment, if the human obeys God's command (i.e. Yes), God simultaneously says Yes resulting in outcome I. Here, like outcome A, both actualize personal freedom. If the human disobeys (i.e. No), God says No to the creature's impossible intention and brings about outcome L. Barth calls this God's left hand. Crucially, the personal God responds with utter constancy in Jesus Christ, so there is nothing mechanical or deterministic about this certainty.⁸³ While superior to the human, God permits the human the choice of obedience or disobedience at every moment (Yes/No).⁸⁴ In double-agency, God determines the human person *coram Deo*. This person, without further development or omission, will participate in God as redeemed sinner for all eternity.

Thus Barth's analysis does not fit nicely into Brümmer's original framework, but does work as represented in Game 3. Barth allows for humans to act and say No to God in a provisional, limited way. Humans can and do sin. They rebel against God's command, though never outside the sphere of God's two-fold will. Likewise, Barth's theology does not stop with a snapshot of the situation after the human affects his provisional No. Rather, God's continued accompanying of the effect

⁸³ God is not a robot, but acts with self-determined constancy. Thus God's personhood precludes outcomes J and K.

⁸⁴ See II.1, 594ff.

(apart from the human agent) brings it to its ultimate end. This movement into the future brings us to our final point concerning eschatology.

v) *Implications for Eschatology*

Brümmer explicitly links his frameworks to corresponding eschatological outcomes. He believes that the personal framework of Game 1, as opposed to the causal framework of Game 2, necessitates a dualistic eschatology. Assuming (as Barth does) that God's goal lies in outcome A, Brümmer concludes that outcome D must result in some cases. Here, God must ultimately assent to the human agent's No and proffer a divine No in return. In other words, the human No *necessitates* a divine No.

Barth's eschatology centers less on the implications of human actions on God's ultimate Yes or No, focusing instead on God's Yes to humanity in the covenantal relationship achieved in Jesus Christ. God gives humans 'time and space' for personal self-determination *coram Deo*. Thus Barth underscores the goodness of creaturely limitations and God's sovereignty beyond these limits.⁸⁵ Barth affirms humanity's ability to act within the sphere God has set for it, but that created sphere does not inhibit God's ability to bring all things to their divinely appointed end in the fulfillment of the covenant and establishment of God's kingdom.

Contrary to all the evident chaos, sin, and evil in world-occurrence around us, the work of Christ has already lost its provisional meaning and achieved its true essence. Under the rubric '*Hominum confusione et Dei providentia regitur*' Barth proclaims the continued goodness of creation. Moreover, God addresses the 'reality and operation of the absurd, of nothingness'.⁸⁶ These two exist in conflict in the confusion of human *perception*, though in actuality they cannot be brought into coordination.⁸⁷ Humanity has no inherent capacity to resolve this two-fold view of world-occurrence. Barth claims,

The most deeply confusing aspect of the confusing action of man is that he thinks he can set himself above both God and himself at a point beyond the creative will of God and the opposing nothingness, where he can and should see the two together and combine them.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ III.3, 61ff. 'The preservation which God grants to the creature is the preservation of its limited being. In its totality this preservation relates to a space which is limited, and in its eternity to a time which is limited.'

⁸⁶ IV.3.2, 696.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 697.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 706.

The Christian must turn from the arrogance of such an integration and instead humbly accept ‘the only possible alternative’:

And it is simply that the reality and truth of the grace of God addressed to the world in Jesus Christ is the third word which the Christian community is both required and authorized to consider and attest beyond and in integration of the first two as it turns its gaze on world-occurrence.⁸⁹

This alternative flies in the face of general philosophy and stands on the Christian grounds of revelation. Such a claim depends on the knowledge of faith, but it need not stand in opposition to reason. Falling short of comprehensive need not mean incoherent or illogical. Barth’s christocentric providence involves a level of mystery and testifies to ‘the necessary brokenness of all theological thought and utterance’, but is it philosophically incoherent?⁹⁰

Here Barth comes into direct conflict with Brümmer’s presuppositions regarding divine/human agency. First, such a view leaves no possibility of human comprehension of a static principle ‘which man can perceive, affirm and appropriate as such, and then logically develop and apply to transcend and overcome all possible antitheses, and therefore the one which now concerns us.’⁹¹ The personal revelation of God’s grace in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit is ‘inaccessible to all human and even Christian *hybris*’ and can only be recognized in gratitude and prayer.⁹² Unlike in Brümmer’s diagrams, humans cannot stand above and see divine and human action from a neutral viewpoint. Barth seals off any alternatives of pushing for greater logical coherence, speaking instead of the mystery of grace: ‘Where grace is actually present and active, it is enveloped by the mystery of its royal freedom.’⁹³ Grace is active, loving fellowship and cannot be assessed from outside that personal interaction.

Second, Barth would claim that Brümmer’s diagram does not account for the ‘new thing’ in relation to the antithesis between God’s providence and human confusion: the incarnation. In Christ, the covenant between God and humanity has been kept and fulfilled. In this way,

The one Jesus Christ has already represented God to man and man to God. He has already championed the cause of God with man and the cause of man with God. He

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ III.3, 293.

⁹¹ IV.3.2, 706.

⁹² Ibid., 707. The self-involved and committed nature of gratitude and prayer indicate the impossibility of neutral evaluation.

⁹³ Ibid.

has already executed the decisive act of the fatherly and royal providence of God by the removal of human confusion.⁹⁴

Christ's work 'is lacking in nothing' and yet is restricted in the fact that it is not fully revealed and known in world history.⁹⁵ While it lies beyond innate human capacity of perception, this 'new thing' changes the structure of a mere antithesis. This explains much of the way in which we may reject Brümmer's diagram as representing Barth's thought in regard to election (Games 1 and 2) while allowing its utility in regard to personalist providence (Game 3). God's effective work of salvation has been accomplished in Jesus Christ. As seen above, this electing will remains active in the living encounter of God and humans to witness—positively or negatively—this triumph of grace.⁹⁶

As these two points make clear, Barth would not concur with Brümmer's logical conclusions regarding the corresponding view of eschatology as the result of the personal framework. While Barth's appeal to 'mystery' and 'the new thing' of Christ's fulfilment of the covenant (with its eschatological implications) may not be accepted by Brümmer, they nevertheless have resonance with the Biblical witness.

The five points discussed above carry import for comprehending III.3. Barth and Brümmer speak in different ways, while fervently adhering to a personal-relations understanding of divine and human agency. In the second portion of this chapter, I attempt to show the ways in which Barth defines 'personality' in contrast with Brümmer's minimalist definition used in the diagrams.

Barth and the Personality of God

i) God as 'The Person' and Human Personhood

Barth affirms many of Brümmer's conclusions considering personhood and freedom. Brümmer correctly concludes that God's personhood involves the ability to say Yes or No to the other (in the proper context). The Yes and No of God to the other—in their asymmetry and proper understanding—are essential to Barth's theology. Rooted in election, God's Yes to humanity contains but also overcomes the divine No. Thus in Christ, God's loving freedom is self-determinate rather than indeterminate. Hartwell claims, 'In fact, Barth's entire theological labours are

⁹⁴ Ibid., 713.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 714.

⁹⁶ While human actions and decisions do not affect salvation, their import remains in their witness (*Zeuge*) and its influence on other persons. See Darrell L. Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 121-131; Johnson, *Mystery*, 112-115.

directed towards making this Yes understood and intelligible.’⁹⁷ Such a statement, however, may obscure more than it illumines if not put into context. The title of §28 states the essential claim for Barth, ‘The Being of God as the One who Loves in Freedom.’⁹⁸ Through revelation, the Christian learns that God is the primary person who loves in freedom. This free loving and loving freedom necessarily contains the capacity to say Yes or No, but one cannot assert a general capacity in abstraction from this actual activity.

Moreover, Barth would reject the systematization of Brümmer’s diagram based on its correlation of the divine and human agents. Brümmer’s labels on the horizontal and vertical axes set both God and the human being *equally* under the broad category of ‘persons.’ Barth never tired of warning that the divine and the creaturely cannot be considered mutually as species under some wider genus. In this way, Barth’s methodology precludes the movement from the general and neutral category of ‘person’ defined by philosophy to the specific persons of God and individual humans. Instead, Barth claims to be starting from the particular as given in revelation and then moving to the general.

In this case, Barth makes the dramatic claim that the Bible does not simply reveal God as personal, but that God is *the* Person. With Brümmer, Barth sees ‘personhood’ in connection to willful action, but Barth sees all other personhood in derivative relation to the divine Person. Barth writes,

The definition of a person—that is, a knowing, willing, acting I—can have the meaning only of a confession of the person of God declared in His revelation, of the One who loves and who as such (loving in His own way) is *the* person.⁹⁹

This strongly positive emphasis on divine personhood begins to clarify the outlines of Barth’s argument regarding human personhood.

Here Barth diverges substantially from Brümmer’s diagrams. The human cannot be placed on the vertical axis as an independent, autonomous actor over and against God without *presupposing* a relation with God whereby the human receives ‘personhood.’ Barth explains,

God is what man in himself never is...Man is not a person, but he becomes one on the basis that he is loved by God and can love God in return. Man finds what a person is when he finds it in the person of God and his own being as a person in the gift of fellowship afforded him by God in person. He is then (in his own way as

⁹⁷ Hartwell, *Theology*, 117.

⁹⁸ II.1, 257.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 284; italics English translators’.

creature) a person wholly and exclusively in the fellowship of Him who (in His way as Creator) is it in Himself.¹⁰⁰

Here Barth denies any inherent, independent personhood in humanity. Personhood does not entail a capacity to say Yes or No to God (as Game 1 presupposes), but rather comes as a result of covenant fellowship. The human individual can neither have knowledge nor being as person in neutrality apart from God. Such neutrality is a fiction existing only in the confusion of the human mind. In this sense, a human's personhood comes from outside and is bestowed as gift rather than from an innate capacity.

Finally, the passage indicates the different personhood of Creator and creature. Speaking of both God and humans as persons or as having personhood does not remove the ontological distinction. If 'person' is to be applied to both God and humanity, this difference must remain clear. The triune God is essentially personal while humans *become* persons on the basis of being loved by God and loving God in return.

Barth denies the possibility of 'personhood' in isolation and instead insists that it be found in I-Thou fellowship both with God and others.¹⁰¹ Inherently personal in the actuality of divine life, God lives in triune fellowship apart from creation. Based on this personal life *ad intra*, God offers the possibility of fellowship (and therefore personhood) to the human. As the God who loves in freedom, the triune God

...is capable of fellowship (*gemeinschaftsfähig*) on the basis of his own power and act, capable of fellowship and capable of achieving fellowship in Himself and without the need of this other, but at the same time capable of fellowship and capable of achieving fellowship with reference to this other. This means really and fundamentally to be I. The being and therefore the loving of God has alone this character of being I.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 284.

¹⁰¹ Cf. III.2, 277ff. Barth's use of terminology such as 'I-Thou' and personalism demonstrates his willingness to use personalist philosophical tools of the 20th century to convey his *theological* content. In this case, Eberhard Busch correctly notes that Barth differs from Buber in that 'co-humanity belongs to the *essence* of the human creature and is thus 'the center of the human' (III/2 348 = 289).' Busch, *Great*, 195. Barth's trinitarian theology grounds the possibility of humanity living in I-Thou relation both with God and other human beings. Mangina notes, 'For Barth, the ultimate pattern of I-Thou encounter is that of the Trinity, in the mutual self-giving of Father and Son in the unity of the Spirit. It is thus that Barth seeks to ground talk of co-humanity not just in Christology, but in the eternal life of the Godhead.' Mangina, *Witness*, 96.

¹⁰² II.1, 285 (320). While philosophers or theologians may well accuse his personalism rooted in trinitarian doctrine of being overly speculative, Barth's logic gives texture and coherence to the ground of human personhood in relation. God's *capacity* to relate to an other is grounded in God's own inner relation as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In discussing Barth's theological anthropology as 'co-humanity' (*Mitmenschlichkeit*), Busch notes, 'Just as God can relate himself outwardly toward humanity, because in himself as the Triune One he is being-in-relation, the human can as well.'

True personality as an ‘I’ rather than an ‘it’ comes from *being in fellowship*. Barth presupposes that fellowship—by definition—means being or acting in love towards the other (outcome A). Thus Barth rejects Brümmer’s presupposition that a person is minimally one ‘who can choose whether to say Yes or No to each other.’¹⁰³ Barth narrows true personhood by eliminating the possibility of knowing, willing, and acting in abstraction and insists that these must be done in loving fellowship, specifically, fellowship in relation to God. Barth writes,

For this reason the original and proper knowing and willing and doing that distinguishes an I from an It, and an act (*Tat*) from a mere happening (*bloßen Geschehen*), is the property and the prerogative, not of the human, but of the divine being as the One who loves.¹⁰⁴

Barth ties the concept of person so closely to God’s triune being and loving that Brümmer’s Games 1 and 2 cannot adequately represent Barth’s theology. A person in relation to God is not one who can choose to say Yes or No to God, rather the ability to respond to God as an ‘I’ rather than an ‘it’ presupposes the divine Yes as well as the creaturely Yes. This creature, hearing God’s Yes and responding with her own Yes, is a true person in this encounter.

Note that Barth’s emphasis on ‘knowing and willing and doing’ stands in opposition to merely deterministic views of the world. Human persons—in relation to the One who loves—live in freedom: knowing, willing and doing. Like Brümmer, Barth remains aware of the dangers of making humans into robots, puppets or chess pieces under providence.¹⁰⁵ Unlike Brümmer, Barth finds security against this threat in loving relation with God, not in the neutral capacity to choose or reject this relation.

Busch, *Great*, 194. I return to Barth’s claim that all personhood derives and depends on God’s triune being below. Barth’s trinitarian theology speaks to an actualized personhood in the godhead that general philosophical theology seems ill-equipped to do. Non-trinitarian personalist philosophers seem to undermine their philosophy if they speak of the creation of a personal world without a primordial God *in relation*.

¹⁰³ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 62.

¹⁰⁴ II.1, 285 (320).

¹⁰⁵ Brümmer’s Game 2 posits a divine person and ‘a robot programmed to say Yes in response to a Yes, and No in response to a No.’ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 62. Barth repeatedly objects to views which preclude any form of autonomy, making humans ‘puppets or slaves’, pieces on a chessboard or ‘a mere spectator’. Cf. II.2, 178, 190; IV.3.1, 447; IV.3.2, 528. Significantly, the ‘lordless powers’ of evil do precisely this to humans: ‘They rob people of the freedom which they have misused and thus forfeited in advance...They make them subjects, parrots, puppets, or even robots.’ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV, 4 Lecture Fragments*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 233.

ii) *Barth's Historical Review and Analysis*

While many would object to Barth's line of reasoning, he goes on to defend his position in ten pages of fine print. Barth divides this section into two parts: an historical review, and a brief but important exposition on the implications of God's personality for trinitarian theology. The basic thrust of the first portion seems to exemplify a common complaint of Barth, which is that the presuppositions of the argument determine its outcome even before a case has been made. Barth claims that the prominence given to the topic of the personhood of God in the 19th and 20th centuries cannot be seen as a positive development, in spite of Barth's staunch and consistent defense of it in a certain form, due to the presuppositions held from the times of Protestant orthodoxy and even the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶ As Barth has already argued at length, the tendency to address the trinity *after* dealing with God's attributes and nature in general led away from the God revealed in Scripture and towards human conceptions of the Absolute.¹⁰⁷ In this sense, these theologians defined person and personhood according to general philosophical or abstract norms rather than in relation to personal revelation. Brümmer's diagrammatic presentation leaves him open to precisely this critique from Barth.

Barth begins his critique by tracing the consequences of theologians' move from general principles to the specifics of how these principles apply to the nature and personhood of God. When God is understood primarily to be 'the absolute or the highest good of men' (i.e. as a presupposition), 'it is very hard to see why and how He can and may be One, why and how He can and may be person.'¹⁰⁸ Personhood becomes centered on *knowledge of self* and thus 'Person is the individual manifestation of the spirit, and its individualization (*Individualisierung*), which as such is limited, but contingently necessary.'¹⁰⁹ The definition of person and personality thus include finitude, which by default preclude God from being personal as the Infinite. Barth quotes lengthy passages from Strauss, Biedermann and Lüdemann which argue against the attribution of personality to God based on the presupposition of God as the infinite, absolute spirit and the concept of personhood necessitating finitude.

¹⁰⁶ In arguing that Barth reforms providence through personalism, I have tried to be vigilant in purging these presuppositions.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. I.1, 295-347. Throughout *CD*, Barth breaks from this trend in traditional Reformed theology and particularly so in providence.

¹⁰⁸ II.1, 288.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 288 (324).

But it is precisely here, where philosophers and theologians seem to give God praise, that Barth claims their arrogance is revealed. In defining God as absolute, these writers assumed the role of acting subject in control of the infinite predicate. Barth accuses such thinkers of (consciously or unconsciously) denying God's active authority, and thus enslaving the 'infinite' in the 'presupposition that God is the content of the human concept of reason.'¹¹⁰ While seemingly humble, both Christian and non-Christian thinkers of the Enlightenment, Romanticism and Idealism asserted their power over God. Barth explains,

It was irresistibly powerful because it moved in purely analytical statements, because it merely repeated the so-to-speak commonly held presupposition that man is the person who, thinking the idea of his reason, has the power to think God, and...God is to be thought of as absolute and infinite, but cannot under any circumstances be thought of as person and therefore as the superior rival of man...For with this equation we have attributed true and proper personality to man as the subject of the idea of reason, thus taking the step which necessarily brings us into insoluble contradiction with the belief in the personal God.¹¹¹

Thus Barth attempts to unmask the denial of God's personhood as idolatry. The human subject defines the divine predicate in such a way that God retains seemingly honorable titles but wields no influence. This God is not the living God of providence but rather an impotent figurehead.

Unfortunately, in Barth's view, even modern defenders of the personhood of God have attempted to assert their case without dispensing with these flawed premises. In keeping these presuppositions, they fall victim to two crucial mistakes. First, the idea that God is 'the absolute of a human idea' or 'absolute personality' ultimately fails because while it places God in the position of subject rather than predicate, it 'constantly gives to the predicate the creative finitude which as such can only belong to the subject.'¹¹² Second, asserting God's personality by absolutizing humanity forfeits the theological nature of the enterprise. Citing nearly a page from Feuerbach, Barth claims such thinking is anthropology, not theology.¹¹³ Barth writes, 'We can see how here the mystery of the modern doctrine of God—that the being of God is the predicate of the human subject—was long ago carelessly exploded by a philosopher who...was no longer interested in the Church.'¹¹⁴ Both of

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 290.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 290-291.

¹¹² Ibid., 292. Barth's personalism demands a positive use of limits regarding both divine and human persons. Since God's power is truly *God's* power, a personal, self-determined (and therefore limited) power, it differs entirely with 'an uncontrolled capacity, power in itself.' II.1, 544.

¹¹³ II.1, 292-93.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 293.

these problems cited by Barth demonstrate his rejection of the presuppositions of the 19th century supporters and detractors of the personality of God.

Ultimately, the presupposition of God as a *neutral absolute* must be rejected to be set on the proper road to understanding the God of the Bible. Thus Barth concludes his discussion of 19th century concept of the personality of God this way,

If we know that we cannot accept what is even in the orthodox doctrine of God the customary transposition of the divine being into a neutral absolute (*ein neutrales Absolutes*), to an anthropocentricity which is secretly at work in response to the revelation of God, we are not forced into this unhappy state of vacillation.¹¹⁵

Barth finds a different way of uniting the concepts of personality and absoluteness than he did earlier in his career. By replacing the ‘neutral absolute’ God of philosophy with the personal, triune God of revelation, Barth finds that he ‘can abandon the dialectic.’¹¹⁶ Barth destroys the dialectic between God as personal and absolute by removing the neutral presupposition of the latter. In light of the Bible, there are no grounds for asserting such a deity in the abstract. Here Barth demonstrates the importance of ordering philosophy and theology. He uses Feuerbach’s logic against contemporary theology, but reverses the ordering to use philosophical tools in his own dogmatics. Having established human personhood as derivative from God’s triune being and in covenantal relation, Barth excludes the possibility of neutrality and leaves room for only obedience or disobedience on the part of the human.

ii) *The Personality of God in Trinitarian Theology*

Next, Barth demonstrates how these modern debates concerning God’s personality led to profound misunderstanding of the term *persona* in trinitarian doctrine. He explains,

For the more the term *persona*...came to be equated with a “person” (in our meaning of the word) and therefore (in complete contradiction to the intentions of the trinitarian doctrine in the Early Church) the more the idea gained currency of three personalities in God, the less could the being of God be understood as the One

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 296 (333).

¹¹⁶ II.2, 296. This is precisely the same *formal* move he made in his 1913 lecture, but ‘revelation’ replaces ‘religious experience (*Frömmigkeit*)’. Karl Barth, ‘Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott,’ *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 24 (1914). In both arguments, Barth positively cites Strauss’s claim that describing God as ‘absolute personality’ is nonsense. Barth also uses Feuerbach’s critique against such views. However, the 1913 essay cannot resolve the tension between God’s absoluteness and personality. As in II.1, Barth refuses to allow for abstract speculation of the divine through the absolutising of the human, but unlike II.1, Barth shows the influence of Schleiermacher by appealing to religious experience. McCormack summarizes Barth’s position this way, ‘...the truth is that the source of our concept of God does not lie in speculative abstraction. It lies in religious experience.’ McCormack, *Critically*, 106.

who loves, and therefore as the One, in terms of the one life of the threefold God in His revelation and in Himself.¹¹⁷

Here, Barth sees a connection between a proper understanding of personality on the one hand and trinitarian theology on the other. While Brümmer's diagrams and discussion center on the anthropological issues arising from the personal framework, Barth's discussion indicates that his concerns deal directly with the doctrine of God and only subsequently the questions related to humans. Brümmer's logic begins with anxiety and conflict by observing humans' No to God and then speaking of God's responses. Barth, rather, begins with the love and unity of the Trinity and then speaks of human persons in this light.

In two brief but significant 'terminological elucidations' Barth stresses the importance and the limitations of the term 'personal' in regard to the triune God. First, God's personhood must be understood solely in light of God's active loving. Barth explains, '...in this context everything depends on the statement that God is the One who loves. But nothing at all depends on the statement that He is or He has personality.'¹¹⁸ Certainly God is personal, but this personality results from God's actual loving. The personality of God gains legitimacy and meaning only in the sense that it describes that which is essential: God's loving. Barth writes,

It can say this [that God is personal] only in the context of the statement that God is the One who loves, as the express avowal and affirmation of the fact that God is not something, not a thing, but a person, the One, the speaking and acting Subject, the original and real I. But it is as who He is and therefore as the One who loves that he is this. The concept of personality as such is too colourless to form a necessary basis for our description of this absolutely indispensable moment in the nature of God.¹¹⁹

As so often in Barth, seemingly obvious correlations find meaning and significance only in proper ordering from the particular to the general.¹²⁰ The revealed truth of God's continual and active love *ad intra* necessitates an affirmation that God wills and acts not as an It but as the true I. Separated from this loving, the concept of personality loses 'color' and obscures more than it reveals. God truly is personal, but God is personal *because* the divine loving demands it. If one introduces fear or conflict into the Trinity, God is no longer loving *ad intra*, nor personal. In conflict with Godself, God would be less than personal. Similarly, sinful humanity becomes less than personal in action.

¹¹⁷ II.1, 288.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 296.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Cf. Hunsinger, *How*, 32ff.

Second, this discussion of God's personality must be understood in its connection and distinction from the historic language of the 'persons' of the Trinity. Barth describes God in the three 'modes of being (*Seinsweisen*)': Father, Son and Holy Spirit.¹²¹ Harkening back to his discussion of Trinity in I.1 (and in doing so, affirming his commitment to beginning with revelation rather than philosophy), Barth states his view that the use of 'persons' in reference to the Trinity should cease due to its tendency to be understood far differently from its meaning in classical theology. Christianity must oppose assertions that God might have three 'personalities in the sense of a threefold Ego, a threefold subject.'¹²² Such tritheistic tendencies have no place in the Bible and therefore no place in Christian dogmatics.

Nevertheless, the concept of 'personality' as used by Barth continues to be 'connected not merely closely, but indissolubly, with the doctrine of the Trinity.'¹²³ Just as tritheistic interpretations fail, so too do monotheistic interpretations that eliminate God's threeness with the intention of defending the divine unity.¹²⁴ Personality comes from the unity and distinction of the one *trinitarian* God. Contrary to properly describing the three distinct modes of trinitarian faith, personality—properly understood—is *identical* with the Trinity as such. Barth writes,

Being in Himself Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God is in Himself the One who lives and loves, and therefore One, and therefore the One...we know him always as the One who loves, and therefore as the One who meets us, and addresses us and deals with us as Thou. *What we can describe as personality is indeed the whole divine Trinity as such*, in the unity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in God Himself and in His work—not the individual aspects by themselves in which God is and which He has.¹²⁵

Properly understood, personalist language best describes God's trinitarian being in actively loving, both *ad intra* and subsequently *ad extra*. Thus Barth simultaneously asserts that 'nothing at all depends on the statement that He is or He has personality' and that the divine 'personality is indeed the whole of the divine Trinity as such.' His use of personal language here emphasizes the unity rather than the distinction of

¹²¹ *KD* II.1, 344. Gunton notes the 'clear influence' of the Cappadocian tradition on Barth's use of 'mode of being'. Colin Gunton, 'The Triune God and the Freedom of the Creature,' in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. S.W. Sykes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 60.

¹²² II.1, 297.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ This is the logic Barth uses several times against post-Christian Judaism and Islam. Cf. *Ibid.*, 448-449.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 297; italics mine.

God, but this unity is in active loving within the Godhead and therefore, outwith. Barth concludes his fine-print discussion with the christocentric trinitarian claim,

There are not three faces of God, but one face; not three wills, but one will; not three rights, but one right; not three Words and works, but one Word and work. The one God is revealed to us absolutely in Jesus Christ. He is absolutely the same God in Himself. This one God as the Triune is—let us say it then—the personal God.¹²⁶

This statement reaffirms Barth's insistence on moving from the particularity of revelation to conceptual language like person or personality.

Barth reasons that the 'personality of God' must be found in the active love of the fullness of the Godhead—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—and not in some innate, static aspect of each 'person' of the Trinity. This reasoning determines his understanding of human 'personhood'. The solitary, autonomous I, existing in isolation from others, is not the starting point or presupposition of a true person, but rather its antithesis and demise.¹²⁷ Barth has already foreshadowed this connection in I.1, claiming that the Church's 'real concern' in proclaiming the oneness of God and the threeness of God 'is revelation, in which the two are one.'¹²⁸ Revelation does not merely impart neutral knowledge or propositional truth but is essentially God's own presence with and for the other. Barth writes,

If revelation is to be taken seriously as God's presence, if there is to be a valid belief in revelation, then in no sense can Christ and the Spirit be subordinate hypostases. In the predicate and object of the concept revelation we must again have, and to no less a degree, the subject itself. Revelation and revealing must be equal to the revealer. Otherwise there is no room for them beside the revealer if this be the one God.¹²⁹

For Barth, abstract monotheism effectively isolates God from the other, as the unity of God destroys the possibility of revelation either within or outside the Godhead. Yet, the unity of God cannot be equated with a thing in isolation. The threeness of God's one nature 'is not solitary but different in His modes of existence, because He is the Father who has an only-begotten Son, therefore the fact that He can be free for others, that He can be free for a reality different from Himself, is eternally grounded

¹²⁶ Ibid., 297.

¹²⁷ As with other 'personalist' thinkers, Barth's position differs from Locke's definition of a person as 'a thinking, intelligent Being, endowed with reason and thought, aware of his identity and of his prominence in time and space.' John Locke, *Essay II*, 27, 9 as quoted in Paul McPartlan, 'Person,' in *Encyclopedia of Christian Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (London: Routledge, 2005). McPartlan rightfully notes the absence of 'any importance [of] interpersonality in the constitution of the self'. McPartlan, 'Person,' 1230.

¹²⁸ I.1, 352.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 353.

within God Himself.’¹³⁰ God’s genuine communion with the other can happen outside of God because it is essential to God’s inner being.

Conclusion

While some similarities exist between Barth’s definition of ‘person’ and Brümmer’s, overwhelming dissimilarities dominate. Brümmer would likely argue that Barth’s dissection of terms such as ‘person’ and his insistence on the derivative nature of human personhood do not ultimately evade the logic of his diagrammatic representation. Significantly, much of this conflict might be clarified by assessing the personal nature of eternal life. Barth helpfully addresses the question in relation to *conservatio*, but fails to do so sufficiently. Be that as it may, Brümmer’s case has accentuated the distinctiveness of Barth’s theological understanding of the trinitarian God’s ‘personality’ as well as his theological anthropology.

Brümmer’s diagrams helpfully clarify key claims underlying providence. In conversation, Barth and Brümmer share several theological values, while coming to very different conclusions. Brümmer’s logic proves persuasive in regard to causal language and challenges Barth’s peculiar insistence on preserving it in III.3 while 1) redefining it entirely in personalist terms and 2) almost completely abandoning its usage once it has been ‘permitted’. In light of Barth’s goals and priorities, personal rather than causal language must be used.

The conversation has highlighted the significance of eschatology in the discussion of providence. Nevertheless, Barth’s careful description of creatures *constantly in relation* with God makes Brümmer’s framework applicable to every world-occurrence, rather than isolating humanity’s decision to accept or reject salvation in Christ. A person lives and is in a continual series of Yes/No decisions *coram Deo*. Thus God’s determinative will can be understood in a twofold fashion as the right and left hand of God. This alteration of Brümmer’s presuppositions carries implications for eschatology as well.

Perhaps even more essential to Barth is the identification of the divine Person. Contra historic philosophies and theologies, Barth’s providential God is not an abstract Almighty, but the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ. This inherently personal, loving God grounds and sustains dependent human persons. Providence must take this asymmetry into account for world-occurrence and beyond.

¹³⁰ I.2, 34.

Turning now to Macmurray, I attempt to explore the implications of Barth's personalist ontology in providence. Specifically, I assess Barth's rejection of dualism and further explore God's singular, twofold will in election. In doing so, the conversation turns to providence in both its positive and negative actuality.

CHAPTER IV

THE THEOLOGICAL FORM OF THE PERSONAL IN BARTH AND MACMURRAY

*...the religious man above all others is not what he is intended to be. A dualism controls the world of religion, and, consequently, there sin—'abounds'...*¹

The quotation above casts doubt on the common claim that Barth's *Römerbrief* theology stands as the quintessence of dualism.² Setting himself against a simple dualism between the Wholly Other and creation, Barth characterizes dualistic thinking as the element controlling 'the world of religion' in which sin abounds.³ Dualism, religion and sin stand in interconnection within this passage, offering a glimpse into the alternative path which Barth would later apply regarding providence in III.3.

While the precise timing of his realization remains debatable, *CD* requires the reader to presuppose an opposition to dualism from start to finish. Torrance claims that Barth's transcendence of dualistic thought constitutes *the primary* problem for readers:

The main difficulty that people have with Karl Barth arises as they try to understand him within the dualist frame of thought that has prevailed within our western culture

¹ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn Hopkins, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 231. Hopkins' translation amounts to more of a paraphrase of the original: 'Gerade die religiöse Möglichkeit ist unter allen Möglichkeiten innerhalb der Humanität die bezeichnendste für den Dualismus von Jenseits und Diesseits, Voraussetzung und Akt, Bestimmung und Sein, Wahrheit und Wirklichkeit, die dieses „Innerhalb“ unvermeidlich beherrscht. Gerade hier „überfließt“ die Sünde (5, 20).' Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1922), 213. Nevertheless, both the translation and the original reveal Barth's claim that 'religion' is most exemplary of the dualism which leads to abounding sin. Lowe has argued for a more nuanced view of Barth's perceived theological dualism even in his *Römerbrief* period. His distinction between moral and metaphysical dualism is particularly helpful. See Walter Lowe, 'Barth as Critic of Dualism: Re-Reading the *Römerbrief*,' *SJT* 41 (1988): 377-395.

² Balthasar includes a 'dualistic-dialectic perspective' as one of the 'pitfalls of *Romans*'. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury, First ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 80. See also Karen Leslie Carr, *The Banalization of Nihilism: Twentieth-Century Responses to Meaninglessness* (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 51ff; Alister McGrath, *The Making of German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 104-105.

³ While Barth uses *der Religion* in both derogatory and complimentary ways, its usage here is decidedly the former. As in §17, 'the world of religion' is 'the realm of man's attempt to justify and to sanctify himself before a capricious and arbitrary picture of God.' I.2, 280.

since the age of the Enlightenment, whereas Barth's thought has moved far beyond that.⁴

I argue in this chapter that many of the presumed problems in Barth's doctrine of providence are only problematic when seen in an impersonal, dualistic frame of reference, one which Barth explicitly rejects. Some of his harshest critics (as well as his supporters) appeal to terms such as 'paradox', 'incoherence', 'mystery', 'dialectic' and 'contradiction' in their exegesis of Barth. While Barth does avail himself of such terms at times (particularly 'mystery' and 'dialectic'), a broader understanding of his non-dualistic framework dramatically reduces their necessity in secondary literature.

The implications of Barth's rejection of dualism (and monism) illumine his personalist providence as well as his understanding of *das Nichtige*. If God's sovereignty neither competes with creaturely freedom (as in dualism) nor consumes the creature (as in monism), then many of the most difficult aspects of providence are seen in a different light.⁵ Assuming Barth's theology successfully removes both, it stands on profoundly different grounds than those of his predecessors.

I structure this chapter's conversation between Barth and Scottish moral philosopher John Macmurray in three main parts. Part one assesses the similarities and differences between both authors' rejection of dualism.⁶ Macmurray attempted to free himself from the shackles of dualism and point the way towards an adequate

⁴ Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), ix. Torrance continues this claim to assert that Barth's work in 'recasting the foundations of theological understanding and bringing it into close alignment with the incarnation of the Word of God' has brought a transformation in 'the rational structure of theology'.

⁵ Barth compares dualistic and monistic views, claiming that their 'common root' brings them to the same conclusion. III.2, 155. By emphasizing the historical *encounter* between the personal God and the personal human as revealed in Jesus Christ, Barth attempts to avoid this faulty starting-point shared by 'older theology', philosophy, and 'Judaism and Islam'. III.3, 30-33. In 'The Constancy and Omnipotence of God', Barth claims, 'If, then, we are to understand God's constancy in respect of His relationship to His creation as such and in general we must resolutely abstain from both monistic and dualistic speculation. But we will really abstain resolutely, that is, radically, only when we see clearly that monism and dualism are not as distinct from one another as at first sight appears...either way they express one and the same thing, one and the same distortion.' II.1, 502.

⁶ As with Barth (and Farrer), Macmurray's profundity and creativity make him difficult to comprehend. As Macmurray himself states in his introduction to *The Clue to History*, the argument 'is both hard to understand and easy to misunderstand.' John Macmurray, *The Clue to History* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1938), ix. Macmurray summarized the challenge of his thought late in his life: '...it *can't* be made 'popular'...It is very serious and very difficult. Unfortunately, I have a capacity of writing so clearly that people are often inclined to think they understand it when they don't.' John Macmurray letter to Reginald Sayers as quoted in Stanley M. Harrison, 'Introduction,' in *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), ix.

understanding of the 'Form of the Personal'.⁷ Like Feuerbach before him, Macmurray participates in a 'Copernican revolution of human thought' by rejecting the egocentrism of the *Cogito* and replacing it with a heterocentrism of relationality.⁸ I argue that this is also true of Barth, though with key differences. I divide part one into three subsections:

1. Replacing the *Cogito* with 'I do'
2. The Field of the Personal
3. The Necessity of God

The discussion demonstrates the impact of Barth's ordering of christological theology in relation to philosophy. Thus I address the three subsections in reverse order to highlight Barth's thoroughly theological use of philosophical tools.

Part two contrasts Macmurray's understanding of Jesus and history with that of Barth. While Barth and Macmurray share an understanding of personal agency, they differ tremendously in its application to God and humans. Barth's revelation-based christocentrism leads him to far different implications and conclusions than does Macmurray's philosophical and anthropological approach. These points of difference clarify Barth's claims regarding providence (particularly, the personal relation between the triune God revealed in Jesus Christ and humanity).

Part three focuses primarily on the implications of the first two parts for Barth's doctrine of providence in relation to election. Because of Barth's non-dualistic view of reality and the singular importance of Jesus' election in relation to history, Barth's understanding of the election of the community and the individual reflect his providence. Objectively elect in Christ, the community and individual witness to this reality in positive or negative correspondence *coram Deo*.

⁷ Macmurray's 'The Form of the Personal' consists of his two series of Gifford lectures in 1952-1954. Macmurray, *Self*; John Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, The Form of the Personal (London: Faber and Faber, 1961).

⁸ Hwa Yol Jung, 'Responsibility as First Ethics: Macmurray and Levinas,' in *JMCP*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 176. Jung helpfully quotes principle 56 of *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future* where Feuerbach explains the communal 'essence of man': 'The single man for himself possesses the essence of man neither in himself as a moral being nor in himself as a thinking being. The essence of man is contained only in the community and unity of man with man; it is a unity, however, which rests only on the reality of the distinction between I and thou.' See also Macmurray, *Self*, 85-86.

Macmurray's Rejection of Dualism

Macmurray's rejection of dualism impacts his entire philosophy. According to Andrew Collier, 'For Macmurray, virtually all errors are instances of dualisms.'⁹ Here, I trace Macmurray's foundational claim to its final conclusion in his profession of theism. In doing so, I outline three claims which are all present, albeit in different ways, in Barth's doctrine of providence. These discussions pave the way for discussing the understanding of God's twofold will in both thinkers in the latter half of the chapter.

i) Replacing the Cogito with 'I do'

The whole of Macmurray's *The Form of the Personal* flows from his basic claim that the Cartesian standpoint of 'I think' (*Cogito*) must be replaced by 'I do'. This seemingly minor alteration proves capable of establishing a non-dualistic philosophical form which eliminates many of the traditional antinomies in western thought.¹⁰ The key error of the *Cogito* lies in that it assumes the reality of an autonomous 'I' (or ego) separated from a physical body and isolated from other persons. For Macmurray, however, the authentic self is constituted in dynamic relations with others. Knowledge of other persons is essential and primary because we become conscious of ourselves only through relations with other persons. The autonomous, unrelated self is an abstraction, a fiction and unreal.

Macmurray argues that this move to 'I do' encompasses both thought and action, while the *Cogito* makes action formally incoherent and mysterious. Macmurray explains,

If we make the 'I think' the primary postulate of philosophy, then not merely do we institute a dualism between theoretical and practical experience, but we make action logically inconceivable—a mystery, as Kant so rightly concludes, in which we necessarily believe, but which we can never comprehend.¹¹

⁹ Andrew Collier, 'Macmurray and Marx: The Philosophy of Practice and the Overcoming of Dualism,' in *JMCP*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 73. Appendix A, while not complete, gives an indication of how broad Macmurray understands the implications of his thinking to be.

¹⁰ While Macmurray's thought can be properly summarized in statements such as this, that must not be misinterpreted as simplistic. Harrison rightly notes the difficulty of grasping 'the revolutionary character of what Macmurray is doing.' Harrison, 'Introduction,' xvii. The same might also be said of Barth's theology. McIntosh offers a helpful summary of Macmurray's solution to dualism. Esther McIntosh, 'Introduction,' in *John Macmurray: Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. Esther McIntosh (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2004), 5-7.

¹¹ Macmurray, *Self*, 73.

In contrast, the 'I do' eliminates the dualism by positing a unity of form whereby the positive contains and is constituted by its own negative.

Macmurray claims that exclusive concepts (such as thought) are negative. They form an ideal limit that can never be actualized. He writes,

'Thought'...is an *exclusive* concept, and therefore negative. As an ideal limit—as 'pure' thought—it denotes an activity of the Self which is purely formal and completely without content. Now the purely formal is equivalent to nothing; for there cannot be a form which is not the form of something, and a purely formal activity is therefore an activity which is no activity.¹²

In contrast, action is the positive which is inclusive. As agents, humans act and therefore think. A thoughtless 'act' is no act at all but merely an occurrence or event.¹³ Pure thought and pure action constitute the negative and positive poles of personal experience. Macmurray explains, that action 'is a full concrete activity of the self in which all our capacities are employed; while thought is constituted by the exclusion of some of our powers and a withdrawal into an activity which is less concrete and less complete.'¹⁴ This formal structure is fundamental for Macmurray and helpful in understanding Barth. Macmurray does not pit action against thought or mind against body.

Like Barth, Macmurray sees false dualisms infiltrating and contaminating many areas of human experience through flawed presuppositions. Macmurray continually takes the dualities he sees in western thought and reorders them as positive and negative aspects of a single unity. This ordering leads Macmurray to a different perspective on many of the most pressing issues of his time, such as freedom and reality. Macmurray's rejection of dualism leads to a particular view of the 'real' and the 'unreal' that is crucial for his explanation of humans' personal freedom, 'Freedom depends upon Reality.'¹⁵ Just as reality results in freedom, so unreality leads to constraint. He writes,

The sense of constraint in human life is always the result of unreality in human life. We are free only when we are real. And it is because there is such a chaos of unreality in modern life that it lacks the sense of freedom and loses significance.¹⁶

¹² Ibid., 88; italics Macmurray's.

¹³ Macmurray, *Persons*, 221.

¹⁴ Macmurray, *Self*, 86.

¹⁵ John Macmurray, *Freedom in the Modern World* (London: Faber, 1932), 115.

¹⁶ Ibid. Macmurray's reference to 'a chaos of unreality' resembles Barth's discussion of sin and evil in §50. In both cases, the human misperception of reality leads to actions which cannot achieve their intention. Thus evil and sin result not from the personal intentions of Satan or demons, but precisely from the *impersonal* and unreal.

Macmurray emphasizes the ‘sense’ or perception of constraint as the crucial ingredient leading to ‘unreality in human life.’ Macmurray’s shift from Descartes’ *Cogito* to ‘I do’ removes the dualism and results in a unity. Macmurray explains,

By means of this form we were able to overcome the dualism of subjective and objective, of mind and matter, and to give an account of action. Now if this form is given a metaphysical use, it will enable us to think the determinate as necessarily including its negative, the indeterminate; or, more generally, to think Reality as constituted by the inclusion of the unreal in its own being. Such a concept would then enable us to think the unity of the world without falling into dualism and antinomy.¹⁷

This logic is neither paradoxical nor fantastical. It reflects an ordering and diversity that portrays the experience of human actions and freedom *vis-à-vis* other agents as well as an outside world. In this sense, Macmurray believes that he has succeeded where Kant (and Descartes before him) failed.¹⁸

ii) The Field of the Personal

In his transition from *The Self as Agent* to *Persons in Relation*, Macmurray makes a core philosophical claim. If we are to understand the individual human as a ‘person’, that individual must be seen in ‘the field of the personal’ which is constituted by a *multiplicity* of persons.¹⁹ While a human can be isolated, she is actualized as a person only in relation to an Other. ‘Any agent is necessarily in relation to the Other.’ Macmurray continues, ‘Apart from this essential relation he does not exist. But, further, the Other in this constitutive relation must itself be personal.’²⁰ The true ‘I’ can only exist in dynamic relation with ‘You’. Unlike the *Cogito*, this practical reality of ‘I-You’ destroys the ‘dualism of a rational and an empirical self.’²¹ While the *Cogito* creates a subject-object dualism, the personal agent is necessarily both subject and object: ‘As subject he is ‘I’, as object he is ‘You’, since the ‘You’ is always ‘the Other’.²² Macmurray returns to this claim later, when he addresses the implications of the personal for theology.²³

¹⁷ Macmurray, *Self*, 218.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Macmurray, *Persons*, 24.

²⁰ Ibid. This logic stands behind his claim, ‘We are not particularly personal in our baths.’ John Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber, 1935) as quoted in Iain Torrance, ‘Privacy and the Form of the Personal,’ in *JMCP*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 232. Barth’s trinitarian theology accounts for this logic even in relation to the person of God.

²¹ Macmurray, *Persons*, 27.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 164.

Macmurray next claims that true personal life is communal, characterized by friendship and heterocentrism. When personal interaction is positively motivated by love, it is most free for both persons involved. The individual finds freedom and is most real *through* centering not on himself but on the Other. ‘A community is for the sake of friendship and presupposes love.’ Macmurray explains, ‘But it is only in friendship that persons are free in relation; if the relation is based on fear we are constrained in it and not free.’²⁴

Starting with a pair of persons in relation (and quickly expanding outward to include ‘every person’), Macmurray claims that the real human ‘acts, and therefore thinks and feels for the other, and not for himself.’²⁵ Under the rubric of ‘heterocentrism’, Macmurray claims that the true person realizes herself ‘in and through the other.’²⁶ Each ‘I’ is necessarily in relation with a plurality of other persons or ‘You’s’. In a pair, the ‘I’ perceives the ‘You’ in either a positive or negative way (based in love or fear respectively). Either way, the ‘You’ makes the agency of the ‘I’ possible through support or resistance.²⁷

This communal life lies at the heart of Macmurray’s non-dualistic freedom. True self-realization cannot come through egocentric isolation, but only in positive relation with the Other: ‘The self-realization of any individual person is only fully achieved if he is positively motivated towards every other person with whom he is in relation.’²⁸ Practically speaking, the individual intentionally and freely removes himself from the center and places the other in his place. Macmurray writes,

Each, then, is heterocentric; the centre of interest and attention is in the other, not in himself. For each, therefore, it is the other who is important, not himself. The other is the centre of value. For himself he has no value in himself, but only for the other; consequently he cares for himself only for the sake of the other. But this is mutual; the other cares for him disinterestedly in return.²⁹

Logically, each individual in the pair constitutes ‘the centre of value,’ but only through the free action of the other, rather than seizing this place for themselves (which Macmurray has shown to be an impossibility and unreal). Moreover, the distinction between the two agents is maintained, because the positive motive contains and subordinates its negative. In this way, love for the other opens the way

²⁴ Ibid., 151. Barth describes free humans under God’s providence as ‘friends of God’ in his crescendo to §49. III.3, 285-288.

²⁵ Macmurray, *Persons*, 158.

²⁶ Ibid., 158.

²⁷ Ibid., 111.

²⁸ Ibid., 159.

²⁹ Ibid., 158.

for free action without the inhibitions of fear. This description obviously depends on trust in the other that results only when love for the other overcomes fear for self.³⁰ In trust, the individual joyfully claims, ‘I need you to be myself.’³¹ In a community based on friendship, all individuals are ‘free in relation.’³² Never fearing for the self or for the friendship of the pair, both agents look outward to act on behalf of others. Macmurray follows his logic and formulates ‘the inherent ideal of the personal’:

It is the universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself. This ideal of the personal is also the condition of freedom—that is, of a full realization of his capacity to act—for every person. Short of this there is unintegrated, and therefore suppressed, negative motivation; there is unresolved fear; and fear inhibits action and destroys freedom.³³

The strong and coherent philosophical form of Macmurray’s heterocentrism leads to ‘theological’ claims.³⁴

iii) The Necessity of God

Concluding *The Form of the Personal*, Macmurray claims that his discussion of the ‘universal community of persons’ leads to ‘an inherent logical necessity’ for God.³⁵ This Divine Other must not create a duality, but acts to unify ‘the actions of every member of the community.’³⁶ God represents ‘the original personal author of the community as the author of the world; and the life of community as a fellowship of the world—of man with Nature as well as of man with man.’³⁷ In this way, Macmurray understands the personal to encompass the unity of persons as well as including and subordinating ‘the non-personal for the sake of the realization of the personal.’³⁸ Macmurray’s defense of theism arises from his observations of human agency; given human personal interaction, God is a ‘logical necessity’. While

³⁰ Macmurray makes this dynamic clear in his discussion of the child in conflict with his mother in ‘Rhythm of Withdrawal and Return’: ‘What he cannot do, so long as his fear is not overcome and dissipated, is to give himself freely...in the fellowship of mutual affection without constraint.’ *Ibid.*, 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

³² *Ibid.*, 151.

³³ *Ibid.*, 159. Macmurray always understood the ‘personal’ to be intimately linked with the political in proper order. Cf. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, ‘Public and Private: The Search for a Political Philosophy That Does Justice to Both without Excluding Love,’ in *JMCP*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 189-208; McIntosh, ‘Introduction,’ 8-9.

³⁴ In spite of this formal cogency, I believe that Macmurray’s vague understandings of both God and revelation do not correlate with the breadth of his vision. Kirkpatrick draws heavily on Macmurray’s writings in his stronger presentation of personalist theism. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *Together Bound: God, History, and the Religious Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

³⁵ Macmurray, *Persons*, 164.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Macmurray never shies away from asserting the philosophical coherence of theism in the face of prevailing skepticism, he nevertheless gives little material content to that theism.³⁹

This summary of Macmurray's rejection of dualism indicates his paradigm shift by using the standpoint of 'I do' rather than Descartes' *Cogito*. Macmurray's philosophy rationally accounts for both action and thought in proper order, thus creating a more comprehensive view of reality. His asymmetry between the positive and negative aspects encompasses and prioritizes elements of existence (real/unreal, act/event, freedom/constraint, love/fear, etc.) in ways that dualistic frameworks cannot. Moreover, Macmurray depicts a personal world which necessarily involves other agents constituting a community. Based on his observations of the personal world, Macmurray then concludes with the theological claim regarding the 'logical necessity' for a personal God.⁴⁰

Turning now to Barth, a similar *form* is altered by Barth's material content and theological methodology. The individual's freedom can never be in isolation, abstracted from God (as the primary Other with whom she is in covenant relation) and other human agents.⁴¹ The summary above assists in understanding the philosophical significance of various theological claims Barth emphasizes regarding providence.

Barth Against Dualism

This section will describe the presence of all three points outlined above in Barth's theology. These common elements highlight the utility of Macmurray's personalist philosophical tools in understanding Barth's doctrine of providence. Nevertheless, Barth's revelation-based methodology and theological ordering contrast starkly with Macmurray. Thus formal similarities are transformed by

³⁹ Fergusson comments, 'To provide greater content to his account of what it means to be a person...Macmurray needs a stronger conception of divine revelation, and an eschatology which provides the religious community with the hope that the realities of individual, social and natural evil which threatened to disrupt and destroy personal life can be overcome.' David Fergusson, 'Towards a Theology of the Personal,' in *The Presumption of Presence: Christ, church and culture in the academy*, ed. Peter McEnhill and George B. Hall (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1996), 114.

⁴⁰ I am aware of the limitations of this outline which cannot do justice to Macmurray's profound and subtle thought. That said, I have attempted to highlight the key aspects of Macmurray's form of the personal in such a way as to bring his thought into conversation with Barth.

⁴¹ Barth's emphasis on 'covenant' in his theology is absent in Macmurray. Regarding its significance for Barth, Mangina writes, 'Reconciliation is the fulfilment of the divine covenant. It is virtually impossible to overstate the importance of this idea in Barth's thinking on reconciliation.' Mangina, *Witness*, 116. One might make the same statement in regard to Barth's doctrine of providence.

material distinctions. In the following discussion, I reverse the order of the three points above in an effort to contrast the two thinkers more clearly and to follow the order of Barth's own logic more closely.

i) The Necessity of God

Barth begins where Macmurray concludes, with the existence of God. Chapter III has already discussed §28's claims concerning the personhood of the *triune* God. I return to §28 briefly to describe Barth's 'actualistic ontology' in which Macmurray's logic can apply to God's own 'being in act'.⁴² The essential point is the replacement of Aristotle's ontology with an ontology of interaction. God's being is alive in mutual relations of love and freedom in the inner-trinitarian modes of being. Barth describes his understanding of God's being in act as descriptive of God in relation to humanity as well as in relation to Godself,

We are in fact interpreting the being of God when we describe it as God's reality, as "God's being in act," namely, in the act of His revelation, in which the being of God declares His reality: not only His reality for us—certainly that—but at the same time His own, inner, proper reality, behind which and above which there is no other.⁴³

In contrasting his actualistic understanding with 'the idea of "essence"', Barth attempts to hold together being and act.⁴⁴ Such an understanding of God's being has enormous import for our understanding of God's inner-trinitarian life as well as divine agency in creation. Note that the passage above explicitly ties Barth's conception of revelation to his actualistic ontology in God's relations with humanity.

God's being in act must be more specifically defined than 'a sum or content of event, act, or life generally'.⁴⁵ In revelation, humanity looks to God's being in act in the election of Jesus Christ alone. Thus Barth claims that the term 'pure act' cannot be appropriate to God without further qualification:

...the action of God that takes place in revelation is a particular action different from any other happening, even in contradiction to it. *Actus purus* is not sufficient as a

⁴² This term is admittedly problematic for at least two reasons: Barth never used it explicitly, and it may imply more than intended. Neder helpfully warns, 'Its great weakness is its potential to convey the mistaken impression that Barth has worked out a formal philosophical ontology independently of the material content of dogmatics.' Neder, 'Differentiated', 91-2 n.54. As with other philosophical tools discussed here, Barth's use is *ad hoc* and not comprehensive. With Jüngel (against Weber), I am arguing that 'ontological statements in theology do not imply a theological ontology'. Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 77.

⁴³ II.1, 262.

⁴⁴ Barth seems to use 'essence' as short-hand for Aristotelian metaphysics and in contrast with his actualism. Barth, like Farrer, saw the presence of Aristotelian presuppositions causing all sorts of problems in theology.

⁴⁵ II.1, 264.

description of God. To it there must be added at least “*et singularis*.” The fact that in God the source, reconciliation and goal of all other happenings are together real and discernible, is another matter, which as such is only true in the separation of this action from every other happening.⁴⁶

Barth’s description of God’s being in action *et singularis* is crucial for understanding providence generally and—as will be seen—the singular intention of God in history. God is differentiated from all creaturely actuality, but ‘He is still connected to it—and the idea is both immanent in the phenomenon and transcendent to it...His work in the creation and preservation of the world can also up to a point—but only up to a point—be described this way’.⁴⁷ God’s agency, according to Barth, cannot be understood apart from an understanding of God’s being in action.

Barth concludes ‘The Being of God in Act’ by explicitly tying God’s being in act with personalism. God is the one who is truly ‘self-motivated’ for ‘No other being exists absolutely in its act. No other being is absolutely its own, conscious, willed and executed decision’.⁴⁸ Barth understands God as truly personal:

Being in its own, conscious, willed and executed decision, and *therefore personal being*, is the being of God in the nature of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Originally and properly there is no other beside or outside Him. Everything beside and outside Him is only secondary.⁴⁹

Barth confirms Macmurray’s claims regarding community and the ‘field of the personal’, but does so from the outset in the divine being. While Macmurray would reject this claim based in revelation, Barth’s reasoning deepens Macmurray’s own claims and further underscores the strength of his rejection of dualism.

As Macmurray sees implications of human communal relations pointing to God (*ii* to *iii* above), so Barth moves in the opposite direction from his understanding of God to human persons. Humanity is called to live in ‘correspondence’ to God whose ‘being is in act’.⁵⁰ George Hunsinger sees Barth’s break from patterns of thought which rely on ‘monadic or self-contained substances’ to be basic in understanding Barth’s view of both God and humanity. He claims, ‘...Barth’s whole theology might well be described as a theology of active relations. God and humanity are both defined in fundamentally actualistic terms’.⁵¹ This means—at least—that the individual *lives* out her being and becomes a ‘person’ in this living. Barth writes,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 271.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 271; italics mine.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 257-272.

⁵¹ Hunsinger, *How*, 30.

Man, however, is existing man. He is not mere thinking man. As he thinks, he lives and acts and suffers. He is absorbed in the actuality of his existence...As we will, we are; and what we do, we are. It is not as if man first exists and then acts. He exists in that he acts. The question whether and how far he acts rightly is the question whether and how far he exists rightly.⁵²

This passage emphasizes the enormous import Barth places on ethics in theology. Actualistic ontology implies an importance to each moment of life *coram Deo*, in contrast with the seemingly all-important decision of Yes or No to God discussed in conversation with Brümmer. Barth develops the importance of these claims in his insistence on the limits of creaturely time and eschatological personhood. Writing later in II.1, Barth states similarly, 'For it is as he acts that man exists as a person'.⁵³ In both cases, being cannot be separated from act. Like Macmurray, Barth disagrees with Descartes, who could posit a creature apart from act. Human existence cannot come before act, rather, the human 'exists in that he acts'.⁵⁴

This distinction is crucial, because it describes who the person is whom God saves. Election in Christ guarantees that all are saved, without any contribution from human persons.⁵⁵ Barth's personal, actualistic ontology, however, describes the historical process of those persons' identities. Put differently, God graciously saves all people in Christ, yet the *personhood* of those individuals is as they act *coram Deo* in history. Christ saves actual people, determined in relation to God during their lifetimes.

The being of humanity derives from and corresponds with this trinitarian 'being of God' *in act*. Returning to Brümmer's diagrams, Barth's covenantal framework becomes clearer. God and creatures must not be understood in dualistic terms but rather in relation. Drawing on the biblical concept of covenant, Barth portrays God and humans 'together bound' in an asymmetrical relation. Therefore,

⁵² II.1, 792-793. Macmurray places a similar importance on ethics, but without Barth's engagement with revelation. Cf. II.2, 509-781; III.4.

⁵³ II.2, 516.

⁵⁴ Jüngel correctly defines Barth's position in proximity but distinction from Sartre's existentialism. See Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth, A Theological Legacy*, trans. Paul E. Garrett (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 121ff. The difference 'is that here the human is elected to freedom of action, and not condemned.' Busch, *Great*, 165. This cannot be known without a revealed determinate divine Person. Barth explains the distinction in his theological anthropology: 'To give a true description of the...potentiality of man, it would have to understand the possibility from the reality, referring to a concrete apprehension and not merely to rationality, to a concrete response and not merely to responsibility, to a concrete person and not merely to personality, to the history in which man lives and not merely to his historicity, to his decision itself and not merely to a capacity for decision.' II.2, 128.

⁵⁵ Barth's election implies *apokatastasis*. Cf. McCormack, 'Grace,' 93. A central claim of this thesis is that providence speaks of the covenantal determination of the person who is saved; not whether or not she is saved.

humans consciously live in this reality or foolishly disregard it (and live in unreality, with God determining the human person in this process). McCormack explains the ontological implications of covenant,

Philosophically expressed, Barth's ontology is thus 'actualistic' (i.e., being is actualized in the decision for activity in time). It would be even more accurate, however to express Barth's ontology *theologically* as a 'covenant ontology' since it is not in 'relationality' in general that God's being is constituted but in the most concrete, particular relation...Knowing God in this way, we can trust that the love and mercy toward the whole human race demonstrated in Jesus' subjection of himself to death on a cross is 'essential' to God and that election is therefore universal in scope.⁵⁶

McCormack's statement makes two elements of Barth's actualistic ontology clear. First, God's being is inseparable from election. As he states in III.3, the eternal decree is essential to God: 'And it is a matter of the eternal decree without which God would not be God...He is either the gracious God of this eternal choice, or He is not this God, the true God, at all'.⁵⁷ God's being is *determined* in God's eternal election. Second, this active choice of God within the Godhead constitutes the grounds on which humanity can contemplate this God's actions in the world with trust in God's love and mercy. As they do so, they shape who they are, who it is that God saves for God's eternal life.

ii) *The Field of the Personal*

The discussion of Macmurray's standpoint of 'I do' leads to an understanding of the human person not as the isolated 'I', but as the 'I' in relation to 'You'. This in turn, leads Macmurray to speculate about the divine Other who constitutes the foundation of personal existence. Barth shares Macmurray's criticism of dualism, but would reject the path Macmurray takes via natural theology. In his theological anthropology in III.2, Barth denies both body-soul and Cartesian dualisms.⁵⁸ Like

⁵⁶ Ibid., 99. See David Willis, *Notes on the Holiness of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 102-103.

⁵⁷ III.3, 5.

⁵⁸ Barth's rejection of Reformed Orthodoxy's body-soul dualism is recurrent throughout III.2: 'Through the Spirit of God, man is the subject, form and life of a substantial organism, the soul of his body—wholly and simultaneously both, in ineffaceable difference, inseparable unity, and indestructible order.' III.2, 325. Rohls correctly notes the dualism's connection to eschatology: 'Along with this distinction [between body and soul] the confessions adopt the psycho-physical dualism bound up with the idea of immortality.' Rohls, *Reformed*, 66. Barth's rejection of the dualism also corresponds with his emphasis on human mortality and limitation. See III.3, 61ff. Regarding the isolated 'I', Barth laments the cloister-cell's tendency for 'I-speculation in the absence of the Thou'. III.2, 290.

Macmurray, Barth claims that the individual ‘I’ cannot be abstracted from ‘I-You’ existence in community. Barth writes,

“I am in encounter.” (*Ich bin in der Begegnung*) Nor am I in encounter before or after, incidentally, secondarily, or subsequently, while primarily and properly I am alone in an inner world...No, at the very root of my being and from the very first I am in encounter with the being of the Thou, under his claim and with my own being constituting a claim upon him. And the humanity of human being is this total determination (*totale Bestimmtheit*) as being in encounter with the being of the Thou, as being with the fellow-man, as fellow-humanity (*Mitmenschlichkeit*).⁵⁹

Like Macmurray, Barth dismisses an inner and outer world dualism—the fictional ‘I’ apart from the ‘Thou’—and instead emphasizes the importance of ‘encounter’ whereby humanity is fully determined.⁶⁰ This non-deterministic use of ‘determine’ is essential for understanding both Barth’s doctrine of providence and election.⁶¹

Such a claim concerning humanity, however, derives from the primary self-determination of God before creation: ‘In Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines (*bestimmt*) Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself.’⁶² Far from seeing the concept of God as the universal Other arising from an evolutionary process of ‘ancestor worship’ (as in Macmurray), Barth understands God’s self-determination to be heterocentrically for sinful humanity before creation.⁶³ This is the ground Barth claims for personal freedom and agency. Thus both Barth and Macmurray reject dualism in favor of persons in relation, but Barth’s route to this conclusion comes through revelation of God’s trinitarian being. The personal God which Barth sees as the foundation and source of all other persons is the triune God *revealed* in Jesus Christ. Without this revelation, nothing more than a conjecture can

⁵⁹ III.2, 247 (295-296).

⁶⁰ Busch offers a helpful summary of ‘Co-humanity.’ Busch, *Great*, 194-198.

⁶¹ The frequency of the word ‘determine’ in *CD* can easily mislead readers into believing Barth is a ‘determinist’. Johnson rightly highlights the importance Barth’s vocabulary: ‘The use of the word “determination” (*Bestimmung*) rather than “choice” regarding God’s election is significant. The verb *bestimmen* can mean to fix, designate, settle, appoint, establish. The noun *Bestimmung* means both determination and destiny. In the latter sense it includes one’s sense of purpose or vocation. It can include both a determination of something at the beginning or the resulting effect that becomes visible at the end. Election as “determination” embraces both.’ Johnson, *Mystery*, 59. Love notes that while ‘determines’ is legitimate, the better alternative seems to be ‘defines’. Love, ‘Role’, 186-188. Both Johnson and Love point to the essential importance of reading Barth’s continual use of ‘determination’ with a fully range of meaning and texture than might be customary in other works. Thus *Bestimmung* is best understood in a personalist framework relating to election.

⁶² II.2, 94 (101). The negative aspect of this primordial determination will be seen more fully in §50.

⁶³ Macmurray, *Persons*, 164.

be made about the actual person of God, regardless of how staunchly one might defend God's personality in abstraction.⁶⁴

Barth begins §45 with the subtitle 'Man in his Determination as the Covenant-Partner of God'.⁶⁵ Here, Barth sees the essence of humanity through the lens of Christology. The crucial point is that in Jesus Christ, humanity cannot be considered in neutrality apart from God. From before creation, the human 'is the covenant-partner of God. He is determined (*bestimmt*) by God for life with God. This is the distinctive feature of his being in the cosmos.'⁶⁶ Barth's point here shares something of Macmurray's form. Macmurray *concludes* that the 'I-You' relation of humanity logically requires a personal God as the universal Other. In both thinkers, God acts as the basis of personal existence. While Macmurray denies the reality of the 'I' apart from the 'I-You' relation of humans, Barth goes further to deny the 'I' *and the 'I-You'* apart from the predestined '*God-human*' covenantal relation actualized and revealed in Jesus Christ.

From this, Barth rejects conceptions of God without humanity or humanity without God. Both are unreal abstractions. While distinct from one another, 'They cannot fall apart and confront each other in neutrality, exclusion or even hostility.'⁶⁷ Barth does not deny that humanity 'can break the covenant', but rather that in doing so, the human is never other than the covenant-partner God determined her to be.⁶⁸ In a brief fine print section, Barth explicates this 'antithesis' based on his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:47 and the 'two men' described there, the earthly and the Lord in heaven. This antithesis is the relative confusion of human existence. Barth, however, quickly returns to his fundamental point,

The good creation of God which now concerns us knows nothing of a radical or absolute dualism (*Dualismus*) in this respect...We do despite [*sic*] to Him if in relation to the human creatureliness of His covenant-partner we begin with the actual antithesis, making the contradiction in which he exists a basic principle, and thus overlooking or contesting the fact that he exists originally and properly in an

⁶⁴ See Parsons's analysis of Lesslie Newbigin's critique. Susan Parsons, 'The Relevance of Macmurray for a Feminist Theology of Action,' in *JMCP*, ed. David Fergusson and Nigel Dower (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 141-158. See also Fergusson, 'Towards,' 114.

⁶⁵ III.2, 203.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 203 (243). Real human life, for Barth, consists of personal actualisation in covenantal relationship through Jesus Christ. Seen in Christ, we have an 'unchanged and unchangeable character.' III.2, 40. Busch explains, 'The true and real human is neither the human nor the sinner *in and of himself*, but rather the human as God in Jesus Christ sees him, creates her, ensures that he cannot be lost. That is the person to whom God turns, the human in covenant with him.' Busch, *Great*, 194. This relational framework of covenant means that human life (and its relationships) '...are influenced by sin but not structurally modified by it.' III.2, 40.

⁶⁷ III.2, 205.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

inner connexion and correspondence between his divine determination (*göttlichen Bestimmung*) and his creaturely form, between his being as the covenant-partner of God and his being as man.⁶⁹

Barth's polemic against a 'neutral' consideration of humans or God in abstraction from their unity in covenant stems from this claim.

Reality and freedom of action come not from positing the fictional Cartesian 'I', but rather from acting and willing in correspondence with God's intention. Just as Barth's theology rejects a *Deus absconditus*, it also rejects a *homo absconditus*. There is no hidden, ideal Peter, Judas or anyone else to save. The only people existing are the specific humans who are as they act *coram Deo* in history. Eschatologies presuming an immortal soul—disembodied and real apart from action—can seem to level out personal distinctions in eternity. Barth's actualistic ontology preserves human personhood for participation in God's eternal life. In this way, history (in its entirety) takes on eternal significance.

iii) *Replacing the Cogito with 'I do'*

Barth ends III.1 with an extended fine-print section interacting with Leibniz.⁷⁰ Here, Barth implicitly addresses the problem of the *Cogito*. In the dualistic framework, the thinking 'I' exists outside the physical world, without direct contact with it. Barth describes 18th century 'optimists' (and those who share their metaphysical framework), as 'incorrigible spectators' who 'successfully evade and resist (to their own detriment) the necessity for decision and action.'⁷¹ This outlook, however, fails to account for personal involvement and interaction. Such spectators cannot actualize their freedom and potential by positing themselves as autonomous 'I's'. Barth describes the futility and fiction of this supposed point of view,

...like oriental despots in relation to their subjects, they have no personal interest in things. Things do not really touch them, either for evil or good. And so they cannot really make contact with things or be sure of good or evil. Everything remains in the sphere of views and opinions and persuasions. Everything is a *panopticum*. Even God and they themselves are mere figures in this *panopticum*.⁷²

⁶⁹ Ibid., 205 (245).

⁷⁰ Barth often speaks of Leibniz in regard to theodicy that could not hold in the reality of the Lisbon earthquake. See II.1, 114; III.3, 33, 298.

⁷¹ III.1, 411. Hunsinger and Balthasar rightly note Barth's opposition to metaphysics. Hunsinger describes Barth's theology as 'closer to narratology than to metaphysics' and suggests that the covenant fulfilled in Christ disrupts 'all efforts at metaphysical closure.' George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 9. See von Balthasar, *Theology*, 74.

⁷² III.1, 411.

The fault lines under such thinking became evident with the 1755 Lisbon earthquake—an event which Barth repeatedly appeals to in differentiating the pastoral/practical strength of his providence from those threatened by such catastrophic disasters.⁷³ Barth accentuates the fiction of the *Cogito* by describing the actual involvement of these ‘spectators’ in the earthquake,

It was fatal for these eternal observers and spectators that they should suddenly feel shaking beneath them the earth on which they thought they could calmly make their observations...Real certainty depends on whether the ground on which you see and think is solid or unstable.⁷⁴

Barth’s point connects with his opposition to natural theology.⁷⁵ The sole foundation on which humans can speak truthfully about creation is the ‘Archimedean point’ of Jesus Christ, truly God and truly human. In the incarnation, God reveals the reality of creation’s goodness and the seriousness of the threat of nothingness. Creaturely limitations make this reality imperceptible outside of Jesus Christ.⁷⁶

Barth concludes with a nod to Leibniz’s unutilized christological insight. While independent ‘of what precedes and follows’ it, Leibniz acknowledges the *maxima ratio* of ‘the divinity and humanity of Christ’ reflecting the ‘perfection of the universe and therefore the perfection of God Himself.’⁷⁷ The tragic fact that Leibniz held this insight and yet failed to ‘exploit this knowledge’ or make practical use of it, accentuates his continuity with the weakness ‘inherent already in the theological orthodoxy of the 16th and 17th centuries.’⁷⁸ What was this crucial failure that ‘was gravely at fault’ in so many aspects of the great Reformers’ theology, including such crucial points as ‘its doctrine of God and predestination, its natural theology, its doctrine of the state, its whole doctrine of creation and providence and its explanation of the Mosaic *valde bonum*’?⁷⁹ Barth claims with sweeping condemnation that Reformation theologians and those after them ‘hardly knew what to make of [Christ] at all, but [were] far more at home with Aristotle and Descartes.’⁸⁰

⁷³ Cf. II.1, 114; III.3, 33, 298.

⁷⁴ III.1, 412.

⁷⁵ McCormack notes Barth’s acceptance of Kant’s ‘attack on metaphysics’ and clarifies, ‘So to speak of Barth as “anti-metaphysical” refers to his attitude towards a particular way of knowing (the path taken); it does not entail the bracketing-off of particular regions of discourse from discussion in an a priori fashion.’ McCormack, *Critically*, 246.

⁷⁶ See III.3, 33.

⁷⁷ III.1, 413.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 413-414.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 414.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

Macmurray's analysis of Cartesian dualism provides a critical lens through which we can see Barth's rejection of Cartesianism and Reformed orthodoxy's reliance on such dualisms. Thus Macmurray's philosophy (or something similar) is necessary to comprehend Barth's reformulation of providence in Reformed orthodoxy.

Barth juxtaposes his christocentric theology with philosophical dualism. His framework has no room for 'the dual system of book-keeping (*doppelte Buchführung*) adopted (in Roman Catholic fashion) by the Lutheran and Reformed fathers and even to some extent by the Reformers themselves.'⁸¹ In Barth's view, dualisms tear apart order and unity, and ultimately 'introduce this tension even into the Holy Trinity.'⁸² Revelation in Christ precludes any such 'dual system'. In Christ, the reality and distinction of various things can and must be held without tearing apart the unity and order in which they exist. '[I]f we tear asunder nature and grace, creation and covenant, the revelation of creation and the revelation of salvation...we have no right to throw stones at Leibniz and the movement associated with him.'⁸³

The discussion above shows continuities and discontinuities between Barth and Macmurray. Both pursue more personal understandings of reality, rejecting the unreal presuppositions in dualism. Nevertheless, Barth's trinitarian and revelation-based theology remains quite different than Macmurray's. These 'tools' in relation to dualism prove helpful later in this chapter as well as in reading III.3. I now turn to another aspect of Macmurray's thought which highlights a significant aspect of Barth's doctrine of providence, that of Jesus and history.

Macmurray's Account of Jesus and History

The Clue to History includes the most extensive and explicit discussions of Jesus in Macmurray's corpus.⁸⁴ While not meant as Christology *per se*, the 1938 work provides Macmurray's understanding of Jesus' significance to the world. The book understands history as a 'process' towards a universal goal which he describes

⁸¹ Ibid., 414 (476).

⁸² Ibid., 414.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ I have found little secondary literature dealing with *The Clue to History*. Kirkpatrick makes constructive use of the book in argument for theistic ethics in contemporary political thought. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *A Moral Ontology for a Theistic Ethic: Gathering the Nations in Love and Justice* (Alderstot: Ashgate, 2003), 173-174. Collier uses *The Clue to History* in assessing Macmurray's proximity to Marx. Collier, 'Macmurray,' 71-75.

as ‘the intention of God.’⁸⁵ Although Macmurray refrains from using the term ‘providence’, the argument and its implications point to a general form of the doctrine. The book is structured in four parts: The Ambiguity of Christianity, The Hebrew Consciousness, The Work of Jesus, and The Progress of Europe.⁸⁶ This structure demonstrates the importance of the Judeo-Christian tradition in shaping Macmurray’s thought concerning history and allows for explicit comparison with Barth.

Macmurray understands Jesus on the terms set by ‘the Hebrew consciousness’.⁸⁷ Like Barth, Macmurray stresses Jesus’ identity as a Jew, even *the Jew*.⁸⁸ Unlike Barth, Macmurray describes Jesus as simply a Hebrew prophet:

Jesus conceived his task, as the prophets had conceived theirs, as being to recall the nation to their allegiance to God, and so into line with the divine purpose which was incarnate in their history.⁸⁹

Macmurray’s use of ‘incarnate’ in relation to the ‘history’ of Israel rather than to Jesus himself is significant.⁹⁰ Contra traditional christological formulations, Macmurray does not identify Jesus as God, but as a prophetic figure who ‘discovered’ God’s purpose in history. Macmurray’s Jesus lives in harmony with God’s intention and calls others to the same, but he is not the divine agent, acting as a human in history.

Macmurray uses the title ‘discoverer’ at significant points. Living a non-dualistic life in line with God’s intention, Jesus ‘discovered’ the meaning of life and its practical significance.⁹¹ Macmurray explains,

⁸⁵ Macmurray, *Clue*, 37.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

⁸⁷ ‘It was in Jesus that the development of Jewish culture was completed...’ *Ibid.*, 42. Kirkpatrick describes this as a ‘highly tendentious reading of Jesus and Judaism’. Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *John Macmurray: Community beyond Political Philosophy*, Twentieth Century Political Thinkers (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 69.

⁸⁸ See I.2, 510-512; II.2, 289; III.3, 219. Barth writes, ‘It is not in vain that they [the Jews] are the people of the Jew Jesus of Nazareth who died on Golgatha laden with their sin and the sin of the whole world.’ III.3, 219.

⁸⁹ Macmurray, *Clue*, 45.

⁹⁰ Macmurray’s christological orthodoxy is not an issue here but rather its impact on his understanding of God as agent and the fulfilment of salvation or the singular intention of God. In other words, Macmurray’s divergence from orthodoxy illumines the impact of Barth’s Christology in providence through contrast.

⁹¹ While the ‘intention of God’ constitutes the pivotal point of Macmurray’s whole thought, he seldom discusses this intention with precision. Macmurray comes closest to defining this ‘intention’ in stating, ‘It is in this way that love, which is in fact always the basis of whatever human community there is, is raised in Jesus to the level of intention, so that it becomes the motive forces behind the intention to create the kingdom of heaven, the community of mankind.’ Macmurray, *Clue*, 67. Thus it seems that the ‘intention of God’ is the establishment of a universal community based on love.

We might put this in a non-religious form by saying that Jesus discovered the significance of human life. In its religious form the assertion would be that Jesus became conscious of the intention of God in human history.⁹²

Jesus stands at the end of a long line of prophets and discovery-oriented progress in Israel's history. Like a child coming of age, Hebrew consciousness reaches its maturity in Jesus. He is 'the fully mature expression of the Jewish consciousness; as the final unfolding, in clear consciousness, of the implications of the Hebrew conception of the significance of social history.'⁹³

Macmurray clarifies that Jesus' discovery was no mere intellectual proposition. Jesus comes to think history as 'the act of God' and lives in the unity of mind and body through action.⁹⁴ This claim carries implications for his 'theology' and understanding of 'history' over and against the philosophical dualism of non-Hebrew thought. Macmurray writes,

For Jesus, as for every religious thinker, the reality of experience is Action, and therefore the world is conceived as an Act. God is the ultimate agent, and the world is his creation....History is the continued act of God, and it is in his working in history that God is known.⁹⁵

Macmurray claims that a true, religious understanding of history involves intentional action on the part of both divine and human agents. Dualistic thought-forms fail at just this point: 'To think history in terms of dualism is to think it as pure happening, and not as action.'⁹⁶ Jesus' 'discovery' allowed him to intentionally live in harmony with God's intentional action in history. In this sense, Jesus achieved his intentions, co-operated with God, and therefore, acted in freedom. Seeing this 'clue to history' in Jesus' life, Macmurray attempts to describe the only true reality available to humans: acting in harmony with God's intention. All human action against the intention of God in history will only be frustrated and cannot achieve its goal. But what is this intention? Macmurray answers that it is the unity of all humanity in

⁹² Ibid., 55.

⁹³ Ibid., 43.

⁹⁴ McIntosh clarifies Macmurray's views of Jesus as significant and helpful, but not divine. She writes, 'Macmurray's interpretation of Jesus' life and teachings is that fear and enmity hinder positive personal relationships, whereas faith in other persons, forgiveness and love enable friendship. If this is Jesus' insight, it is not as unique as Macmurray maintains, and yet it does give Jesus a significant place alongside other visionaries and social activists, such as Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King.' McIntosh, 'Introduction,' 10.

⁹⁵ Macmurray, *Clue*, 92-93. Here Macmurray's conception of God as 'the ultimate agent' who continues to work in the world has resonances with Barth's understanding of God as 'the one who loves in freedom'. II.1, §28. Similarities, however, immediately give way to dissimilarities based in dramatically different understandings of human potential to know this God. Barth makes this dividing line clear in developing his understanding of 'The Knowledge of God' in §25-27 immediately preceding his discussion in §28.

⁹⁶ Macmurray, *Clue*, 93.

equality and freedom. While this basic goal runs common through much of his writing, Macmurray seems far more confident in describing this intention than he does the personal God who intends it.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, Macmurray's understanding of history as the work of God has implications for providence.

First, the claim means that all world-occurrence down to the smallest detail fall under the scope of 'God's work'. Thus Macmurray's providence remains as comprehensive as Barth's or any in the Reformed tradition. His non-dualistic form consists of a unity of positive and negative aspects. History is fully determined by God, without becoming 'deterministic.'

Second, the affirmation that history is the *continued* act of God accounts for both human co-operation and rebellion against God. Here Macmurray's relentless battle against dualism pays dividends. Since 'an act is the realization of intention', history reveals God as a worker or agent. The crux of the problem arises in that humans attempt to act within God's continued act and 'the intentions of man not only do not coincide with the intention of God, but are often in active opposition to it.'⁹⁸ Macmurray claims to describe 'Jesus' solution of the problem of Free Will and Determinism.'⁹⁹ Since the antithesis arises from a false dualism, Jesus (and Macmurray) avoid the conflict. When the human acts in harmony with the divine intention, she realizes her intention and acts in genuine freedom. Kirkpatrick explains that in Macmurray's explanation, 'Heteronomy and autonomy fade from opposition to each other into harmony with each other.'¹⁰⁰ He acts in his best interest and greatest benefit by wholly devoting himself to God's intention.

Macmurray accounts for rebellion as well. All reality must ultimately realize God's intention because it 'is embodied in their nature. To act in defiance of the will of God is to intend the impossible.'¹⁰¹ As with Barth's use of the 'impossible possibility' for sin, Macmurray's 'impossible' needs clarification. A human *act* against the intention of God is impossible because an act is the 'realization of intention' and the human's intention is 'necessarily self-frustrating.'¹⁰² Working against the intention of God, the human agent achieves 'something that they did not

⁹⁷ Collier has rightly pointed out that Macmurray's account of history 'as the realisation of intention' is in accord with his 'personalist metaphysics.' Collier, 'Macmurray,' 73. This makes Macmurray's relatively weak doctrine of God all the more striking.

⁹⁸ Macmurray, *Clue*, 95.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰⁰ Kirkpatrick, *Moral*, 91.

¹⁰¹ Macmurray, *Clue*, 95.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

intend.’¹⁰³ Contrary to his intention, he will instead achieve ‘its opposite.’¹⁰⁴ Macmurray quickly specifies that such frustration does not result from some sort of divine ‘intervention.’¹⁰⁵ A human act is determined by the ‘nature of reality, by the nature of our own reality, which we are negating, as much as by the nature of the reality on which we act.’¹⁰⁶ The intention to act against reality can only persist for a limited time.

The human opposing God’s intention can only do so by contradicting her own (God-given) nature. The negative aspect of human agency depends on its positive in an asymmetrical relation. Macmurray explains,

Self-negation is only possible through self-assertion. Even the most self-frustrating and unreal of intentions must have its roots in the positive reality of our own nature. In the end the negation must negate itself...There is no antinomy between freedom and necessity, because what is necessitated is freedom.¹⁰⁷

The dichotomy between freedom and necessity poses a false opposition because it fails to understand the unified nature of reality. Like Barth, Macmurray draws on mathematical language, ‘the negation must negate itself’, in order to show the futility of the natural creature attempting to use natural capacities to overcome its nature.¹⁰⁸ Thus rebellion neither threatens the realization of God’s intention nor entails any coercion or interruption on the part of God. Macmurray’s confidence in this claim translates into a robust philosophy of history (for example, his 1938 interpretation of Hitler is shocking in hindsight).¹⁰⁹

Macmurray illustrates this point with the example of suicide. According to Macmurray, Jesus taught ‘that man’s rejection of freedom is necessarily self-frustrating.’¹¹⁰ As a specific creature with a particular unchangeable nature, the

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 96. Macmurray’s language of ‘negate itself’ fails to accentuate a personal *relationship* between the personal God and the personal human. The human’s intention is frustrated, not by a living Lord (as in Barth) but seemingly by the mechanical reality of nature as such.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. For example, in arguing for limited human time, Barth speaks of humanity’s fulfilment in God as ‘the negation of everything which negates it.’ III.2, 561.

¹⁰⁹ Macmurray explicitly claimed that history allows for God’s plan to be carried forward by fascism generally and Hitler specifically. Macmurray writes, ‘What fills me with excitement is to find the leader and symbol of one of the greatest peoples of Europe [Hitler] corroborating the prophecies of Jesus in his passionate opposition to their fulfilment.’ Macmurray, *Clue*, 227. While Macmurray clearly opposes fascism and Hitler, such a statement falters in a post-Holocaust world. Even in its form, where Hitler’s ‘passionate opposition’ to Jesus’ prophecies leads to their fulfilment, Macmurray’s claims seem to break on the rocks of theodicy and the details later revealed concerning Hitler’s mass executions of Jews.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 101.

human can reject freedom, but this entails rejecting and therefore, negating himself, he must use his freedom to reject his freedom. Macmurray references Jesus' own teachings:

What follows? He becomes a divided being, a house divided against itself. He has taken the sword. He has built his house on sand. He tries to be above reality, and sinks below it. He seeks to be master and achieves his own slavery. He exalts himself and is abased. He justifies himself and in the act condemns himself.¹¹¹

In each case, the error lies in a false dualism. This foolish act of negation can never fully succeed because it is only possible through the positive will: 'The negative will can never destroy the positive will, since it is sustained by the positive.'¹¹² This means that the occurrence of suicide represents an impossible possibility. Macmurray acknowledges that a small proportion of people actually do commit suicide (and in a sense this is self-evidently 'possible'), but still claims that suicide exemplifies the 'law of self-frustration' taught by Jesus.¹¹³ In taking one's own life, the natural human 'will to community' is negated. But the triumph of the negative will never achieves its goal of total isolation. Suicide results when the 'unreal' negative will simulates 'the real will' to community.¹¹⁴ Committed to a false dualism, the person endures 'a perpetual civil war within himself...which frustrates all his intentions and destroys him.'¹¹⁵ In this case, 'God's intention' remains true and is even advanced through the suicide.¹¹⁶ This can be understood in the third implication of Macmurray's claim.

Macmurray argues that all human actions must testify to God's intention in world history as either positive or negative 'witness'. According to Macmurray, Jesus 'discovered the structural law of the action of reality in human experience.'¹¹⁷ This 'structural law' integrates 'the real nature of human life' with 'the nature of

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid., 117.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 101.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ This description of suicide shares strong formal similarities to Barth's exegesis of Judas' betrayal in II.2 which will be addressed later in this chapter. These similarities further accentuate the material dissimilarities between the two thinkers in Barth's insistence that Christ himself is God's intention in history.

¹¹⁷ Macmurray, *Clue*, 116-117. Here, Macmurray's 'providence' demonstrates the achievement of God's intention without coercion or divine tyranny, even in human rebellion. This achievement comes through the application of personal agency in relation to God as seen in his use of the 'intention of God'. Nevertheless, his personalist structure is undercut substantially by his use of legal, rather than personal, imagery such as 'the structural law' or the 'law of self-negation'. In contrast with Barth's living God who achieves much the same outcome, Macmurray's laws of reality lack the personalism he propounds so forcefully elsewhere.

reality as a whole.’¹¹⁸ Jesus’ discovery opens the way for humans—both as individuals and as communities—to adopt their own real intention. This is the positive outworking of ‘providence’: ‘...since the intention of God for man is necessarily man’s *real* intention—the intention which expresses his real nature as part of the world—its acceptance unifies human action and integrates human nature.’¹¹⁹ In this positive case, human action corresponds with God’s universal intention. When this occurs, both human freedom and divine determination testify to the goodness and unity of God’s creation.¹²⁰ Here, the antithesis vanishes and both agents act in co-determination or proper double-agency.

Unfortunately, such correspondence seems all too rare. Nevertheless, human rebellion against God’s intention must inevitably ‘witness’ to this reality, though in a negative or abnormal form. Returning to suicide, Macmurray allows for such an ‘abnormal’ action to *witness* to God’s good intention in the world.¹²¹ The human, rebelling against her nature and therefore God’s intention, chooses the path of self-destruction. Suicide constitutes the closest a person can go in achieving her intention against the intention of God, but even here it is God’s intention that shines brighter against the darkness. The rejection of God’s intention ‘sets man in opposition to himself, and leads to self-destruction; and this resistance itself bears witness to the truth and necessitates the victory of the truth.’¹²² Ultimately, the creature’s actions—by nature—cannot threaten the intention of the Creator.¹²³ In small and great actions, humans witness to God’s intention in the world through either the acceptance or rejection of this intention. The ‘law of self-negation’ claims that human intentions opposing God’s intention ‘will achieve [their] opposite.’¹²⁴

Macmurray’s ‘providence’ rests on the two claims summarized above. First, history is the ‘act of God’ and second, all things necessarily contribute to the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 117.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 117; italics Macmurray’s.

¹²⁰ Like Barth, Macmurray finds the importance and value of human action primarily in ‘witness’. God’s intention (Macmurray) or election (Barth) remain God’s work, not humanity’s achievement.

¹²¹ Macmurray, *Clue*, 111.

¹²² Ibid., 117.

¹²³ Macmurray’s religious framework does not allow for human action to fundamentally inhibit God’s intention in history. By definition, the Creator’s intention will ultimately come to pass. Macmurray writes, ‘A creator who cannot achieve the intention of his creation is a contradiction in terms.’ Ibid., 54.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 117. Collier writes, ‘Every dualism, every deflection of the divine intention, is self-negating, and because it is so, serves the divine intention willy nilly by its own self-destruction.’ Collier, ‘Macmurray,’ 74.

achievement of God's single intention.¹²⁵ Drawing on his non-dualistic framework, Macmurray allows for human contingency and decision which are determined as positive or negative witness by the laws of creation. Jesus is a prophetic 'discoverer' who provides the exemplary model for living in harmony with God's intention in history, but Macmurray's understanding does not *require* Jesus—much less his death on the cross or his resurrection. The discovery of the real religious life might take place elsewhere under very different circumstances. I turn now to Barth's contrasting understanding of Jesus and the ways in which this impacts his own non-dualistic providence.

Barth on History and Jesus

Readers of *CD* will immediately see a strong christological contrast with Macmurray. These distinctions regarding the person of Jesus fundamentally shape their respective views of history and therefore, their personalist providence. While the most essential differences appear in the two writers' respective christological understandings, the formal similarities should not be overlooked.

Contrary to Macmurray's conspicuous absence of christological terminology, Barth speaks frequently of Jesus' divine and human natures. He continually makes christological affirmations which Macmurray consciously avoids.¹²⁶ While Barth's high Christology is widely documented, a few affirmations might be cited:

¹²⁵ In Macmurray's writings, Jesus' discovery precludes any concept of an afterlife for human agents. While dualistic thought forms inevitably posit another world, life, or reality in the future where the ideal might be realized, 'religious' thinking for Macmurray 'shows no need...of a doctrine of immortality or of a belief in another world.' As seen above, Macmurray's understanding of the apocalyptic points to the intentions actually achieved (often over lengthy periods of time) in the history of this world. Emphasizing the Old Testament particularly, Macmurray rejects 'a hope of immortality', claiming, 'Old Testament religion is clearly about this world, and about nothing else.' Macmurray, *Clue*, 30, 31. Eternal life, heaven, and eschatological judgment reflect a pie-in-the-sky ideal that fails to recognize the limited, but real nature of human existence. Human life lived properly constitutes a co-operation with the intention of God in history. Each human being can play a part in realizing God's intention of bringing about a global community based on freedom and equality of all people. To the extent that an individual exercises this freedom and opportunity, she co-operates with God. To the extent that she intends that which conflicts with God's intention, she achieves only frustration and negation. She cannot act in the sense that her intentions will not be realised. According to 'the law of self-negation', she will actually achieve the opposite of her intention, that is, the intention of God. She witnesses to the veracity of God's intention through the futility of her own. Unlike the human agent whose life and agency exist for only a short span of years, God continues to see the divine intention enacted—one way or another—over the long course of history. While the human's perspective often blinds him to the development over time, God sees the inevitable achievement of the divine intention increasingly approaching its achievement from day to day and year to year.

¹²⁶ Macmurray's distance from Barth's position can be seen in the Scottish philosopher's reluctance to develop any specific concept of God. I am indebted to Dr Esther MacIntosh of the University of Leeds for her helpful guidance in response to my query on this matter.

Jesus is both God and man.¹²⁷

[Jesus] has revealed Himself and is to be accepted as He was, in the eternal counsel and purpose of the Father, and as its most specific content, when all things began to be.¹²⁸

...in Jesus Christ we have to do with very God...He is very God acting for us men, God Himself become man...He is nothing less or other than God Himself, but God as man.¹²⁹

These affirmations clearly contrast with Macmurray and reformulate Jesus' relation to history.

Following from Christology, the incarnation correspondingly transforms and reveals history by bringing God into history and world history into God. Barth claims that the historical life of Jesus, and specifically his death on the cross, actually change history itself. He writes,

This history of Jesus Christ—in which He gives a share to His disciples, and through them to the community founded by their ministry, and through this to the world—is the act of God (*ist die Tat Gottes*) in which His movement for man and against His [*sic*] sin is in its fulfilment an event for all times.¹³⁰

According to Barth, Jesus does not discover the intention of God, *he is the intention of God*, actualized in history. Election, as revealed and carried out by Jesus' history in world history, determines both Creator and history in creation.¹³¹ Barth therefore places all of providence after and under election.¹³²

¹²⁷ III.2, 66.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 483.

¹²⁹ IV.1, 128-129.

¹³⁰ IV.2, 776 (880). Barth's personalism conveys God's act from Jesus to others in the unity of the creaturely nexus through relationships. This argument mirrors Barth's logic on 'original sin'. Webster helpfully explains, 'What Barth has to say [about original sin] is closely connected with his use of the notion of covenant to clarify the relationship of reciprocal agency between God and his human creatures...' Webster, *Moral*, 67. Farrer shares a similar view of original sin. Cf. Farrer, *Love*, 150ff.

¹³¹ Barth stresses the importance of Jesus' history 'being plainly a human history.' It is explicitly not '...a superhuman, super-historical truth.' III.2, 66. Barth introduces his revolutionary doctrine of election with an striking statement regarding both the importance of election for humanity and *for God*. His claims would be entirely untenable apart from the history of Jesus Christ in the history of the world. Barth writes, 'The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One. It is part of the doctrine of God because originally God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself. Its function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God.' II.2, 3.

¹³² Both creation and providence describe God's working relationship with the world, but both deal directly with 'the unconditional lordship of the will and Word of the Creator over the creature—a lordship which in both cases has its meaning in the divine election and covenant as its final secret and basis.' III.3, 8-9. Thus, in contrast with Macmurray's position, the pre-historical determination of God in election and the historical enactment of that determination in Jesus form the *basis* of all history for Barth.

While Macmurray's argument logically necessitates a personal God, his amorphous doctrine of God undermines his argument. Ironically, Macmurray maintains a much more confident tone about the outcome of historical events (such as the fascism of World War II) than Barth, but cannot support this confidence with a corresponding doctrine of God. Barth's strong Christology takes the pressure off his loose philosophy of history in a way which Macmurray's weak Christology cannot. For Barth, what is done in Christ proves definitive, while world history corresponds to this reality only fitfully and ambiguously.

Macmurray claims that dualistic thinking leads to an understanding of history as 'pure happening' rather than intentional 'action'.¹³³ Barth makes a similar point, but roots his claim in the particularity of Jesus Christ, the 'one decision' (*eine Entscheidung*) of God.¹³⁴ Already in II.2, Barth precludes dualistic thought forms in his discussion of election by speaking of the single command of God as 'an integral whole (*auch darin gänzlich*).'¹³⁵ According to Barth, God's active decision in election constitutes the source for every aspect of creaturely-occurrence: 'It is always a single decision, including all the thoughts and words and movements in which we execute it.'¹³⁶ In this way, Barth's doctrine of providence cannot be understood apart from election. Using his characteristic language of encounter and decision, Barth explains that we have no abstract existence or freedom apart from God.¹³⁷ The electing God confronts the human subject so thoroughly and 'integrally' that we are left with 'no other choice than that between obedience and disobedience.'¹³⁸ Confronted with the personal, living God in Jesus Christ, the human subject has no other possibility. Neutrality is precluded.

For Barth, the history of Jesus reveals and actualises God's intention in creation. Jesus is salvation itself. Barth writes,

¹³³ Macmurray, *Clue*, 93.

¹³⁴ II.2, 663 (739). This determinate singularity corresponds with Barth's 'command of God' so that all creaturely-occurrence must positively or negatively witness to this decision. See II.2, 661-708.

¹³⁵ II.2, 663 (739).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 663. For Barth, human agents execute the 'single decision' of God in election. Authentic human action matters in that it witnesses 'one way or another', positively or negatively, to the unshakable, unassailable realisation of election in Jesus Christ.

¹³⁷ Barth's concept of 'encounter' and 'confrontation' to describe the relation of Creator to creature is essential throughout his discussion of providence in III.3. It aims to preserve the relative integrity of the creature against being overwhelmed, as in monism, while also guarding against a fundamental dualism whereby Creator and creatures might be considered in fundamental opposition to one another or in abstraction from one another.

¹³⁸ II.2, 669. The utility of Brümmer's Yes/No framework is seen here in an entirely different way for Barth. The binary choice represents every moment of creaturely life in its limited time and space.

The giving of the Son by the Father indicates a mystery, a hidden movement in the inner life of the Godhead. But in the self-sacrifice of the man Jesus for His friends this intra-divine movement is no longer hidden but revealed. For what the man Jesus does by this action is to lay bare this mystery (*Geheimnisses*), to actualise the human and therefore the visible and knowable and apprehensible aspect of this portion of the divine history of this primal moment of divine volition and execution.¹³⁹

Note the connection Barth draws between the inner-trinitarian life of God and Jesus' history 'within the history of all men.'¹⁴⁰ As fully God and fully human, Jesus actualizes God's intention in his life, death and resurrection, completely fulfilling the covenant in the nexus of history. The history of Jesus therefore serves as the basis of all history, the determination of all creation, and the self-determination of God himself. This must be kept at the fore in interpreting Barth's doctrine of providence.

Taking the implications discussed above, I now describe Barth's doctrine of providence in light of his assertion that history 'is the continued act of God'. The christological affirmations just discussed accentuate the distinctiveness of Barth's theology despite formal continuities with Macmurray. Nevertheless, the formal similarities help to clarify the relative philosophical coherence and strength of Barth's doctrine of providence. The following discussion is divided into three subsections:

- i) God's Act is Comprehensive
- ii) God's Act Encompasses Human Cooperation and Rebellion
- iii) Human Witness to God's Act

Each point uses the tools of Macmurray's philosophy to clarify Barth's claims concerning creaturely life under God's providence.

i) God's Act is Comprehensive

Like Macmurray, Barth explains the universal scope of providence by linking God's action to a single intention. As such, the human no longer asks traditional, anthropocentric questions of providence in the same way (i.e. Why did God cause my brother to die? Why did God allow Hitler to rise up? etc.). Instead, the Christian may know that God acts in history with a determinative effect in the constancy of God's singular intention of election. Barth's doctrine of providence claims that the

¹³⁹ III.2, 66 (77). Note that Barth does not remove all mystery from providence, but rather speaks of the revelation of this mystery. Jesus Christ leads humanity into the mystery of fellowship with the Triune God.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 66.

God revealed here is acting in history to carry out the intention of election through every detail of world-occurrence. He writes,

Providence, however, belongs to the execution of this decree. It is eternal, divine providence to the extent that it is grounded in this decree... It is God's knowing, willing and acting in His relation as Creator to His creature as such.¹⁴¹

While Barth and Macmurray share this comprehensive aspect of providence, they differ dramatically in their relative claims regarding the personality and character of the acting God.

Barth's position stresses active, personal language in reference to God. While the effect appears quite similar in many ways, Barth's stress on the personal 'constancy' of the living God contrasts starkly with Macmurray's use of legal terminology, with its mechanical inevitability (i.e. the law of self-frustration or the 'structural law' of world-occurrence). Ironically, Barth's doctrine of providence seems far more personal in reference to God than that posited by the author of *The Form of the Personal*.

ii) *God's Act Encompasses Cooperation and Rebellion*

The second claim is that the divine intention in history must encompass both human co-operation and rebellion against it. Macmurray explains this affirmation using modal terms such as possible and impossible, real and unreal. Barth employs a similar form of thought but fills it with christological content. Only by understanding these implications can Barth's understanding of history come to light.

In describing his theological anthropology, Barth uses the term 'real' and 'unreal' regarding humanity.¹⁴² His basic claim is that Jesus is 'real man.'¹⁴³ Jesus' reality consists in the actualizing of his humanity in union with God's action in history. In interpreting John's gospel, Barth explains '...the humanity of Jesus and His participation in the Godhead are not irreconcilable and antithetic, but that it is His very participation in the divine which is the basis of His humanity.'¹⁴⁴ In contrast to dualistic thought which necessitates antithetical explanations for such a claim, Barth explicitly states, '...this identification is not a paradox or contradiction

¹⁴¹ III.3, 5.

¹⁴² Barth's use of terminology is particularly important as we have seen in our discussion of 'determination' language. One can easily make assumptions concerning the meaning of words which Barth uses in very different ways, such as 'possible' and 'impossible'. III.2, 68.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 58.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 66.

to be accepted in amazed bewilderment by a *sacrificium intellectus*.¹⁴⁵ Rather, ‘real man’ lives in the harmony of his intention and God’s intention. Humans rebelling against God’s gracious will lose their lives to unreality.¹⁴⁶ Does Barth mean that other humans have no life or existence? John Godsey has helpfully recorded Barth’s response to this question:

Everything depends on what we mean by ‘real’. Here [in III.2] I do not mean that we men do not *exist*, but that there is a kind of existing that lacks reality. He does not accomplish what it means to be a man. Yes, Christ is the only real man before God. He fulfils the real existence of man.¹⁴⁷

Like humans under Macmurray’s law of self-negation, the sinful, unreal human cannot succeed in achieving an intention which opposes the positive reality of human nature.¹⁴⁸ ‘Unreal’ humans cannot ‘accomplish’ or ‘fulfil’ their intentions against God’s will.¹⁴⁹ For Barth, Jesus’ humanity is totally real in his obedient reliance on and submission to the power of providence given through the Word of God.¹⁵⁰

Unlike sinful human beings who—by definition—rebel against God, Jesus ‘did not and *could not* rebel against this providence.’¹⁵¹ In his exegesis of Christ’s temptation in the wilderness, Barth claims that Jesus’ victory consists not in his power against Satan but in his reliance on and submission to God’s ‘fatherly discipline’.¹⁵² The ‘devil was more stupid than cunning’ in suggesting that Jesus set his will against God’s will, because he failed to comprehend true reality.¹⁵³ Such a conflict of wills can only result by the positing of a false dualism or a neutral sphere where Jesus might act or will apart from the Father. Barth opposes this outright, stating, ‘There is no “own,” no “of Himself,” no neutral sphere (*neutralen Ort*), from which things might be sought or said or done as from the seat of a will distinct from

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Such people are portrayed by Barth as more pitiful than demonic. Their personal identities include ‘missed opportunities’, they become a ‘prisoner’ or they exist like ‘driftwood carried downstream’. II.1, 677; III.3, 356; IV.2, 578.

¹⁴⁷ Barth, *Table Talk*, 15.

¹⁴⁸ See above and Macmurray, *Clue*, 96.

¹⁴⁹ Sinfulness is necessarily less than human. Nider helpfully explains the oxymoronic aspect of ‘human sinfulness’: ‘Free disobedience is a contradiction in terms just as human sinfulness is.’ Nider, ‘Differentiated’, 180.

¹⁵⁰ III.2, 68.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 67; italics mine.

¹⁵² Ibid., 67. Barth explains the continuity and discontinuity between Jesus and Israel: ‘Jesus...was subjected to the same discipline. But He was the Son who heeded the warning. He did not and could not rebel against this providence. For He was really Jesus; and He commended and entrusted Himself to the providential care of His Father.’

¹⁵³ Ibid. Formally, the devil’s mistake here strongly resembles those who experience Macmurray’s ‘law of self-frustration’.

that of His Father.’¹⁵⁴ Barth’s high Christology affirms both Jesus’ full humanity and full divinity by asserting the unity of all his actions with the intention of the Father. Here again, we see Barth’s opposition to dualistic frameworks, ‘If it [Jesus’ work] is really parallel to the work of the Father, if He really works ὁμοίως what He sees the Father work, there can be no possible dualism (*Dualität*).’¹⁵⁵ Jesus lived out his human history in precise correspondence with the will of God.

This pattern of positive ‘correspondence’ between the life of Jesus and the intention of God demonstrates the true opportunity, freedom and potential of humanity. It also reflects the personal, interactive and communal identity of the sovereign, triune God. Providence, understood in this way, opens the possibility for humanity to co-operate in the divine rule, *to determine God*. Rebellion, on the other hand, constitutes a missed opportunity and a squandering of life. As unreal, however, it poses no threat to God’s intention. Barth explains this asymmetry,

[God] is free and immutable as the living God, as the God who wills to converse with the creature, and to allow Himself to be determined by it in this relationship (*in diesem Verkehr mit ihm sich auch von ihm her bestimmen lasse will*). His sovereignty is so great that it embraces both the possibility, and, as it is exercised, the actuality, that the creature can actively be present and co-operate in His overruling. There is no creaturely freedom which can limit or compete with the sole sovereignty and efficacy of God. But permitted by God, and indeed willed and created by Him, there is the freedom of the friends of God concerning whom He has determined that without abandoning the helm for one moment He will still allow Himself to be determined by them.¹⁵⁶

In this affirmation of creaturely determination of God, Barth goes much further than the theological tradition in stressing the opportunity of humans to co-operate in the divine rule. This statement, however, can only be made by excluding dualism and presupposing the completion of the covenant in Jesus. Freedom, realized in active ‘friendship with God’, neither threatens God’s intention nor eliminates the determinations involved in loving relationship. Here, free humans ‘determine’ God. Such a statement helps reveal the magnitude of Barth’s reformulation of the Reformed tradition.

The passage above also stresses God’s sovereignty over human rebellion. Seen in a non-dualistic framework, human rebellion is self-defeating and cannot threaten the divine intention. Abstract ‘creaturely freedom’ whereby humans ‘limit or compete’ with God is unreal. Humans, as creatures, do sin, but this rebellion cannot threaten the intention of the Creator. Barth explains,

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 63 (73).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ III.3, 285 (323).

The creature sinned by thinking, speaking and acting in a way alien and adverse to grace and therefore without it. We are certainly not to say that man was capable of sin (*sündigen konnte*). There is no capacity (*Können*) for nothingness in human nature and therefore in God's creation, nor is there any freedom in this direction as willed, ordained and instituted by God. When man sinned he performed the impossible, not acting as a free agent (*was er nicht konnte, handelte er gerade nicht als freier*) but as a prisoner (*Gefangener*).¹⁵⁷

The creaturely sphere in which humanity exists allows for both co-operation with and rebellion against the Creator. In the case of the former, the human chooses reality and acts as a free agent (achieving her intention). This is freedom. In the latter, he chooses unreality and exists only as a prisoner, a non-agent. Intending sin—the break in relation with God—he cannot objectively live as Godless. These are the limits determined in the nature of the human created in covenant with God before the foundations of the world. Seen in light of Macmurray, the 'impossible possibility' is not so much paradox or nonsense as it is a reflection of human confusion or stupidity.¹⁵⁸

iii) *Human Witness to God's Act*

Both thinkers articulate a providence which includes both human co-operation and rebellion in witnessing to God's intention. While providence encompasses both, the former does so positively in its reality while the latter does so negatively in its unreality. Returning to Barth's theological anthropology, we see a resonance with Macmurray's claim in regard to Jesus' ethics being anthropology.¹⁵⁹ 'Real' humanity exists only in correspondence with the intention of God.¹⁶⁰

Macmurray's thought helps illumine Barth's theology in light of Brümmer's frameworks. Unlike Brümmer, Barth removes the Yes and No of factual salvation from humanity in general. Nevertheless, all of history retains significance in Barth in a far more comprehensive way than Brümmer's focus on a single decision. Like Macmurray, Barth formally disallows divine-human competition which would allow for creaturely obstruction of God's intention. Every human act—without exception—witnesses positively or negatively to God's intention. Barth's personalist

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 356 (411). In this way, Barth acknowledges human sinfulness, but neither attributes it to God (i.e. makes God 'author of sin') nor allows it endurance. Humans act *as if* they were independent from God and were not covenant partners to God, but this is not reality.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. IV.2, 409-424. Barth discusses 'The Sloth of Man' as 'The stupidity of man' and describes humans' refusal of reallity primarily with God but also with 'fellow-men', 'the created order' and 'his historical limitation in time.' IV.2, 413, 409.

¹⁵⁹ Macmurray, *Clue*, 88.

¹⁶⁰ Similarities can be seen in their common use of John 4:34 to argue that reality is action in correspondence with God's intention. See III.2, 67-68; Macmurray, *Clue*, 94-95.

providence, therefore, can be depicted in a Brümmer-like fashion. Below is an amended version of Table 2's Game 3 above.

Table 3

		GOD	
		Game 3: Asymmetrical personal relation → played with one human person and God	
		YES	NO
HUMAN BEINGS	YES	OUTCOME I (Positive, free witness to God's mercy in election)	 OUTCOME J
	NO	 OUTCOME K 	OUTCOME L (Negative, involuntary witness to God's judgment in election)

I have adapted Brümmer's framework further to reflect Barth's use of God's right and left hand in relation to humans. God's constancy gives perfect dependability without the mechanical determinism of a robot. When creaturely persons say Yes to God in obedience, God's merciful right hand assures positive witness to election (outcome I). When the human says No to God and disobeys, God responds with the No of God's left hand and frustrates the impossible intention. Thus the personal God brings outcome L with judgment and its negative witness. Barth furthers his claim to God's constancy by speaking of God's self-determined personhood in Jesus Christ. God works in a determinate manner in and through the human act to witness to God's intention, one way or the other. In this way, Macmurray's philosophy helps me to adapt Brümmer's framework, in order to demonstrate Barth's continual use of the language of 'determination' without falling into the critique of determinism leveled against him in Chapter II.

Turning now to part three, I use Barth's depiction of 'witness' in II.2 to support these claims. Examining both election and rejection in relation to the community and individuals, I demonstrate that Macmurray's thought sheds light on Barth's counter-intuitive claims regarding election and God's right and left hand in providence.

Barth's Twofold Election and Providence

Part two emphasized the impact of Jesus' on history and creation through election. God actualizes this reality in providential care. Significantly, Barth orders his discussion of election to include human individuality, but only *after* his discussion of Jesus, which precedes the discussion of community. Thus Barth asserts the primacy of Jesus' history in election, which forms the basis and essential presupposition of the community's election, which in turn forms the basis and essential presupposition of the individual. Schematically, Barth's claim might be seen this way, with no possibility of reversing the arrows:

Election of Christ=>Election of the community=>Election of the individual¹⁶¹

Like Macmurray, Barth affirms the importance of the individual but does so without asserting an individualism resulting from dualism. As many of the key questions of providence arise in relation to individual freedom, this order must be assumed throughout. In light of Barth's christocentric election, I argue that Barth's discussions of the election of communities and individuals presents providence in action. This is particularly clear in Barth's understanding of human 'witness' to God's election as opposed to creaturely contribution in election.

Barth's basic claim is that by revelation, humanity can know and act in the single, twofold will of God in Jesus Christ. Election forms the foundation for providence. While this election 'is the whole of the Gospel, the Gospel *in nuce*', it must be understood in connection with both creation *ex nihilo* and eschatology.¹⁶²

Barth makes the connection explicit,

In the beginning with God, i.e., in the resolve of God (*Gottes Ratschluß*) which precedes the existence, the possibility and the reality of all His creatures, the very first thing is the decree whose realisation means and is Jesus Christ... It is the fixing of an end for this reality, foreordained, valid without question, unailing in efficacy... The will of God is Jesus Christ (*Indem Jesus Christus der Wille Gottes ist*) and this will is known to us in the revelation of Jesus Christ.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Barth makes this structure evident in II.2 §33 'The Election of Jesus Christ' leads into §34 'The Election of the Community' which leads to §35 'The Election of the Individual.' Together, these three paragraphs constitute the heart of Barth's discussion of 'The Election of God' following §32 'The Problem of a Correct Doctrine of the Election of Grace.' Elsewhere, Barth clarifies this ordering, 'Because Jesus Christ lives in His community as in His body, the determination of the individual by and for Jesus Christ, as it takes place in and with His election, is his determination by and for Israel, by and for the Church. The elect individual, elect in and with the community of God, is what he is, and has what he has, directly from and for Jesus Christ.' II.2, 410.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 157 (171).

Barth sets God's electing will before and after creaturely life in a way that necessarily relativises claims to human autonomy within time. Human actions retain their relative integrity, but God continually determines them in relation to the one divine will—Jesus Christ—as positive or negative witness. The One who constitutes the beginning and end of all things accomplishes the divine will either through the positive or negative witness of God's creatures; there is no third, neutral way. Every world-occurrence has its place and nothing is lost, though comprehension of this reality lies beyond human capacity.

i) Election of the Community

Barth's combination of a non-dualistic framework containing christological specificity allows him to answer difficult questions of providence more subtly than many before him. Consider two questions arising from the biblical narrative: 'Did God will that Israel reject Jesus?' and 'Did God will that Gentiles accept Jesus?' In both cases, Barth's twofold doctrine of election answers these questions to illustrate providence in relation to the community.¹⁶⁴ Yes, God's determinative will encompasses both (1) the sin of Israel's rejection and (2) the righteousness of the Gentiles' acceptance: 'The electing God and the elected community embrace even this Israel which steps into the void.'¹⁶⁵ Israel's rejection and the Church's acceptance constitute the will of God in their negative and positive aspects respectively.¹⁶⁶ However, God did not and does not 'want' the former, while He did and does want the latter. The Christian concept of covenant consists of both these aspects, 'the doctrine of the divine command'.¹⁶⁷ Like Macmurray's 'law of self-negation', Barth asserts that the living God *determines* Israel's rejection to 'achieve its opposite.'¹⁶⁸ Against its own intention, Israel's rejection witnesses to God's will in election negatively as God's judgment. The acceptance of Jesus by the Gentiles witnesses to God's determinative action in history in that the Gentiles willingly correspond to God's intention. In accepting the grace of God in Jesus, the Gentiles

¹⁶⁴ This brief treatment of Israel and the Church shows Barth's ordering of providence over the community ahead of providence and the individual. I am aware of the sensitive nature of Israel in light of the Holocaust and current political conflicts. While these are important questions, they are only tangentially related to Barth's argument here.

¹⁶⁵ II.2, 236.

¹⁶⁶ See *Ibid.*, 205ff.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 509.

¹⁶⁸ Macmurray, *Clue*, 117.

hear and respond to the command of God. They give free obedience to this command.

Following his claim that ‘there is no...independent election of the community’ apart from the election of Jesus Christ, Barth writes of the ‘twofold (and in its twofoldness single) direction of the eternal will of God (*doppelte (und eben in ihrer Doppelheit eine!) Richtung des ewigen Willens Gottes stoßen werden*)’ in relation to the community.¹⁶⁹ Thus the community must correspond to positive and negative aspects of Jesus as ‘crucified Messiah of Israel’ and ‘risen Lord of the Church.’¹⁷⁰ The community of God, Barth writes,

...exists according to God’s eternal decree as the people of Israel (in the whole range of its history in past and future, *ante* and *post Christum natum*), and at the same time as the Church of Jews and Gentiles (from its revelation at Pentecost to its fulfilment by the second coming of Christ).¹⁷¹

Barth therefore moves from the specific historical enactment of Jesus’ cross and resurrection to the historical existence of the community of God. He clarifies the connection, ‘This is the ecclesiological form of what we have previously described in christological terms.’¹⁷² This connection to Jesus’ life corresponds both to the negative and positive aspects of creaturely existence.¹⁷³

Barth claims that Israel and the Church constitute the one community of God. At all times and places, the living God ‘is in its midst’ determining its service as ‘the judgment and mercy of God.’¹⁷⁴ This divine determination is expressed in the left and right hand of God respectively. While Barth specifically opposes anti-Semitism, he nevertheless understands ‘Israel’ as the negative aspect of the community of God. In their rejection of Jesus Christ, he writes, the Jews witness to

...the depths of human guilt and need and therefore of the inconceivable greatness of God’s love in the event in which God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself. The Jews of the ghetto give this demonstration involuntarily, joylessly and ingloriously (*wider Willen, freudlos und glanzlos*), but they do give it.¹⁷⁵

Taken at face value, such statements, particularly written as they were in 1942, seem anti-Semitic.¹⁷⁶ Barth means to point in a much different direction. Like

¹⁶⁹ II.2, 197 (218). Barth’s opposition to dualism and monism is clear in the structure of this statement.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 198.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Clearly, Macmurray could not make this claim.

¹⁷⁴ II.2, 206. Such a claim necessitates the double-agency to be discussed in Chapter V.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 209 (230).

¹⁷⁶ Barth’s ‘anti-Semitism’ is widely debated and lies beyond the scope of this thesis. See Eberhard Busch, ‘Indissoluble Unity: Barth’s Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era,’ in *FSW*, ed. George

Macmurray’s formula: the positive contains and is constituted by its own negative, Israel’s disobedience to election cannot be separated from the Church’s obedience; the Church contains and is constituted by Israel. Barth explains, ‘The Church is the bearer of God’s positive message (*positiven Botschaft Gottes*) to the world in which the negative is—necessarily, but still only subordinately—included (*in die die negative eingeschlossen—notwendig, aber doch nur untergeordnet eingeschlossen ist*).’¹⁷⁷ Barth expands his explanation of Israel’s form further by pointing to other positives in relation to their negatives:

Table 4¹⁷⁸

Positive Aspect	Negative Aspect
The Church	Israel
Resurrection of Jesus	Crucifixion of Jesus
God’s Mercy	God’s Judgment

The key insight of this table (which could be expanded by looking at a broader swath of *CD*), is the way in which a singular reality is differentiated without dualism. The Church and Israel have had and continue to have a history in the world. Their existence is actual and not mechanically controlled by God. Living in their particular nature, God’s creatures serve the purpose for which they were elected, in one way or another. They *witness* to God’s intention in Jesus Christ, whether in the positive or negative aspect. Providence is the living God’s rule in this twofold determination by God’s left or right hand.

ii) Election of the Individual

Barth’s exegesis of Romans 9-11 continues to give specificity to how God’s twofold determination looks in practice. Barth lists various pairs of human agents

Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); George Hunsinger, 'Introduction,' in *FSW*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004); Katherine Sonderegger, 'Response to "Indissoluble Unity",' in *FSW*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

¹⁷⁷ II.2, 211 (233).

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 211. Barth again evokes the right and left hand of God: ‘In this form the unity of the community is revealed in its differentiation...The Church form of the community stands in the same relation to its Israelite form as the resurrection of Jesus to His crucifixion, as God’s mercy to God’s judgment.’ Significantly, Barth does not abstract Christians from judgment. In one of the last sentences he wrote for *CD* Barth explains, ‘...Christians are not saved without judgment, but, threatened by death and perdition, they are saved through judgment.’ IV.4, 212.

from Paul's text to illustrate his claim. I will discuss briefly the example of Moses and Pharaoh. Barth portrays God accomplishing 'the single will of God' in 'a differentiated form (*unterschieden Gestalt*).'¹⁷⁹ Acting 'in the same sphere', Pharaoh and Moses correspond to God's 'single will' in 'different forms'.¹⁸⁰ Here we see a key to Barth's use of the phrase 'in one way or another' (*so oder so*).¹⁸¹ While Moses' actions smoothly correspond with the divine will, Pharaoh's 'running and willing' also reflect God's will.¹⁸² The key lies in the distinction between the positive and negative aspects, God's right and left hand respectively. Thus God 'determines (*bestimmt*) Moses as the voluntary (*freiwilligen*), Pharaoh as the involuntary (*unfreiwilligen*) servant of His power and His name.'¹⁸³ Humanity, for its part, witnesses to God's will through its actions in encounter with God: 'He chooses Moses as a witness of His mercy (*Zeugen seines Erbarmens*) and Pharaoh as a witness of the judgment (*Zeugen des Gerichtes*) that in and with this mercy becomes necessary and is executed'.¹⁸⁴ Here, mercy corresponds with God's right hand and judgment the left.¹⁸⁵

Barth claims that the 'key exegetical error of the classical doctrine of predestination' was seeing the scope of Romans 9:18 'in the personal situation and destiny of Moses and Pharaoh.'¹⁸⁶ By focusing on God's will in the election of the community, Barth's view contains all personal human action but cannot be limited to these actions. God can and does determine every aspect of human existence, but the error of the classical doctrine of predestination was that it 'opposed an indeterminate God (*unbestimmten Gott*) and an indeterminate man (*unbestimmten Menschen*).'¹⁸⁷ Barth states flatly, 'Paul did not do that.'¹⁸⁸ According to Barth, the God who loves

¹⁷⁹ II.2, 221 (243).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 221.

¹⁸¹ 'In one way or another the latter [Israel] will have to carry out God's will and thus reveal the depth of human need and therefore the depth of the divine mercy. In one way or another this must benefit the work of God's community laid upon the Church. As a movement of the body of Christ it must in one way or another witness to Him, in one way or another confirming Israel's election, but with it that of the Church as well.' Ibid., 261-262 (288).

¹⁸² Barth uses 'running and willing' here in the same way he uses 'life' elsewhere. It means existence, but not necessarily *human* existence, though humans may be referred to. The human who sins denies his humanity, but cannot become objectively godless in doing so. Cf. III.2, 27f.

¹⁸³ II.2, 221. Barth's freedom is represented here as 'voluntary' versus the bondage of 'involuntary' service, but such service precludes coercion or tyranny on the part of God.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 221 (243).

¹⁸⁵ See III.3, 224f.

¹⁸⁶ II.2, 221. Barth makes the same claim of the interpretation of Romans 9:6f. 'in that of the different sons of Abraham and Isaac.'

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 223 (246).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 223.

in freedom acts in a wholly determinate fashion corresponding to Jesus Christ (as depicted in Game 3). Thus, in dealing with Romans 9:20-21, Barth writes,

He uses them both as witnesses to Jesus Christ, each in its own way. This is how the potter, the God of Israel, deals in and with His people—not according to the caprices of His omnipotence (*Launen seiner Allmacht*) but in the determinate purpose (*sondern in der bestimmten*)...¹⁸⁹

The similarity between Barth's formal presentation and Macmurray's at this point helps to discredit critics' accusations of determinism.

Davaney believes that Barth ultimately sets human action in competition with divine omnipotent power.¹⁹⁰ If this were the case, God's actions would fully trump any human action leading to a collapse into monism. Given Davaney's presuppositions, Barth would have to agree and fall into the ancient debates of dualism between freewill or predestination. However, Barth's non-dualistic argument precludes Davaney's claims. Standing on the grounds of election, Barth rejects the abstraction of 'an indeterminate power of God.'¹⁹¹ Providence in proper relation under election entails a determinate God. Barth writes,

On the contrary, the "power" of God in His dealing with man...is something wholly determinate (*ganz bestimmtes*); it is settled by the determined purpose on which God has decided with respect to man in Jesus Christ.¹⁹²

God remains utterly 'free' in determining the outcome of every detail of creaturely action, but this freedom encompasses and grounds rather than cancels human autonomy. Barth's summary of this claim points to his wider doctrine of providence. This relation to providence becomes clear in Barth's interpretation of the 'tenor' of Paul's question in Romans 9:20a 'O man, who art thou that repliest against God?'¹⁹³ Barth gives two possibilities which point strongly in the direction of a Macmurray-like understanding of providence. First, Barth rejects the framework which Davaney assumes,

The tenor of the answer which Paul has in mind with this counter-question is not as has so often been assumed: "After all you are only a creature with which God as its Creator has power to deal as seems good to Him."¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 223 (246). The first sentence is stronger and more like Macmurray in the German: '*Als Zeugen Jesu Christi braucht er je in ihrer Weise beide!*' Barth claims God's witness 'needs' (*braucht*) both the positive and the negative.

¹⁹⁰ Davaney, *Divine*, 232.

¹⁹¹ II.2, 222.

¹⁹² Ibid., 223 (245). God's self-determination allows for Game 3 in the historical co-determination of the human person.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 222. NRSV 'But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God?'

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

Such an interpretation presupposes the God of the philosophers but has nothing to do with God in Jesus Christ. Rooted in this determinate God, the ‘tenor of the answer hidden in the counter-question’ is:

“In any case, whether you are a friend of God like Moses or an enemy like Pharaoh, whether your name is Isaac or Ishmael, Jacob or Esau, you are the man on account of whose sin and for whose sin Jesus Christ has died on the cross for the justification of God, and for whose salvation and bliss, and for whose justification, He has been raised from the dead” (Rom. 4:25).¹⁹⁵

While God remains free in Barth’s view, God’s constancy in election means that the power of God to determine human life will be the opposite of an unpredictable caprice. Seen in Jesus Christ, providence holds the friend and enemy of God alike in the covenant of grace.¹⁹⁶

God’s freedom manifests itself in the *ongoing* determination of creaturely existence. The positive contains and is constituted by the negative. As a result, the two aspects ‘stand in an irreversible sequence and order.’¹⁹⁷ While neither Moses nor Pharaoh holds a ‘capacity’ to thwart God’s intention, they are each given opportunity. Both must witness to election. Nevertheless, the type of witness matters tremendously for the person involved.

Barth explicates the potter and the clay along precisely these lines. The rejection and acceptance of God, the Yes and No, the right and the left, must not be understood dualistically or on equal terms. Barth writes,

Without prejudice to the seriousness of the divine purpose on both sides, the relationship between the two sides of the one divine action is one of supreme incongruity (*höchste Inkongruenz*), supreme a-symmetry (*höchste Asymmetrie*), supreme disequilibrium (*höchste Ungleichgewicht*). The light of the divine willing and the shadow of the powerful divine non-willing are indeed related at this point, but they are necessarily governed by an irreversible sequence and order.¹⁹⁸

Barth’s point here is precisely that of Macmurray’s rejection of dualism. God’s determinative action should not be understood dualistically ‘as if God’s mercy and hardening, the existence of “vessels of honour” and of “dishonour,” were the two goals of two different ways of God.’¹⁹⁹ Instead, the one will revealed in Jesus Christ

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹⁶ Because of election in Jesus Christ, all humans will be saved (without relation to their works). Because of providence, these humans are the real *persons* co-determined in their history (*coram Deo*).

¹⁹⁷ II.2, 224.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 224 (246).

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 225.

is the twofold action of God.²⁰⁰ Barth draws attention to the importance of his rejection of dualism explicitly,

...it is quite unambiguous that Paul is not speaking of a content of God's will which is to be interpreted as an abstract duality (*als abstrakte Doppelung*), but of God's way on which in execution of His one purpose He wills and executes in a determined sequence (*bestimmter Folge*) and order this twofold operation (*Doppelte will und tut*).²⁰¹

In rejecting dualism, Barth can profess God's gracious 'determination' of all things while avoiding the charge of 'determinism' leveled by his critics. Here, Barth differs dramatically from Calvin and Reformed orthodoxy's double-predestination. The impact proves significant for providence as well. For Barth, everything that happens must be set in the story of salvation, where for Calvin much is the story of damnation.

According to Barth, Jesus Christ's history stands at the center of all world-occurrence, revealing this twofold operation. Here Barth goes well beyond Macmurray in his stress on the history of Jesus. Jesus becomes the hermeneutic key for understanding all of Israel's history: 'The meaning of its history cannot, then, be perceived in juxtaposition of two different purposes of God.'²⁰² The one purpose of God reveals that in the positive and negative aspects all things are made to witness to the living God: Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, Moses and Pharaoh, Peter and Judas Iscariot. This assertion differs dramatically from monistic determinism. True, God determines all things in His election 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4); however, this will provides the time and space for human agents also to live and will, to become the persons they are. The Lordship of God determined, determines and will determine all things as witnesses to election.²⁰³

The example of Judas helps to demonstrate Barth's understanding of providence under election. It also gives a particular example of the way Barth avoids both the charge of determinism and of making God the author of sin. At no point do Judas' actions cease to be determined by God's active electing will, but Judas is no puppet or chessman. He rebels against God and acts *as if* he were a godless person.

²⁰⁰ This argument lays the foundations for Barth's rejection of any vestiges of determinism in Reformed orthodoxy's providence.

²⁰¹ II.2, 225 (248). The final phrase here is strangely translated as 'twofold operation' instead of 'twofold will and act'.

²⁰² Ibid., 227.

²⁰³ Predestination as the continuing determination of the living God is addressed by Barth directly in II.2. Barth writes, 'In this context we must stress the fact that the divine predestination as thus understood is a living act (*lebendiger Akt*)...We can view it as a whole only as we view the living person (*lebendige Person*) of Jesus Christ.' Ibid., 180 (198).

Contrary to deterministic views, Judas' betrayal was not 'written', required by God's plan or specifically necessary for God's salvific purposes. God determines the betrayal for the realization of God's will, but Judas did not have to betray Jesus any more than the other disciples were inhibited from doing so by God. Barth states bluntly that the other disciples shared the same perverse 'possibility' of Judas,

To be sure, they have not actually done it or co-operated with [Judas]. But the point is that they obviously could have done it. The possibility of doing it was their possibility too... any of the others might equally well have been the one.²⁰⁴

As 'the great sinner of the New Testament', Judas illustrates the perverse impossible possibility of the 'rejected'.²⁰⁵ In his will and act of handing-over Jesus, Judas' 'disobedience was certainly not obedience. On the contrary, it was total disobedience.'²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Judas' betrayal encounters the sovereign determination of God and therefore will witness to the grace of God. Barth concludes, 'The rejected as such has no independent (*selbständige*) existence in the presence of God. He is not determined (*bestimmt*) by God merely to be rejected. He is determined to hear and say that a rejected man is elected.'²⁰⁷ Barth has shown the omnipotence of God's providential determination without any possibility of determinism in a mechanical or overpowering sense. God does not interfere in Judas's actions, but determines them—'against [Judas'] will and deserts (*gegen seinen Willen und Verdienst*)'—as a witness.²⁰⁸ Likewise, Judas's sin remains Judas's responsibility, though determined by God's left hand. In such a view, God cannot be understood as either the 'author of sin' or as a monadic tyrant.

Formally, Barth's description of Judas strongly resembles Macmurray's claim that the creature who intends against God's intention will 'necessarily achieve, not what they intended, but its opposite.'²⁰⁹ Barth's claim differs on the material level in that Jesus' death and resurrection have transformed history and defined humanity's possibilities in history. As the 'negative apostle' (*der negative Apostel*), Judas

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 471 (522). Barth restates this same claim in emphasising the continuity between Judas and the other disciples a page later, '[the other apostles] are involved with Judas in just the situation from which they might have betrayed Jesus as he did.' II.2, 472.

²⁰⁵ II.2, 461; italics English translators' of 'Er ist der groß Sünder des Neuen Testamentes' (511). This description comes in Barth's lengthy and notably sympathetic fine print section dealing with Judas under sub-heading 4, 'The Determination of the Rejected'. (II.2, 458-506).

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 483.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 506 (563). Obviously, Judas does not intend to 'say that rejected man is elected' but nevertheless does so, involuntarily but without divine coercion.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 503 (560).

²⁰⁹ Macmurray, *Clue*, 95.

involuntarily (but actually) 'has a part in the determination of the elect.'²¹⁰ As with Macmurray's concept of 'negative witness', so Barth deems Judas the 'negative apostle'. Such a distinction accentuates the tragedy of Judas' rebellion, while neither attributing his sin to God (as Author of Sin) nor setting Judas in a competitive, causal framework with God. God's intention and will remain fully realized in Jesus Christ, but providence confesses God's continuing action in determining reality in relation to this will. Like Macmurray's claim that the positive contains and is constituted by the negative, Barth's election requires rejection. Barth explains that the negative determination of Judas by God

...indicates the meaning and purpose of the determination of the elect (*der Bestimmung des Erwählten*). It is the necessary reverse side of this determination, which must not be overlooked or forgotten. And in its ultimate range it points to the very spot at which the proper and positive determination (*die positive Bestimmung*) of the elect begins.²¹¹

Thus even Judas' betrayal of Jesus is determined by God's providence to play its part in the fulfilment of God's intention in history, though remaining fully Judas's personal sin and guilt.

I began this section by claiming that Barth's understanding of election in Jesus Christ encompasses both the positive and negative actions of human agents. God's determination of positive human correspondence to election presents little difficulty (outcome I shares the ease of outcome A). God's mercy and human witness to that mercy harmonize with one another. Alternatively, biblical examples of rebellion such as Judas, Pharaoh and Ishmael present challenges in their negative witness to God's will. Yet in either case, God determines creaturely action to witness to the divine election in Jesus Christ. There are no omissions or neutrality; all things must witness, in one way or another, to election. In this way, Barth's doctrine of providence wholly reflects the impact of election in the wider circumference around the history of Jesus Christ. God relates all history positively or negatively to this one life. Like Israel, every creature stands in relation, 'For in the purpose determined for it in accordance with election there is also decreed that it must fulfil it just as much in and with its disobedience (to its own perdition) as in and with its obedience (to its own salvation).'212 While the dishonor of serving

²¹⁰ II.2, 457 (507).

²¹¹ Ibid., 454-455 (504). The German emphasizes the connection of the negative to the positive in asymmetrical order more clearly than the valid English translation given here: '*Sie ist deren notwendige, nicht zu übersehende und nicht zu vergessende negative Kehrseite.*'

²¹² Ibid., 261.

‘indirectly’ and ‘involuntarily’ as a ‘miserable (*kümmertliches*) testimony’ cannot be equated with serving in a positive, voluntary capacity as a ‘friend of God’, both constitute ‘a testimony to Christ (*Christuszeugnis*).’²¹³ Nothing escapes God’s sovereign determination. This reality in history determines the people whom God saves for God’s eternal life.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to clarify the structure of Macmurray’s non-dualistic understanding of divine agency to illumine Barth’s understanding of providence, particularly in relation to election. Macmurray views history as the act of God and thus describes a way between monism and dualism to articulate a post-Enlightenment providence. In the place of Macmurray’s vaguely defined ‘intention of God’, Barth places the person of Jesus Christ in election. Self-determined ‘before the foundation of the world’, Barth’s God continually acts in a determinate manner revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, ‘in one way or another’, all things fall under the lordship of the triune God.

The discussion above has shown the continuities and discontinuities between Barth and Macmurray. In doing so, I have further developed Game 3 from the discussion with Brümmer. Arguing that both Macmurray and Barth largely share a common *formal* understanding of personal agents, I use Macmurray’s philosophical tools to recast Barth’s thought against criticisms outlined in Chapter II. Barth’s theology is deeply personal and takes the agency of both divine and human persons seriously within a non-mechanistic, non-dualistic framework. Thus determinist readings of Barth’s doctrine of providence cannot hold. Macmurray’s thought brings illuminating philosophical insight into the shape of Barth’s doctrine of providence.

The material differences, marked off most decisively in Barth’s relentless insistence on divine revelation, prove decisive. Barth’s triune God revealed in Jesus Christ is *the person* who acts in loving freedom to sustain and enable every other personal agent. While Macmurray ultimately concludes with the need for a God, he fails to define the personality of that God. As such, the divine Other which Macmurray proclaims falls short of many of the crucial aspects which his philosophy requires for creaturely persons. While Macmurray would surely object to the claim,

²¹³ Ibid., 263 (290). I have used ‘miserable’ rather than ‘wretched’ to indicate the subjective human aspect. Barth describes obedience as ‘the indestructible position of His child and brother, His intimate and friend.’ II.2, 236.

Barth's revelation-based theology ultimately fills out Macmurray's *Form of the Personal* more adequately than his own broadly theistic approach. In contrast with Macmurray, Barth portrays a determinate, personal God whose will is revealed in election. God's constant determination of the creature requires some form of double-agency. I turn now to a discussion of Austin Farrer to assess Barth's double-agency in the whole realm of creation, and its implications for theodicy.

CHAPTER V

PROVIDENTIAL DOUBLE-AGENCY IN BARTH AND FARRER

Introduction

This chapter sets Barth in conversation with British philosophical theologian Austin Farrer on the topic of double-agency.¹ The preceding discussions have shown Barth's rejection of abstracting human persons from their objective reality in covenant relationship with God and his understanding of the nature of those personal relations. Barth's doctrine of providence describes continual divine agency in and through the acts and existence of every creature. Farrer's concept of double-agency attempts to describe this two-fold reality and the rational grounds on which it stands.² Other scholars reference double-agency in Barth's theology, but only in a cursory manner.³ Double-agency attempts to preserve values of the theological past while articulating them in a manner which acknowledges the benefits of post-Enlightenment thought. Hebblethwaite describes the two-fold aim of double-agency,

...to hold that the created universe has a given and regular structure, necessary for the production of persons, yet responsible for pain as well as good, and also to hold that that structure is flexible enough to allow for the divine inworking in a way which does not force or fake the natural operation of created energies and agencies.⁴

¹ Farrer is notoriously difficult to understand. Thomas Tracy describes *Faith and Speculation* as 'richly imaginative and somewhat enigmatic'. Thomas Tracy, 'Divine Action, Created Causes, and Human Freedom,' in *The God Who Acts: Philosophical and Theological Explorations*, ed. Thomas Tracy (University Park: PSUP, 1994), 79. Buckley and Wilson cite Basil Mitchell's comment that no matter how one arranges the theologians of the past, one will have to finally remark, 'and then of course there is Austin Farrer.' James J. and William McF. Wilson Buckley, 'A Dialogue with Barth and Farrer on Theological Method,' *Heythrop Journal* 26 (1985): 274. Wiles wrote in a more negative tone, 'The slowness of my reaction [to Farrer's account of double-agency] is due in part to my difficulty in being quite clear about what Farrer is saying. He is an elusive thinker.' Maurice Wiles, 'Farrer's Concept of Double Agency,' *Theology* 84 (1981): 243. Nevertheless, Hebblethwaite notes Farrer's pioneering 'application of the techniques of philosophical analysis to the central doctrines of the Christian faith' and sees this approach as increasingly influential in the Anglo-American context. Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical*, 2f.

² Hebblethwaite correctly identifies double-agency as 'the leading theme of the four short books that Farrer wrote towards the end of his life.' Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical*, 140, 167n.44. These books were: Farrer, *Love*; Austin Farrer, *Saving Belief: A Discussion of Essentials* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964); Austin Farrer, *God is Not Dead* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1966); Farrer, *Faith*.

³ Cf. Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God: A Pastoral Doctrine of the Trinity* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 117f; Hunsinger, *How*, 185ff; Johnson, *Mystery*, 135ff.

⁴ Brian Hebblethwaite, *Evil, Suffering and Religion* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), 91.

If the former is achieved, theological personalism need not be set against science, and providence may be understood as at least modern. If the latter is achieved, divine personalism is maintained and many of the theological values of the tradition are preserved. It is therefore logical that both Farrer and Barth see tremendous value in double-agency for providence.⁵

This chapter is comprised of five parts. The first two parts describe double-agency in both thinkers with a corresponding explication of levels of creation. Part one deals with the physical and animal realms while part two turns to the more complex personal realm. In each discussion, I address Farrer and Barth in turn. The descriptions in parts 1 and 2 equip readers to see the particular rationalism of faith described in part 3. Here I use Farrer's concept of 'religious knowledge' to illumine Barth's understanding of faith in relation to providence. In spite of the confidence both thinkers have in their personalist providence, each professes a humble 'agnosticism' in regard to discerning it in specific world-occurrence.⁶ This agnosticism is the topic of part 4. Part five concludes the chapter comparing Farrer's two aspects of religious truth with Barth's two-fold providence. Here, the importance of the type of human participation in double-agency gains clarity.

Farrer's Double-Agency in the Physical and Natural Realms

Farrer's cosmology includes three categories of creature: physical, animal and personal.⁷ Every world-occurrence involves God's personal agency engaging with creatures in a manner appropriate to the creature. Farrer explains the distinction between the physical and animal realms and the personal realm,

On the theistic hypothesis, everything that is done in this world by intelligent creatures is done with two meanings: the meaning of the creature in acting, the meaning of the Creator in founding or supporting that action. Subjectively

⁵ I have encountered only three suggestions to the similarities between Farrer and Barth. Duthie comments on Farrer and Barth: 'Christian thinkers of a very different stamp have come to a not dissimilar conclusion.... If his [Farrer's] metaphysical and apologetic interest marks him off from Barth, his coming to rest in a theology of God as effective and unconditioned will bring him very near indeed.' Duthie, 'Providence,' 73. Love takes initial steps at a comparison. Love, 'Role,' 41ff. Buckley and Wilson offer a helpful and sensitive comparison of methodology. Buckley, 'Dialogue,' 274-293. The dearth of comparisons is more surprising in light of Farrer's studies with Barth in Bonn in 1931. See Marcel Sarot, 'Farrer, Austin Marsden (1904-68),' in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 209.

⁶ As noted in Chapter I, I use 'agnosticism' (not knowing) regarding many particular answers related to providence rather than its conventional use referring to the uncertainty of the existence of God.

⁷ Cf. Farrer, *Love*, chapters IV, V, & VI respectively. Polikinglyhorne misses Farrer's attention to impersonal creatures in his critique, '...the discussion seems framed solely in terms of God's interaction with agents and not with the whole of his creation.' John Polkinghorne, *Science and Providence: God's Interaction with the World* (London: SPCK, 1986), 12.

considered, there are two doings; physically there is but one event. Where the creature is concerned is non-intelligent there are not two meanings, for only the Creator has a meaning or intention.⁸

Here, Farrer uses 'agency' loosely.⁹ Thus Farrer's 'double-agency' always involves two realities (divine and creaturely), but not always two 'agents' in the sense of *personal* action with intention. For Farrer, a rock or atom is a 'physical agent' in the sense that it behaves according to its God-given nature in a world of mutual interference. Likewise, animals act according to their instincts. In doing so, God acts in the behaviors of the animal without interference: 'God uses creaturely powers straight; he does not make them only to twist them.'¹⁰ Farrer rejects the claim that nature is ruled by impersonal laws, instead claiming that the personal Divine Agent rules precisely in the existence of creatures.¹¹

Farrer refuses the assumption that God acts in rocks in the same manner in which God acts in humans. The example of an earthquake makes Farrer's point. Too often theologians 'start from a rash confidence' in assessing the higher designs of events, 'instead of starting from a patient study of natural processes'.¹² When an earthquake occurs, all sorts of practical questions arise: '...how to rescue, feed, house and console the survivors', but '...no theological problem arises'.¹³ Farrer continues,

The will of God expressed in the event is his will for the physical elements in the earth's crust or under it: his will that they should go on being themselves and acting in accordance with their natures.¹⁴

Farrer claims God's agency uniquely suits the 'nature' of the creatures with which it engages, regardless of human experience of the event. Assessing God's 'higher designs' from an entirely anthropocentric perspective goes wrong for a variety of reasons, not least of which is the failure to perceive the varied ways of God's agency.

Farrer's distinction between 'thinking physically' rather than humanly accentuates his understanding of the variety of creatures and richness of God's action.¹⁵ Farrer explains,

...God makes the world make itself; or rather, since the world is not a single being, he makes the multitude of created forces make the world, in the process of making or being themselves...The price of it is, that the agents God employs in the basic

⁸ Farrer, *Faith*, 159.

⁹ 'For want of a better name, we will call them natural agencies.' *Ibid.*, 71.

¹⁰ Farrer, *Love*, 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹² Farrer, *God*, 87.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

levels of the structure will do what they will do, whether human convenience is served by it or not.¹⁶

At all levels, double-agency always applies. This agency, however, must not be seen as uniform, but as relational and appropriate to the creatures' nature in action. For physical and animal natures, the perfect creation includes death and pain as constituent aspects of reality in interaction.¹⁷ This claim illumines part of Farrer's 'theodicy'.¹⁸

Farrer assesses 'the grand cause of physical evil'.¹⁹ The 'evil' arises from 'a misfit between the properties of different systems placed in mutual relation.'²⁰ Weeds kill roses, glaciers pulverize rock, cancer kills organisms; in each case, the creature acts naturally.²¹ The physical universe functions through interference between systems of various kinds. Labeling any of these physical creatures 'evil' implies a personal capacity beyond its God-given nature. With many nonbelievers, the Christian affirms that a world without pain would be a world without interaction. Wilson and Hartt remark,

No molecules would interact, no trees would fall, and no lightning would strike. All these events are perilous to human life, but without the mutual contact that makes up a physical system, there would be no world of life at all.²²

God creates physical creatures and their existence is their action, 'for to act is to be; they are what they do, or what they are apt to do.'²³ These creaturely systems inevitably interfere with one another to constitute the physical world. Thus for Farrer, the question is not: *Why does physical evil exist?* (for the physical world 'inescapably involves it'), but rather *Why did God make a physical world?*²⁴

On a higher level, the animal world reacts and responds to external changes far more than the merely physical world. Yet, the human, observing an animal, wrongfully imputes animals with human personality. 'Adopted by us,' Farrer claims, 'animals obtain a sort of personality in human affection, and a man will grieve at the death of a dog. But that is a human, not a canine sorrow...'²⁵ Pain for an animal is

¹⁶ Ibid., 90-91.

¹⁷ For Farrer as for Barth, the physical and animal levels are essentially the same now as they were in the world created by God before Adam's fall.

¹⁸ Cf. William McF. Wilson and Julian N. Hartt, 'Farrer's Theodicy,' in *CC*, ed. David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 100-118.

¹⁹ Farrer, *Love*, 50.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cf. Wilson and Hartt, 'Theodicy,' 115.

²² Ibid., 112.

²³ Farrer, *Love*, 55.

²⁴ Ibid., 60; italics mine.

²⁵ Ibid., 83.

not a moral offense, but a vital ‘function of animal consciousness’ which aims at survival: ‘Scalded cats and burnt children respect the hearth.’²⁶ As such, pain constitutes both an essential aspect of animal nature as well as God’s providential action through it.

Farrer’s logic regarding impersonal ‘evil’ amounts to a denial of the charge. God acts in these realms as the creatures work in their natural way. Divine agency works precisely in the ‘natural systems’ observed by non-religious thinkers. Farrer claims,

The perfection of the Creator’s management of his creatures is shown by his ability to dispense with anything forced, anything adventitious, in his direction of them. Working in their own way they do his amazing will.²⁷

Unlike the evolutionary scientist who sees only ‘laws, or generalities, or averages’ which bring about ‘the evolution of a biological species’, Farrer sees a personal God who brings evolutionary change ‘through the multitude of individual creatures, by the sum of whose destinies the evolutionary change is realised.’²⁸ The distinction is subtle, but crucial. Creation is affirmed in its goodness, both in its whole and in its components. Avoiding an apparent contradiction, Farrer sees the world as personal while believing in evolution.

When humanity suffers physical or animal pain, it constitutes no offense to providence. Humans’ physicality allows them to interact in the world as an essential aspect of their agency. Humans are personal, but they are not only personal. Farrer writes,

Man, in being man, is both a body and a beast; he shares the good and evil of animal nature, and of the physical too. From the incidence of the evils, he has no exemption; he has a greater ingenuity in palliating or preventing them, that is all.²⁹

Rational humans can and should seek to avoid pain, loss and natural disasters, but they must do so as physical and animal beings.

Farrer’s double-agency in the physical and animal realms carries implications for providence. First, God is not seen as ‘interfering’ or ‘suspending’ creaturely natures at any point. Miracles in Hume’s sense of ‘disruptions of nature’ are

²⁶ Ibid., 88.

²⁷ Ibid., 96.

²⁸ Ibid., 98. Farrer is a Christian evolutionist.

²⁹ Ibid., 106. ‘The natural sets the whole stage for the personal, and the natural penetrates the personal at every point.’ Farrer, *Faith*, 69.

precluded by Farrer.³⁰ God's agency *perfectly* coincides with physical and animal 'agency'. Farrer explains,

The progress of the creative work does not throw the natural order out of gear, nor fill it with irrational breaks, sudden starts, or unpredicted miracles. For then God would not be creating through the natural order, nor would he be the God of nature.³¹

Divine agency does not conflict or compete with natural agency. Seen from an anthropocentric perspective, animal suffering and natural disasters *appear* as evils, but theologically they remain aspects of God's good creation. Notably, Farrer qualifies his rejection of 'interruptions' with a humility regarding the limitations of human knowledge.

Second, scientific research does not conflict with providence, but rather is grounded in God's constancy. Science provides significant insight into the world, despite its common mistake of perceiving God's personal agency as abstract 'laws'. Double-agency, in regard to physical and animal creatures, thus portrays a view of God's personal providence that allows theology and science to co-exist without conflict.³² I return to Farrer's affirmation of 'scientific naturalism' below in discussing God's transcendence. Nevertheless, Farrer sees science and double-agency as entirely compatible, though often misunderstood.

Third, physical and animal 'evils' have always been a part of God's good creation. God constructs the 'field of the personal' on these lower realities. Adam's fall does not alter worldly substance.³³ Death, pain and sickness are not the terrible 'fantastic results [of] simple actions.'³⁴ The world was not magically transformed from Eden into a dark and threatening place by human rebellion. Certainly, human sin brings awful consequences into the nexus of creation, but it does not alter physical or animal reality. Turning now to Barth, we see a similar 'cosmology', with corresponding revisions of Reformed doctrine.

³⁰ Farrer notes the singular nature of Christ's resurrection explaining, 'But no one who believes that God remakes the life of the dead in a new and glorified fashion supposes that he forces or violates their natures in thus fulfilling and transforming them.' Farrer, *Saving*, 81-83. Cf. Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville: WJKP, 1989), 175-178.

³¹ Farrer, *God*, 62.

³² Cf. Farrer, *Faith*, Chapter V.

³³ This differs from Calvin and the exegetical tradition. Cf. Schreiner, *Theater*, 28.

³⁴ Farrer, *Love*, 158.

Barth's Double-Agency in the Physical and Natural Realms

Barth broadly shares Farrer's vision of a stratified creation built from the bottom up by the personal God.³⁵ While Farrer primarily follows the path of natural theology,³⁶ Barth derives his 'cosmology' from detailed exegesis.³⁷ Barth's methodology aligns levels of nature with the six days of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:4a.³⁸ In both theologians, the lower levels of creation support the purposes of the personal.

Barth understands humanity specifically created as covenant partner to God within a stratified creation. He strives to give each 'level' respect while portraying humanity in its relation to God as the 'crown' of creation.³⁹ These various levels are utilized by God to make 'Creation as the External Basis of the Covenant'.⁴⁰ Each day of creation marks the appearance of created beings with particular natures which serve the Creator's intention. For example, light has a God given 'nature' corresponding to its function and purpose. Barth explains, 'Giving it its nature, He sets it [light] with this nature in that antithesis [between God and darkness]'.⁴¹ This 'nature', however, is in relation to the living God. Acting naturally, it corresponds with its Creator:

...in its distinction from Himself He finds in it a correspondence (*entsprechend*) to the goodness of His creative will and acts. In this connexion only that can be called "good" which corresponds to God's will and act as Creator, and for this reason and in this way in a positive relation to Himself'.⁴²

Barth goes on to contrast his view of the goodness of light in correspondence with the will and act of God to those who consider the 'qualities and advantages of light'.⁴³ In doing so, Barth sets his actualistic ontology and its stress on relationships in contrast with the traditional Aristotelian substantialism. Double-agency means

³⁵ Ibid., 32ff. Farrer accepts evolutionary theory under divine providence.

³⁶ A key—and not incidental—exception comes in Farrer's insistence on revelation in regard to persons. Farrer notes this distinction regarding theodicy: 'So far we have proceeded in the main by the light of natural reason...It is otherwise with human ills. No Christian opinion can hesitate to hold that God's purpose in permitting them, and his kindness in curing them, are equally explained in the revelation he has given us.' Ibid., 106ff.

³⁷ As with philosophy or ontology, I use cosmology in an *ad hoc* rather than comprehensive manner. Cf. n.42 in Chapter IV.

³⁸ III.1, 94-228.

³⁹ Ibid., 181, 217. Barth also refers to God's rest on the 7th day as the crowning of creation. III.1, 223.

⁴⁰ III.1, 94-228.

⁴¹ Ibid., 122.

⁴² Ibid., 122 (135). Nimmo helpfully develops Barth's use of 'correspondence' in relation to Barth's ethics. Paul Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 11-12.

⁴³ III.1, 122.

that impersonal creatures ‘are’ in their natural existence precisely as God actively sustains them to be.⁴⁴ Like Farrer, Barth suggests ‘two doings’, but only one meaning given by God, since the non-intelligent nature of light does not involve an intention from the side of the creature.

Barth accentuates the ‘limits’ (*Grenzen*) and ‘nature’ (*Natur*) of each creature. Every creature has a particular God-given nature allowing for varied praise and witness to its Creator. Thus the creation of plants signals the potential not for agency but for obedience nonetheless. Barth highlights the difference in the nature of plants and non-living creatures this way,

Light has only to become and be what it is. The firmament has only to divide. The waters have only to gather. The results of the activity of the action of these creatures do not extend beyond themselves to the existence of other creatures. But the earth...has a transitive character...It produces things that are different from itself....⁴⁵

Barth portrays creaturely life as both ‘produced by God’ and totally natural. As in Farrer’s lower levels of providential double-agency, Barth preserves the full integrity and relative individuality of the creature while affirming divine agency in each moment of existence. The Creator both creates the nature of the impersonal creature and personally acts in double-agency using ‘creaturely powers straight...’.⁴⁶

Later, Barth considers the creation of birds and fish. These animals share the capacities of the creatures already considered, but God grants them even more activity. They are ‘the first autonomous living creatures’ (*selbständig lebenden Kreaturen*).⁴⁷ Their peculiar nature,

...consists of creatures which live in autonomous motion (*selbständiger Bewegung lebende*), abounding and flying. Not by a long way do we see as yet the free decision and action (*freie Entscheidung und Aktion*) which will make man and for which man is ordained as created in the image of God; but we certainly have a first intimation of it.⁴⁸

Barth’s description sets these creatures above the merely physical yet far below personal humans. These animals now have ‘autonomous motion’ and the miracle of this day of creation is ‘that life in its higher and individual form, the animal form (which is also man’s), commenced independently by reason of the fiat of God’s word...’⁴⁹ Note that Barth’s understanding of the various natures in creatures

⁴⁴ Using Brümmer’s framework outlined in Chapter III, physical and animal double-agency always results in outcome E (replacing the robot with an impersonal animal or thing).

⁴⁵ III.1, 153.

⁴⁶ Farrer, *Love*, 98.

⁴⁷ III.1, 168 (188).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 172.

presupposes the nature of the creatures preceding them. Animals have *at least* the capacity of plants in that they reproduce. Likewise, humanity is *at least* the ‘higher and individual form’ given to animals. Yet, the human person is ordained to also be much more in her living in ‘the image of God’.⁵⁰

Barth turns next to land animals. A contrast with these animals’ natures illumines Barth’s understanding of the human person under providence:

If it is true that man, created with the beasts by the will and Word of God, may freely hear and obey this Word, it is also true that he will constantly have before him in the animal world immediately around him the spectacle of a submission to this Word which, if it is not free, is in its own way real and complete.⁵¹

The animal must submit to God’s active will in living. Submission is different and less than voluntary obedience, but it remains the actual activity of the creature in double-agency. Humans go wrong in either denigrating or exalting the animal realm. Like Farrer, Barth honors the animal world as ‘real and complete’ but different from the freedom of the personal realm. This implies a similar logic to that of Farrer in discussing human and ‘canine sorrow’. Animal double-agency is fully honored and not violated by God in Barth’s theology, but it is different than that of the personal realm.

This brief summary of Barth exegesis shows similarities with Farrer’s levels of being. At no point does Barth abstract any creature from its relation to God. While lower creatures lack subjective comprehension of this relatedness, they live in the reality of God’s action in and through their actions. This is God’s providential double-agency on impersonal levels. I turn now to expand the three implications of physical and animal double-agency introduced in the description of Farrer above:

- i) No Humean Miracles
- ii) Science and Providence
- iii) Fallen Creation

Barth addresses each of these in III.3, but the similarities with Farrer’s double-agency help to explain the significance of each point—shared with a post-Enlightenment worldview—as necessarily related to Barth’s doctrine of providence.

i) No Humean Miracles

Miracles in Barth are not violations of nature or creaturely order. Barth clarifies in III.3,

⁵⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, 191ff.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

This does not mean that He suspends it as such, substituting for it His own activity. That would not be to order it, but to suspend and destroy it. It would result in the undoing, or at any rate the ignoring of His creation.⁵²

Providence means that God ‘is the God of miracles’, but this is no ‘magical conception of things’.⁵³ A miracle is ‘miraculous’ in relation to *human perception* rather than a break in the created order. Barth writes,

Naturally there can be no question of His contravening or overturning any real or ontic law of creaturely occurrence. This would mean that He was not at unity with Himself in His will and work. But we must allow that He can ruthlessly ignore the laws *known to us*, that is, *our own perception* of the ontic laws of creaturely occurrence.⁵⁴

Divine omnipotence in Barth can therefore be seen in the richness of the cosmos—visible and invisible—rather than in the Creator’s power against the weakness of the creation. While remaining free and living, God grants authentic existence to creation.⁵⁵ Barth claims,

...although miracles are ultimately unexpected and inexplicable as series of creaturely actions and effects directly initiated by God Himself, they do not involve any setting aside of [creaturely] actions and effects.⁵⁶

Long before penning these words in III.3, Barth had expressed similar views regarding ‘miracle’ in II.1. There Barth claimed, ‘Miracle is not the proof of a special divine omnipotence. It is a special proof of the one divine omnipotence’.⁵⁷ A miracle manifests a *continuity* rather than discontinuity with the ‘one constant life of God’.⁵⁸ Miracles reveal ‘the richness and comprehensiveness of the divine ordering of things, but not that God sets aside or destroys His own order’.⁵⁹ Again, Barth points to humanity’s limited perception, rather than any ‘violation’ of God’s order. Herein lies Barth’s close association between God’s self-revelation and miracle.⁶⁰ Barth writes,

If it belongs to this divine order that He should give and allow us a usual picture of His omnipotence, the not yet complete picture which is broken by miracles *for the sake of a right understanding* and with a view to the future revelation of His perfection, then this irruption of miracle *does not take place outside this order, setting it aside and destroying it*, but it belongs to the order as a legitimate element and member in the right functioning of the order. There is thus no reason to ascribe

⁵² III.3, 165.

⁵³ Ibid., 161.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 129; italics mine.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 27.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁵⁷ II.1, 540.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 540-541.

⁶⁰ Cf. Trevor Hart, ‘Revelation,’ in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 41-44.

to God—in respect of this irruption, the interruption of the regular—a special omnipotence exercised and used in an extraordinary way.⁶¹

Three aspects of Barth's understanding of miracles come to light in this passage. First, miracles belong to creation's one 'divine order'. Second, while humanity perceives hints of this order, miracles have a revelatory purpose, breaking common human *perceptions* 'for the sake of a right understanding'. And finally, in revealing something of 'the future revelation of [God's] perfection', miracles point towards an eschatological revelation of God's order that is true but not yet fully revealed.

The discussion of miracles raises the philosophical difficulty of special providence.⁶² If God does not disrupt the causal nexus, how can one account for the specific 'miracles' in Scripture? Barth's answer does not envision a violation of the causal nexus, but an expansion of it to include heaven.⁶³ This explanation will help to clarify Barth's interpretation of heaven and angels in III.3. While fully a part of the creation, heaven remains imperceptible to humanity. Nevertheless, as part of the cosmos, heavenly creatures can act and reveal in the earthly realm. Thus God directs angels—whose *nature* is to obey perfectly—to behave in ways that *seem* to disrupt creation, but violate no ontic laws of creation. While Farrer would almost certainly avoid the use of heaven and angels in this way, he would likely concur with Barth's expansion of creation beyond limited human perceptions.⁶⁴

ii) *Science and Providence*

Following closely on this first claim, Barth rejects views pitting science against theology. While such views often confuse God's personal, providential care with 'operative laws of nature', 'It is God Himself, in fact, who is the law of all occurrence.'⁶⁵ As such, science grants provisional insights into God's good creation;

⁶¹ II.1, 541; italics mine.

⁶² Hebblethwaite and Henderson accentuate the problematic nature of specific providence in contrast with the relative ease of describing general providence. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Hugh Henderson, 'Introduction,' in *DA*, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Hugh Henderson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 2.

⁶³ Barth's theological claim carries philosophical value. Allen explains a similar move, 'This is analogous to the way Newtonian laws operate within a certain domain (low speeds) but are only approximations to the higher laws of relativity that encompass all that comes under the purview of Newtonian laws and more besides.' Allen, *Christian Belief*, 180.

⁶⁴ Farrer's disciple Allen argues that the Bible's miracles can be both irregular and natural, based on unknown aspects of creaturely nature. These miracles, however, do not interrupt history or the causal nexus. Allen writes, 'There are gaps only if it is assumed that what is true of the power of most people and things specifies the limits of what God can do through other people and other things. What happens is unusual, and so does not "regularly" happen. But there is no disruption of the continuity of nature and history.' *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ III.3, 129.

nevertheless, such insights cannot become a worldview which would mistake God's personal constancy with a mechanical law. Understood in this way, Barth—like Farrer—orders theology and science without conflict. Double-agency allows both to fully affirm scientific inquiry, while simultaneously declaring God's personal providence.⁶⁶

iii) *Fallen Creation*

Finally, in comparison with the Reformed tradition, Barth's portrayal of God's creation is markedly less fantastical. Barth's understanding of Adam's fall does not rely on a magical change in creation from God's good creation to something ontologically different. In contrast, humans live out Adam's 'fall' continually:

[Human history] constantly re-enacts 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.⁶⁷

Barth's rejection of a 'golden age' carries with it the implication that God's work is primarily looking towards the future rather than hoping to return to a past perfection. The natural and physical world in which humanity lives certainly has a 'shadow-side' which involves pain, suffering and death. But this shadow-side is not evil, but the negative aspect of the good creation. The Christian living in faithful fellowship with God *in this world* affirms the goodness of creation as the 'Father's house.'⁶⁸ I return to this discussion in Chapter VIII regarding Barth's distinction between creation's shadow-side and nothingness in §50.

Barth's position, like Farrer's, contrasts with the Reformed tradition. He affirms creatures as ontologically good, precludes *providentia extraordinaria* and

⁶⁶ The example of evolution is illuminating. Farrer applies his thought to his theistic acceptance of evolution. See Austin Farrer, *Interpretation and Belief*, ed. Charles C. Conti (London: SPCK, 1976), 177. Similarly, Barth's discussion of creation in III.1 gives little time to the topic, but does not contradict it. Barth's position is summed up well in a 1965 letter to his grandniece, 'The creation story deals only with the becoming of all things, and therefore with the revelation of God, which is inaccessible to science as such. The theory of evolution deals with what has become, as it appears to human observation and research and as it invites human interpretation. Thus one's attitude to the creation story and the theory of evolution can take the form of an either/or only if one shuts oneself off completely either from faith in God's revelation or from the mind...for scientific understanding.' Karl Barth, *Letters 1961-1968*, ed. Jürgen Fangmeier and Hinrich Sotewesandt, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 184.

⁶⁷ IV.1, 508.

⁶⁸ Barth appeals to the 'Father's house' several times to affirm the Christian view of creation even after Adam's fall. Two years before writing III.3, Barth wrote, 'And man, with whom God in Jesus Christ has bound himself, may count on the fact that, whether he sees it or not, already now and here he is not in foreign territory but in the house of his eternal Father.' Karl Barth, *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie Jr. (London: Epworth Press, 1964), 57., 57. Cf. III.3, 50; III.4, 633-634.

clings to the personal God in Jesus Christ rather than the Almighty of philosophy. Each reformulation has implications for the critiques from modern readers. Specifically, the claim that Barth's doctrine of providence opposes science simply misses the mark and fails to understand the scope of his argument.

Farrer's Double-Agency in the Personal Realm

While double-agency on lower levels insists that the personal God works in and through impersonal creatures, the real difficulties of double-agency arise with personal creatures. Both Farrer and Barth emphasize personalism in regard to double-agency. For Farrer in particular, God and humans must be understood as *at least* personal. Personalism stands in intimate connection to both theologians' discussion of faith and the role of faith in double-agency. While Barth emphasizes the strict link between personalism and God revealed in Jesus Christ, Farrer makes this connection with less stringency and consistency. For both theologians, faith cannot be understood abstractly, it must be faith in something, or rather, someone. While discussions of double-agency may not seem intrinsically connected to personalism, Farrer insists on a 'serious personalism'.⁶⁹

In *God is Not Dead*, Farrer argues that any Christian view that 'does not assert that everywhere and in all things we meet a sovereign, holy and blessed Will' may just as well admit to atheism.⁷⁰ Henderson rightly points out that Farrer's understanding demands that God is 'at least personal' or 'more than personal'.⁷¹ While Farrer deals with personalism in relation to God and humanity throughout his works, I will address three basic claims here:

- i) Divine Transcendence
- ii) No Uniformity
- iii) Accessible in Lived Response

Each of these claims assists in underpinning the type of rationality Farrer grants to *personal* double-agency.

⁶⁹ Farrer, *Faith*, 48. Significantly, Farrer previously attempted to articulate double-agency in *Finite and Infinite* without personalism. Allen explains, 'It is only much later, with *Faith and Speculation*, that he [Farrer] drops all pretense that his reasoning and, by that token, all Christian reasoning about God is done without a commitment to and actual interaction with God.' Diogenes Allen, 'Farrer's Spirituality,' in *CC*, ed. David and Edward Hugh Henderson Hein (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 61.

⁷⁰ Farrer, *God*, 92.

⁷¹ Edward Hugh Henderson, 'The God Who Undertakes Us,' in *CC*, ed. David Hein and Edward Hugh Henderson (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 73, 76.

i) *Divine Transcendence*

First, like Barth, Farrer insists on the otherness of God. God's transcendence does not destroy the relation between Creator and creature; rather, it serves as its foundation. Farrer writes,

We are perfectly clear that for us there is a positive and practical value in asserting the otherness of God. For it means that we exercise our relation with him as a personal relation. God is not, indeed, out there in space beside us, like one of our neighbours; he is at the causal root of our being, and of every being; and it is through our root...that we receive his Grace. But his otherness for us lies in this, that his life is personal to him, it is not ours...⁷²

God's otherness guards against pantheism and assures that creatures have an identity distinct (but not separated) from God. It assures that God's life is not ours but that its reality can be sought after and experienced in the reality of relationship.

Farrer underscores the importance of God's otherness in conjunction with scientific naturalism. Far from seeing science in conflict with Christianity, Farrer claims that scientific naturalism and the personal realism of God 'join hands to place the world outside the personal being of God'.⁷³ Such a claim, however, does not entail a comprehensive 'world-view' where God occupies a special slot within the scientific view.⁷⁴ God's otherness is the foundation of nature's integrity as well as the reason that God is truly the God of nature.

ii) *No Uniformity*

God's personalism precludes a uniformity of divine action.⁷⁵ Farrer excludes the possibility of using the 'physical model' for understanding 'the mysterious interaction between the human and the divine'. He reasons, 'If there is no uniformly-acting agent of a determinate constitution for us to interact with, the physical model simply does not apply'.⁷⁶ Farrer claims it is nonsense to try to understand personal agency according to the impersonal limits of uniformity.

God's personal action corresponds with the personal nature of humanity. While lacking uniformity, God's actions are guaranteed a *constancy* through grace. Farrer writes,

⁷² Farrer, *Faith*, 47.

⁷³ Farrer, *Saving*, 42-43.

⁷⁴ Thus Barth opposes 'God of the gaps' theories.

⁷⁵ Allen argues that Wiles' outdated 'view of matter' leads him to believe that 'the creative action of God is *uniform*'. Allen then defends Farrer's double-agency in a persuasive manner. Allen, *Christian Belief*, 174ff. Notably, Barth's God does not act uniformly, but is determinate in Christ.

⁷⁶ Farrer, *Faith*, 41.

To say that God deals personally with us is not to say that he acts by caprice. The dependability of grace may result from the ordinance of a sovereign will, just as well as from the constant nature of a force.⁷⁷

As such, natural or physical relations are not to be pitted against personal interactions. In fact of experience, personal interactions can be described as *at least physical* in the sense that speech, sight, and thought demand a physical component. But personal actions transcend the merely physical to involve interaction along the lines of 'dialogue'.⁷⁸ God's agency is and evokes 'personal' action. The act and the response it calls forth must be seen together. Thus double-agency implies a rich variety of divine action that precludes uniformity.

iii) Accessible in Lived Response

Personal double-agency can only be perceived in the context of a dynamic relationship. God's agency functions as a call to which humans respond. If God is personal, intellectual assent to tenets of faith is insufficient for the *life* of faith. Henderson summarizes the implications of Farrer's personalism this way,

To affirm God's reality, then, is to acknowledge the divine will and divine action as bearing upon us. It is also to acknowledge that God loves and knows, because an unconditionally binding will of God implies that God knows what possible ways there are for us to live and what ways are best. If God wills that we live in one way rather than another, then God loves or desires what God knows to be best. Thus the real affirmation of God will lead us to the use of personal language.⁷⁹

Henderson's comment links the claim of a personal God with the call on the believer's active life: 'Truly to believe in God is to take up and enter into life lived in a personal relation of trusting, loving, and obedient dependence on God'.⁸⁰ Thus Farrer's understanding of personal double-agency is manifested in humanity's dynamic living out of faith, as opposed to any sort of static Gnosticism that would lead the Christian to claim a higher ability to interpret the divine significance of world-occurrence. Farrer describes the response of faith,

There is only one practical relation of the human person to the divine, and that is the voluntary relation of which faith, obedience, love and their contraries are the modalities. That is why the point of punctuation we have been marking is the only genuine point of punctuation. There are other supposed points, but since they are illusory, the attempt to place them leads to nothing but bewilderment.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 41-42.

⁷⁹ Henderson, 'God,' 77.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Farrer, *Faith*, 99.

In Farrer's thought, the life of faith in and with the personal God must be exactly that, the *life* of faith. In this way, the life lived in faith, obedience and love constitutes an essential condition of rational knowledge of personal double-agency.

Barth's Double-Agency in the Personal Realm

While sharing many characteristics with Farrer regarding double-agency, Barth's *christological* personalism adds detail to his exposition. Based on his understanding of God's self-revelation, Barth ventures much further.⁸² Like Farrer, Barth's God is at least personal. Johnson writes of Barth:

We may speak of God as the inherently personal creator of the world, not because God is "a person" like us but because God is *more* than a person, the eternal non-contingent source of personhood.⁸³

In contrast with 'all kinds of pantheism', Christianity confesses a constant encounter between the Creator and creature. As seen in conversation with Brümmer and Macmurray, Barth portrays human life as a continual decision of Yes or No to God (obedience or disobedience), regardless of human subjective acknowledgement of this reality. With Farrer, Barth understands the ontological distinction between Creator and creation as decisive in understanding personal double-agency. This leads to Barth's understanding of God's transcendence.

i) Divine Transcendence

I have discussed Farrer's understanding of God as Creator being essential for personal relations with creatures. Barth too, understands the personalist significance of the Christian doctrine of creation and its claims regarding divine transcendence. Unlike Farrer, however, Barth grounds his claim in God's personal life *ad intra*. Thus trinitarian theology gives content to the personal richness of God's life, which supports the diversity of divine action in creation.

For Barth, God's transcendence as the 'Wholly Other' serves God's immanence, God's loving freedom for the other. Chapter II introduced Duthie's criticisms regarding the loss of human personhood and the lack of rationality in Barth's doctrine of providence. Farrer's thought helps to explain how Barth's personalist double-agency includes transcendence *in order to* preserve human

⁸² Care should be taken regarding the two theologians' use of 'revelation'. While Barth develops his views thoroughly (and draws heavy criticism as a result), Farrer's views thoroughly depend on Christian content (as will be seen in the final section of this chapter). I would suggest that Farrer's providence would be strengthened by a stronger and more developed doctrine of revelation.

⁸³ Johnson, *Mystery*, 51.

personhood while maintaining philosophical rationality. Contrary to these criticisms, Barth understands divine transcendence as the foundation of creaturely integrity and relative autonomy.⁸⁴ Barth's 'Wholly Other' does not follow a traditional Cartesian dualism in relation to creation. In a dualist framework, transcendence is defined in relation to another, God goes beyond all that which constrains or limits creatures. Barth moves in a different direction, as can be seen throughout II.1 in his discussion of the divine perfections, particularly in his discussion of 'The Being of God in Freedom'.⁸⁵

Barth claims that transcendence supports immanence in the divine *Person*. God's freedom consists of both a positive and a negative aspect. Barth explains,

The loftiness, the sovereignty, the holiness, the glory—even what is termed the transcendence of God (<<Transzendenz>> *Gottes*)—what is it but this self-determination (*Sichselbstbestimmen*), this freedom, of the divine living and loving, the divine person (*der göttlichen Person*)?⁸⁶

Transcendence partially constitutes the personhood and living freedom of God. However, transcendence cannot be abstracted from God's self-determination as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁸⁷ As such, Barth criticizes historical views which abstract the negative from the positive aspect of aseity:

But the replacement to the term *aseitas* by *independentia*, and the content of the explanation, reveal that the tendency was for that which must always be our primary concern when it is a question of the being of God, the positive aspect of God's freedom to exist in Himself, to be less clearly grasped and considered less important than the negative aspect of God's freedom from all external conditions.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Jenson helpfully outlines the thrust of Barth's argument, in contrast with criticisms: 'From the very beginning Barth's theological search has been for a proclamation of the transcendent God whose transcendence is *not* that of the terminus of our alienation from the things of this world, and of the religious quest in which we enact that alienation, but rather the transcendence which limits us *to* the tasks of time, and just so frees us from and for them. The kind of "otherness" of God which Barth is popularly supposed to have carried to an extreme is exactly what he has made his target. It is what he means by "religion".' Robert Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 6. I am indebted here to Magina's reference to Jenson's study in discussing Barth's push beyond Cartesianism. Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life : the Practical Knowledge of God*, Issues in systematic theology, vol. 8 (New York: P. Lang, 2001), 13.

⁸⁵ II.1, 297-321.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 302 (339-340). 'Self-determination' in Barth ties in closely with his doctrine of election. God's being is being for the other. Again, Barth's personalism lies at the heart of his theological enterprise.

⁸⁷ Gunton helpfully distinguishes between 'spatial' and 'ontological' transcendence. He correctly notes, 'For Barth God's *trinitarian* transcendence provides the ontological basis for the acts in which he becomes (spatially!) immanent. If God were not so supremely transcendent of reality that is other than he, he would not be the God who does the things he does.' Colin Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 2001), 196. Gunton cites II.1, 344 in support.

⁸⁸ II.1, 302. The similarities to Macmurray's resistance to dualism are evident; God's self-grounded 'freedom to exist in Himself' contains and is constituted by 'God's freedom from all external

While the negative aspect of God's freedom remains essential, it is subordinated to the positive which Barth sees as decisive.⁸⁹ Both are included at all points, but an asymmetry favors the positive and shapes the implications of the negative. God's freedom is the freedom of the triune God, not a 'freedom' that might enslave God in 'otherness' from creation.⁹⁰

The real claim that 'God is free from all external conditioning' must be 'defined' by the positive aspect of God's freedom as *revealed* in the actuality of God's triune life. Barth writes,

If, therefore, we say that God is *a se*, we do not say that God creates, produces or originates Himself. On the contrary, we say that (as manifest and eternally actual in the relationship [*in Ewigkeit wirklich ist*] of Father, Son and Holy Ghost) He is the One who already has and is in Himself everything which would have to be the object of His creation and causation if He were not He, God.⁹¹

For Barth, God's freedom is the reality of God's being God. This actuality, however, cannot be known to the creature outside of personal revelation. Thus while Barth and others may be in agreement on the negative aspect of God's freedom, they disagree regarding the all-important positive aspect. Basing his thinking on revelation of God's own being without any relation to creation, Barth understands God to be absolutely transcendent in divine freedom. The perfect love of the triune God *ad intra* drives out all fear of divine action *ad extra*.

Bringing this claim into conversation with Farrer, Barth understands the trinitarian God of revelation to be self-sufficient as personal agent *ad intra*. While neither believes persons can exist in isolation, Barth applies this logic consistently to God's personal, trinitarian being.⁹²

conditions.' Revealed in Jesus Christ, this positive reality precludes a thought path that would posit the negative aspect which might lead to caprice, tyranny or raw power on the part of God.

⁸⁹ Herein lies the logic Barth's insistence that God does not need creation. This negative is an essential aspect of the claim that God creates graciously out of a love that is void of self-serving motives. 'But He would be no less God even if the work of creation had never been done, if there were no creatures, and if the whole doctrine of providence were therefore irrelevant.' III.3, 5.

⁹⁰ Cf. III.1, 185.

⁹¹ II.1, 306 (344). Cf. Christopher A. Franks, 'The Simplicity of the Living God: Aquinas, Barth, and Some Philosophers,' *Modern Theology* 21, no. 2 (2005): 293ff.

⁹² Thus while Barth affirms creation *ex nihilo*, trinitarian claims allow him to assert God's essentially personal reality before the existence of an external other. Farrer understood the implications of his claims and set them in the mouth of his 'adversary' in the form of suggesting creation as eternal. Farrer, *Faith*, 159. Farrer rejects the suggestions and turns to trinitarian theology: '...it has not appeared that the Godhead self-disclosed to them exhibits so desolating and inconceivable a solitude. They believe Trinity of Persons in Unity of Substance.' Farrer, *Faith*, 167.

Barth stresses God's transcendence and immanence in relation with finite beings. While God acts as covenant-partner to the creature, this partnership involves an asymmetry unlike creaturely relations. Barth writes,

Every relationship into which God enters with that which is not Himself must be interpreted...as eventuating between two utterly unequal partners (*schlechterdings ungleichen Partnern*), the sheer inequality consisting in the fact that no self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) of the second partner can influence (*Bestimmung*) the first, whereas the self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) of the first, while not canceling the self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) of the second, is the sovereign predetermination (*souveräne Vorherbestimmung*) which precedes it absolutely (*schlechterdings vorangehende*).⁹³

Unlike God, creatures are not absolutely free and therefore cannot 'be inwardly present to another, entering and remaining in communion with him in the depths of its inner life.'⁹⁴ The covenant involves two dramatically *unequal* partners, but this asymmetry is not tyranny. The finite agent's fellowship with another can never be 'in eternal faithfulness and whole-hearted devotion'.⁹⁵ This, however, is precisely what God offers from the abundance of God's trinitarian life. Herein lies Barth's insistence on divine transcendence.

ii) No Uniformity

For Barth, God's constancy differs from uniformity or mechanical predictability. God's identity is revealed in the divine self-determination of election in Jesus Christ. This primordial election—as it is carried out in history—is gracious and, therefore, not uniform. Barth explains,

A selection is made because [humans] have all rejected and forfeited the preserving grace of the Creator as the only condition of their existence, and because it is a matter of its restoration, or rather of its triumph over the opposition raised against it. But this triumph could not take place, and grace would not be grace, if the relation between God and all men were uniform (*gleichförmigen*).⁹⁶

In contrast with the traditional conviction of God's 'immutability', Barth describes the 'constancy' of the divine person. Barth explains, 'God's constancy—which is a better word than the suspiciously negative word "immutability"—is the constancy of His knowing, willing and acting and therefore of His person.'⁹⁷ Those who have

⁹³ II.1, 312 (350-351). Barth amends this opinion and opens the possibility for the positive determination of God by the human Yes in III.3. Cf. III.3, 285. Power-based and deterministic presuppositions can easily mislead here. Rowan Williams makes this point well, 'Power is exercised by x over y; but creation is not power, because it is not exercised on anything.' Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 68.

⁹⁴ II.1, 313.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 508 (571).

⁹⁷ Ibid., 495.

taken the general philosophical concept and attempted to apply it to the Christian God have actually proclaimed the ‘direct opposite’ of divine constancy.⁹⁸ God lives in a personal way, knowing, willing and acting with complete consistency to Godself. God acts in rich diversity at different times with different creatures, but never in contradiction to God’s singular intention revealed in Jesus Christ. This is God’s constancy without uniformity.

God’s relations to creation conform both to the creature’s nature as well as that of the Creator. Barth writes,

...the fact that in His relation to creation and man God relates Himself to them in a way which is conformable to their mutability and alteration is based on the fact that they have this nature of theirs from Him and even in the perversion of it cannot evade that which they have from Him. What is conformable or proportionate to them is so because it was apportioned to them by Him, so that primarily and originally it is based on His own creative being and essence.⁹⁹

As in other realms, God respects creaturely nature. Thus in dealing with humanity, God is ‘not prevented from advancing and retreating, rejoicing and mourning, laughing and complaining, being pleased and causing His wrath to kindle, hiding or revealing Himself’.¹⁰⁰ As revealed in Scripture, God actually does do these things, but in doing so God does not violate some supposed philosophical immutability. Instead, God remains constant to his person revealed in Jesus Christ while adapting to the nature of the creature. As seen in relation to Macmurray’s ‘intention of God’, such constancy does not imply a ‘risk’ to God’s intention, but allows God to actively achieve it, in double-agency, without violating creatures’ natural existence. Barth, like Farrer, precludes uniformity in divine action based on God’s personhood. Barth, however, does this in a far more christological manner than Farrer.

iii) Accessible in Lived Response

Barth’s personal God assures rather than prohibits free and diverse dealings with creatures generally and humans specifically. Farrer’s description of the necessarily ‘lived response’ to God’s person resonates with many of Barth’s claims discussed in conversation with Brümmer and Macmurray. Since Barth appeals to the rubric of ‘fellowship’ throughout his providence, humans must ‘act’ in the non-

⁹⁸ Ibid. ‘The Constancy and Omnipotence of God’ emphasises that constancy relates to the personal character of God’s agency in relation to election, as opposed to some abstract conception of uniformity that could lead to a mechanistic or predictable understanding of God’s agency. II.1, 490-607.

⁹⁹ II.1, 499.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 498-499.

dualistic sense of mental intention coupled with physical engagement. For Barth, God's singular intention in election can be described in terms of 'fellowship'.¹⁰¹ Human faith best describes the proper lived response to God in double-agency. Far from mere intellectual assent—much less passivity—the life of faith depicts the most active, free and whole human life possible. Like Farrer's 'faith, obedience and love' Barth continually emphasizes the three-fold response of the Christian as 'faith, obedience and prayer'.¹⁰² I return to this theme more extensively in Chapter VII in my discussion of humans under providence.

The discussion above has attempted to sketch the shape of personal double-agency in both Farrer and Barth. The perennial critique against double-agency lies in its agnosticism; i.e., its inability to be verified scientifically.¹⁰³ Thus the question arises: Is double-agency a coherent way to speak of God's personal providence, or is it simply an elaborate way of whistling in the dark? Both theologians argue that the answer is accessible through faith alone. Does this imply an irrational belief resembling pre-modern superstitions? I turn now to the topic of the rationalism of faith, where both thinkers attempt to defend the veracity of faith against the charge of credulity.

Farrer's Conception of Religious Knowledge

Much of the strength of Farrer's double-agency lies in its ability to affirm scientific claims while simultaneously asserting the reality of faith. Yet the appeal to faith opens Farrer up to the charge of appealing to 'magical' knowledge. Farrer denies the claim and staunchly defends the rational grounds of his views. In 'Faith and Evidence' Farrer explains,

Without the readiness of faith, the evidence of God will not be accepted, or will not convince. This is not to say that faith is put in the place of evidence. What convinces us is not our faith, but the evidence; faith is a subjective condition favourable to the reception of the evidence.¹⁰⁴

Thus faith does not exclude evidence, but makes it accessible. Like looking 'for a note of music through a microscope', looking for God in inappropriate ways is nonsensical.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ Cf. Busch, *Great*, 47ff.

¹⁰² Farrer, *Faith*, 99. Cf. III.3, 244ff.

¹⁰³ Cf. Christian Link, 'Gestalt and theologischer Ort der Vorsehungslehre Karl Barths,' *Zeitschrift für Dialektische Theologie* 10 (1994): 113; Schröder, 'See,' 134; Wiles, 'Farrer's.'

¹⁰⁴ Farrer, *Saving*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Farrer, *God*, 107.

This claim demands further clarification. Is ‘faith’ merely a veil for speaking of purely subjective—and therefore unempirical—views? Does faith consist of the experience of the believer, so that it falls prey to Feuerbach’s critique that theology really amounts to anthropology? Farrer addresses these critical questions directly.

Farrer approaches the nature of faith with tools from philosophical theology. One of these tools is discerning the sense in which modal concepts are used. Allen and Henderson each call attention to Farrer’s work on various domains of ‘truth’ in ‘On Credulity’.¹⁰⁶ Each type demands an appropriate means of perception; they are accessible in different ways. Farrer delineates four ‘sorts of truth’: ‘... (1) science; (2) personal understanding; (3) formal ethics; (4) religion.’¹⁰⁷ See Table 5 for my representation of Farrer’s four domains of truth. These distinctions are crucial ‘because the subject-matters of several disciplines oblige them to use different sorts of thinking’.¹⁰⁸

Table 5
Farrer's Four Domains of Truth

	Abstract	Specific
No Valuations	(1) Science	(2) Personal
Valuations	(3) Formal Ethics	(4) Religion

Science, Domain 1, gains precision of insight by drawing artificial limits around its subject matter. Thus Farrer gives the example of modern physics. Physics refuses

...to consider anything but the *measurability* of a physical process. Not that the physical process can possibly be nothing but its own measurability, but that the question of its measurability is a tidy question which leads to exact answers.¹⁰⁹

Likewise, the economist or the psychologist dramatically limit the scope of their studies in an effort to gain economic or psychological ‘truths’. ‘Scientific truth’ has many advantages, which Farrer readily acknowledges, but the nature of the truth and therefore its ‘sort of thinking’ has limitations. He explains,

The economist may concentrate on man in so far as he is an economic agent, but if the economist concludes that *because* it is possible to get sound results this way,

¹⁰⁶ Diogenes Allen, 'Faith and the Recognition of God's Activity,' in *DA*, ed. Brian Hebblethwaite and Edward Hugh Henderson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), 197-210; Allen, 'Farrer's Spirituality,' 58-61; Farrer, *Interpretation*, 1-6; Henderson, 'God,' 78-81.

¹⁰⁷ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3; italics Farrer's.

man is nothing but an economic agent and all the rest of his apparent action is economic activity under a disguise, then the economist is a fool.¹¹⁰

Farrer grants Domain 1 a full dignity while emphasizing its inherent limitations. After gleaning information from this particular domain, one must not neglect the need to integrate its knowledge into the wider realms of creaturely life.

The second domain is personal.¹¹¹ In seeking personal truth, it is no longer admissible merely to study limited physical processes; one must concentrate on a specific individual. While the truths discussed in Domain 1 will be related to those in Domain 2, they are not exhaustive. According to Farrer,

I may consider very scientifically a man's economic relationships and the probable psychology of his instinctive urges, but the answers I shall get will do no more than point to what it is I am up against in dealing with this man. I have just got to know him through interacting with him.¹¹²

Farrer never negates Domain 1, but draws attention to its limits. Personal knowledge requires interacting with the specific individual on a personal level in order to gain access to it.

The third type of truth is that of 'formal ethics'. Unlike Domains 1 and 2, both Domains 3 and 4 require valuations. One may understand the facts of Domain 1 in general, and the personal knowledge of Domain 2 particularly, without engaging in judgments of valuation. Domain 3 understands the information of Domains 1 and 2 but goes on to ask if these truths are 'to be approved or deplored, whether the persons are acting a lie or living sincerely'.¹¹³ Like Domain 1, Domain 3 remains both abstract and limited. Its limits allow for greater precision in understanding moral thinking '—the recognition of obligation, the attempt to make moral rules consistent, the problem of particular duty'.¹¹⁴

Finally, Farrer introduces Domain 4, 'religion'. As with the move from Domain 1 to Domain 2, we move from the abstract to the specific. But here, Allen explains, 'As in ethics, we are concerned with values and valuation, but not abstractly. We deal with the entire person interacting with real beings'.¹¹⁵ In Domain 4, the individual cannot simply remain 'the master' of the subject-matter,

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 3-4; italics Farrer's.

¹¹¹ Farrer's use of 'personal understanding' for domain (2) may imply more than intended. Personal here refers to creaturely specificity. Henderson uses the analogy of medical diagnosis on a particular patient, where X-raying people in general will not suffice. Henderson, 'God,' 80. Cf. Allen, 'Faith,' 205-206.

¹¹² Farrer, *Interpretation*, 4.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 205.

but must instead ‘undergo the impact of the whole fact’.¹¹⁶ Farrer appeals to an analogy of personal relations between friends,

Just as you cannot become aware of the personal reality of your friend by trying on him preconceived questions of psychological or economic science, but only by undergoing the impact of his existence, so it is with awareness of your own being and destiny, and of its demands on you. You cannot say: I propose to open just a crack of my mental door and admit only those facts to which I have already issued blue tickets. You have to throw the door open, however mysterious, or terrifying, or overwhelming the body of fact may be that tumbles in.¹¹⁷

There is no ‘neutral’ truth in Domain 4. The individual who hopes to seek Christian truth (a subset of Domain 4) must encounter Christ. Thus while in some ways remaining an ‘experience’, this encounter with Christ is properly explained by Allen: ‘There is nothing either private or esoteric here. The problem is whether an individual person is willing to expose himself or herself to a self-examination in the light of what is said about Christ.’¹¹⁸ The access to this domain of truth 4 is an openness to encountering the person of Christ as judge and redeemer. While Farrer admits that some individuals will reject these grounds outright, he accentuates the strength of the philosophical position:

...on this ground their position is immensely strong and need fear no antagonist. There is no constraint, no embarrassment here; here we can take on all comers. We do not need to worry whether all philosophers agree with us, for the philosophers are for the most part discussing carefully limited questions and their opinion on the total question may be of little interest even if they are prepared to plead guilty to having one.¹¹⁹

Once the type of truth seen in Domain 4 is properly understood and approached according to this understanding, many philosophical difficulties dissolve.

Farrer’s depiction of the four ‘sorts of truth’ demonstrates the need to go beyond Aristotle’s metaphysics and seek a personalist framework that accounts for both the specificity and the valuations required in Domain 4. If his argument is accepted, Christian theists cannot be accused of philosophical nonsense, and the charge of credulity applies not to the Christian but to the philosopher who would ignore the nature of this domain by ruling out its accessibility *a priori*. Farrer writes,

We have often just seen (so we have thought) the inexorable truth that we are rebellious creatures under the eye of our Creator, and that our Creator has come upon us in Christ. Credulity, here, is the crime of pretending to believe that there is

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Allen, ‘Faith,’ 206.

¹¹⁹ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 6.

any way out of this situation but one—to reconcile ourselves to the truth of our nature, which demands our submission to the God who made us.¹²⁰

Farrer's argument is thoroughly personal. Note that while Farrer's philosophical framework could be filled with other material content, he writes from a Christian standpoint and fills the framework with Christian content.

Allen argues that such an encounter can be avoided—*at the cost of credulity*—but the choice to encounter or not lies in the individual's choice whether or not to open her 'heart'.¹²¹ According to Allen,

To open the heart is to allow what is in the domain of value, and in particular self-evaluation, to affect one. One with an open heart may find in Christ and in the promises of God the good that we need to seek. But one without an open heart shall not.¹²²

Thus we may rightfully keep questions of the 'heart' from problems in Domains 1 and at times 3, due to the nature of these domains. Within Domain 4, and to a rather more limited extent within Domain 2, Farrer asserts that the questions of the heart simply must be considered along side of questions of the mind. The mind and heart permit two ways of thinking. Farrer writes,

If we do feel the problem, the most reasonable attitude to start with is that the two ways of thinking which exercise an undoubted sway on the truth-seeking mind both have their rights: it is a matter of finding the proper relation between them, not of allowing one to oust the other.¹²³

The two ways must complement each other without either diminishing the other's importance. Farrer writes,

Unless our minds in fact function in these two ways: unless we sometimes see God as truth, and evasion of him as credulity, at other times the proved facts of the special sciences as truth, and the outrunning of them as credulity—unless this is so, we are not confronted with the specifically religious problem of truth.¹²⁴

Historical and scientific truths demand historical and scientific thinking respectively. According to Farrer, religious truth is a distinct 'sort of truth' that demands an appropriate two-fold approach of seeing God as truth and seeing the 'proved facts of the special sciences as truth'.¹²⁵ Neither is excluded.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 2.

¹²¹ Allen explains his use of 'heart' this way, 'This use refers to what we value and seek to possess because of the good it will do and be for us. It is related to the human hunger or quest for life. The intellect is involved in this quest, but what is at stake is our own person: what we are, what we ought to be, what we may become, what we may hope for...To open the heart is to allow what is in the domain of value, and in particular self-evaluation, to affect one.' Allen, 'Faith,' 206-207.

¹²² Ibid., 207.

¹²³ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 2. Farrer's 'two ways' resonates with Barth's answer to his grandniece regarding evolution noted above. Cf. Barth, *Letters*, 184.

¹²⁴ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 2.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Farrer refuses to align himself with either the religious zealot who opposes scientific claims that conflict with cherished beliefs, or with the skeptic who opposes religious claims that conflict with assumptions of her scientific ‘world-view’. While approaching Domain 4 from opposite directions, both parties make the same categorical mistake of allowing one essential (but not exclusive) ‘way of thinking’ to ‘oust the other’.¹²⁶ Clearly, this line of argument has ramifications for both sides of the divide. Farrer concludes,

But the historian whose mind is open to the fourth type of truth, and who has some awareness of the abyss of divine being which underlies his own existence, may meet a voice and a visitant out of that abyss, when he weighs the strange history of the year 30 as it is mirrored in the witness of those who most intimately responded to it.¹²⁷

Nothing is taken from the other domains, yet Domain 4 also requires personal risk and engagement. Allen explains, ‘...a person who has exposed him or herself to valuation by Christ, and who engages in intellectual work in philosophy and history with a concern for Christian truth is a person with faith seeking understanding’.¹²⁸

Since faith necessarily brings the individual into relation with God in Christ, it cannot claim to be ‘neutral’. Thus when discussing the ‘experimental proof’ of double-agency, there is an awkwardness for a ‘would-be believer’. Farrer explains,

One [consequence] is that we cannot reason ourselves into faith by the experiment of union with God’s will; for the experiment is no experiment unless it is an act of faith. We cannot perform the spiritual act of uniting our wills with the will of a God in whom we do not yet believe.¹²⁹

Knowledge of divine activity in world-occurrence can and should be sought, but the decisive precondition of perceiving that knowledge is actively relating with God through faith. Farrer’s ‘faith’ and the individual’s union with God’s will have a qualitative and quantitative component. Qualitatively, the necessity of faith uniting human willing with God’s will means that faith involves a relationship; either the relationship is acknowledged (through faith) or it is not. But Farrer also leaves room for a quantitative understanding. Like love in relationships, faith can grow from ‘initial faith’ to something much stronger.

The discussion above brings two elements of Farrer’s approach to light. First, while neither the scientific nor the faith ‘way of knowing’ can oust the other, there is a logical priority in the religious domain to faith; it is faith seeking

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹²⁸ Allen, ‘Faith,’ 209.

¹²⁹ Farrer, *God*, 109.

understanding, not understanding leading to faith. Faith and science cannot be pitted against one another, but religious truth must start from at least some form of ‘initial faith’ and therefore lack ‘neutrality’. Farrer writes,

But if a proper distinction of saving faith from pious philosophy is vital, equally vital is a just relation between them. Otherwise the philosopher loses his starting-point. He must know that he is examining or articulating the assumptions of the believing mind.¹³⁰

Second, faith demands that the Christian seek the truths of the other domains. Faith itself calls the believer to seek all understanding. Allen explains,

And we continue to look for manifestations of divine agency because of our desire to be honest, and *because* of our response to Christ. Because we have confidence in the truth of the gospel, we *expect* to find manifestations of divine agency in nature, history, and in people in all times and places.¹³¹

To be sure, faith does not remove mystery, and Farrer professes a relative agnosticism. Yet faith leads the believer to look for divine agency in every aspect of world-occurrence, despite the difficulties in recognition.

Barth on Faith

Barth, far more explicitly and systematically than Farrer, sets faith at the forefront of theological inquiry. While an exhaustive discussion of Barth’s understanding of faith exceeds the scope of this study, it is possible to highlight certain points of similarity and dissimilarity with Farrer.¹³²

Theology, for Barth, cannot be pursued outside of faith. Theology is ‘*Nachdenken*’ or the ‘after thinking’ of God.¹³³ Thus faith responds to the prior action of God and is inconceivable in reversal of this ordering. I turn now to Barth’s use of ‘faith seeking understanding’ in order to outline the rationalism of faith in Barth before turning to his use of ‘faith’ in *CD* III.

i) Faith Seeking Understanding

It is often claimed that a key milestone in establishing Barth’s theological method came in writing a thin volume on Anselm of Canterbury in 1931.¹³⁴ In an oft cited passage, Barth comments on the significance of his study on Anselm this way,

¹³⁰ Farrer, *Faith*, 15.

¹³¹ Allen, ‘Faith,’ 209; italics Allen’s.

¹³² Cf. Johnson, *Mystery*, 178ff; McCormack, *Critically*, 425ff.

¹³³ Cf. Buckley, ‘Dialogue,’ 275ff; Busch, *Great*, 76-81.

¹³⁴ Karl Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, trans. Ian W. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1960). McCormack has argued convincingly that Barth’s own autobiographical reflections on the significance of the Anselm book do not match the evidence in his own writings before the project.

The real evidence of this farewell is not my much-read little pamphlet *Nein! (No!)* attacking Brunner in 1934, but the book on Anselm of Canterbury's proof for the existence of God which appeared in 1931.¹³⁵

Following what he believed to be Anselm's methodology, Barth found a model for his theological epistemology.¹³⁶ The key to Barth's distinctive interpretation of Anselm lies in his emphasis on *order* in theology. For Barth, and for Anselm as read by Barth, theology must be ordered beginning with revelation, then faith, and finally understanding.

The *intellectum* corresponds to the 'rationalism' in Barth which contrasts with that 'conventionally understood in philosophy'.¹³⁷ The key distinction is that Barth's rationalism, like Farrer's, is 'internal and not external to faith'.¹³⁸ Moreover, Barth's appropriation of Anselm can be understood, according to Hunsinger, 'under two organizing rubrics, "no knowledge without faith" and "no faith without knowledge."¹³⁹ Hunsinger explains,

...faith itself establishes the peculiar kind of knowledge that is possible within the web of Christian belief. This knowledge is not neutral, because engagement is inseparable from its content [*sic*]. It is not speculative, because its content is not grounded in possibilities external to its christocentric subject matter. It is not apologetic, because it does not commend itself on external grounds. And it is not systematic, because it cannot be explicated within the scope of a formally unified conceptual scheme. The knowledge of faith might thus be said to be, in various ways, self-involving, self-grounded, self-commending and self-interpreting.¹⁴⁰

Such a description of 'the knowledge of faith' in Barth has implications for philosophy's critique of faith's foundations as seen in Farrer above. Like Farrer, Barth sees faith as a different sort of knowledge than other categories, though this

See McCormack, *Critically*, 412-449. But while the Anselm book does not mark the fundamental divide that Barth and others after him claim, it does reflect a basic ordering of revelation, faith and intellectual understanding that Barth later developed more extensively in I.1.

¹³⁵ Busch, *Barth*, 206. While I am in essential agreement with McCormack's views noted above, it remains important to note Barth's own opinions concerning the development of his thought and the importance of various stages in his development as a theologian. According to Busch's biography, it was his interaction with Anselm that was 'to blame' for Barth's delay in revising his 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik* and his subsequent abandonment of the project in favor of beginning again entirely with what would become the *Church Dogmatics*. Busch notes, 'It was predominantly as a result of his work on the Anselm book, which in the meantime had continued to make further progress, that Barth now recognized that he had to begin again afresh in dogmatics, and why he had to do so'. In Barth's own words, 'Most commentators have completely failed to see that this Anselm book is a vital key, if not *the* key, to understanding the process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my *Kirchliche Dogmatic* (ET *Church Dogmatics*) as the only one proper for theology'. Busch, *Barth*, 210.

¹³⁶ Busch, *Barth*, 206.

¹³⁷ Barth's particular 'rationalism' noted by Hunsinger echoes Farrer's discussion of 'empirical verification' of faith. Farrer, *Faith*, 57; Hunsinger, *How*, 49.

¹³⁸ Hunsinger, *How*, 49.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

difference does not imply incoherence or irrationality. Barth's view is analogous to Farrer's claims concerning Domain 4 as involving the entire human addressed by her Creator.¹⁴¹ Hunsinger describes this aspect of Barth's theology as the motif of 'personalism': 'Truth is not something neutral but something self-involving, and so is apprehended not by a solitary intellect, but by the whole person in fellowship with God.'¹⁴² Fellowship constitutes a key rubric in Barth's discussion of faith.¹⁴³ It entails an active, personal relationship with God.

Barth thus rejects faith as a solely intellectual consent to dogmatic claims.¹⁴⁴ Faith necessarily involves knowledge, but cannot be restricted to knowledge. Barth writes,

...πίστις is the real event which rests on the will and Word of God and relates to the will and Word of God, in which is also included at all events the fact that the proclamation of Christ confirms itself to men, in which men, touched by its truth, themselves become its bearers, and in which the knowledge of God becomes real. Πίστις says more than γνώσις but in all circumstances it says γνώσις too.¹⁴⁵

Faith (πίστις) is an *event* in which humans relate to the 'will and Word of God' (the person of God, not a substance or 'thing').¹⁴⁶ This personal interaction involves knowledge (γνώσις) but cannot be reduced to 'neutral information'. In Barth's view, Biblical knowledge

...does not mean the acquisition of neutral information... What it really means is the process or history in which man, certainly observing and thinking, using his senses, intelligence and imagination, but also his will, action and "heart," and therefore as whole man, becomes aware of another history which in the first instance encounters him as an alien history from without, and becomes aware of it in such a compelling way that he cannot be neutral towards it, but finds himself summoned to disclose and give himself to it in return...¹⁴⁷

Barth's words make the personal nature of this encounter with Christ clear. Like Farrer's Domain 4, Barth emphasizes the importance of the 'heart' as well as 'two

¹⁴¹ It is worth noting that Farrer's use of 'religion' for Domain 4 would be rejected by Barth who draws a sharp line between Christian faith and 'human religion'. My conjecture is that Farrer's use of the term would occasionally cross the line in Barth's view into 'Religion as Unbelief' but more often fall into the favorable category of 'True Religion'. I.2, 297-361.

¹⁴² Hunsinger, *How*, 152. Note that Hunsinger's use of 'Personalism' indicates the strong overlap of 'faith' and 'person' in Barth's thought.

¹⁴³ Faith is the personal response to God's personal grace which leads to intentional participation in Christ.

¹⁴⁴ Barth's argument presupposes his rejection of dualism discussed in Chapter IV.

¹⁴⁵ I.1, 229.

¹⁴⁶ Throughout *CD*, but particularly in volume II.1 Barth often equates the 'perfections of God' (and even active aspects of those perfections) with God Himself. For example, Barth does not hesitate to equate God's knowing and willing with God's 'one total essence', '...we must affirm first that with the two statements "God knows" and "God wills" we are describing the one total essence of God. God's knowledge is God Himself, and again God's will is God Himself.' II.1, 549.

¹⁴⁷ IV.3.1, 183-184.

ways of thinking'. Thus neither thinker opposes science, but rather carefully explicates its limits and usage.¹⁴⁸

While Barth does not demean other types of truth, he refuses to approach knowledge of Christ as if it were physics or economics.¹⁴⁹ For example, in introducing his theological anthropology, Barth describes science and theology similarly to Farrer's Domains 1 and 4 respectively,

To the extent that science is exact, it will refrain from consolidating its formulae and hypotheses as axioms and therefore treating them as revealed dogmas. It will always be conscious that its concern is not with the being of man but the appearance; not with the inner but the outer; not with the totality but with the sum of specific and partial phenomena.¹⁵⁰

He is not degrading or excluding science from a life of faith. Barth asserts the legitimacy of anthropology (and science generally),

...the exact science of man cannot be the enemy of the Christian confession. It becomes this only when it dogmatizes on the basis of its formulae and hypotheses, becoming the exponent of a philosophy and world-view, thus ceasing to be exact science. As long as it maintains restraint and openness in face of the reality of man, it belongs, like eating, drinking, sleeping and all other human activities... which in themselves do not prejudice in any way the hearing or non-hearing of the Word of God, which become acts of obedience or disobedience only in so far as they correspond to the creaturehood of man, which as such cannot be changed by his disobedience.¹⁵¹

Here, Barth claims that the nature of an 'exact science' is to keep its limits in mind lest it expand to a 'world-view'. Like Farrer, Barth understands scientific information as truth in the sense of Domain 1 and therefore meriting respect. But this claim must not preclude the personal, providential God ruling the world in double-agency.

The nature of faith and the evidence which it renders accessible is relational. Faith is not an impersonal 'thing' empowering the believer's life. Rather, faith is lived response in encounter with the gracious, personal God. Faith's response to grace involves an asymmetrical and irreversible ordering. Barth claims that if a person truly believes,

He has not created his own faith; the Word has created it. He has not come to faith; faith has been granted to him through the Word. As a believer he cannot see himself

¹⁴⁸ The criticisms of Schröder and Link discussed in Chapter II do not account for this distinction.

¹⁴⁹ For a good example of Barth's praise of the pursuit of other 'types of truth' (to use Farrer's terminology) see Barth's discussion of 'science' in his broader discourse on theological anthropology. III.2, 23-27.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

as the acting subject of the work done here. It is his experience and act. He is not at all a block or stone in faith but a self-determining man.¹⁵²

Here, Barth's asymmetry is clearly tilted towards the action of the Word, however, human agency remains real. Busch clarifies this ordering,

Through the God who lays claim graciously upon himself for the human, she is so claimed that that claim precedes all her faith. Faith, then, cannot be mere receptive passivity. In faith the human is *addressed* by the God who lays claim upon himself for her in such a way that this God finds an answer in her. God makes her responsible, answerable.¹⁵³

This description clarifies the relational framework of faith in Barth's theology. God addresses the individual in grace. In responding, the individual's own faith is awakened to correspond with that grace.

This overview of Barth's ordering of faith seeking understanding shares a similar ordering in relation to philosophy with Farrer's Domain 4 'religious knowledge'. Philosophical thinking is not excluded, but ordered in a manner appropriate to the type of knowledge. We have already seen the personal and relational aspect of Barth's faith seeking understanding. I turn now Barth's increasing emphasis on the personal in his depiction of faith in *CD III* to understand its role in Barth's doctrine of providence.

ii) Faith in CD III

Faith for Barth has concrete implications within the realm of creation and providence. It cannot be defined generally, but always as personal 'faith in Christ'. Barth states succinctly, 'Faith in Jesus Christ is a life in the presence of the Creator'.¹⁵⁴ It is a relational understanding which has nothing to do with an abstract 'god' and everything to do with the personal God revealed in Jesus Christ. Moreover, this leads 'to certain concrete determinations of this faith (*konkrete Bestimmungen dieses Glaubens*)'.¹⁵⁵ God's will determines power. This power, however, does not compete with the natural powers of the world, it is the power of their powers. Barth explains,

Whatever other powers the believer in Jesus Christ knows...Jesus Christ has intervened for him as the Bearer of this power over all powers ...because it is itself their origin, and that without it they would not be powers at all...¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² I.1, 244-245. Jüngel has correctly pointed to Barth's discussion of the Formulae of Concord here. Jüngel, *Legacy*, 123.

¹⁵³ Busch, *Great*, 164-165.

¹⁵⁴ III.1, 32.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34 (37).

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

While acknowledging supremacy, Barth accentuates not the quantitative but qualitative difference in God's power. Divine power is the source of all other powers; it is essential, they are merely derivative. In this sense, it is only by faith that 'power' can be used in an analogical sense to refer to divine and creaturely potency.¹⁵⁷

The life of faith is intimately connected to knowledge of providence. It is '...life in the actual experience and recognition of His power over all things and situations'.¹⁵⁸ Since faith is the active encounter with God in Jesus Christ, the Creator is not philosophy's Almighty. Barth writes,

And to the extent that faith in Jesus Christ has this side too, containing within itself knowledge of the truth of the Creator, it is the presupposition on which Jesus Christ becomes the known quantity in face of which the reality and relationship of Creator and creature cannot remain hidden from us.¹⁵⁹

A portion of faith in Christ necessarily reveals the reality of God's relation to the world in general and to the human in particular; God and humans are together bound.

Two further implications follow. First, the God revealed in Jesus Christ is the Bearer of the power of the Creator. Thus the qualitative difference cannot be considered apart from the *person* of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Creation understood in relation with faith in Jesus Christ allows no conflict between God's power and powers opposed to divine rule. As faith, this is no assurance of sensory perception on the part of the believer. Barth warns to the contrary,

It may be an open question how far this is visible to the believer, how far Jesus Christ Himself will make it visible even to the believer. If, as believer and therefore not as onlooker, he sees something of it in this life, it will always be a sign... But this does not alter the fact. With or without signs, those who believe in Jesus Christ have to do *ipso facto* with the Lord of heaven and earth...¹⁶⁰

Faith asserts the unquestionable superiority of God's power over all other powers, though this may not be perceived by the believer observing world-occurrence. As will be further clarified, even as the believer searches for 'signs' of this lordship, an agnosticism remains.

The second implication is most fundamental. Lived faith 'is necessarily a life in the recognition and experience of His benevolence'.¹⁶¹ Judging from world-occurrence around her, the Christian cannot deduce God's benevolence towards her.

¹⁵⁷ This distinction is not properly accounted for by Davaney. Davaney, *Divine*.

¹⁵⁸ III.1, 34.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

But faith in Jesus Christ reveals what world-occurrence cannot: ‘the unmistakable fact that the omnipotence and righteousness of the Creator is that of His mercy’.¹⁶² In this sense, faith reveals that the One who rules all things has, is and will control them with a supreme benevolence towards God’s creatures.

iii) Conclusions of Barth on Faith

As seen in discussing Barth’s view of faith generally in *CD*, Barth’s position resembles Farrer’s. The human response of faith to God’s grace constitutes solid grounds which philosophy cannot easily assail. Like Farrer’s Domain 4 truth where the Christian ‘position is immensely strong and need fear no antagonist’, Barth’s position is similarly strong.¹⁶³ Both seek to describe the rationality of the personal and refute philosophical critiques. Furthermore, like Farrer, Barth’s commitment to the reality of the Christian’s faith encounter with Christ relativises his concern for the approval of philosophers.¹⁶⁴

Barth’s concept of ‘faith’ is not the same as Farrer’s in its details. Most notably, Barth’s strict connection of faith with revelation and Trinity contrasts with Farrer’s.¹⁶⁵ While both thinkers base their providence in a personalism, Farrer’s revelation lacks sufficient strength to support his claims concerning God’s personhood. Barth’s revelation, however, preserves divine freedom while grounding his claims in God’s self-determination (and therefore determinate nature). Thus Barth provides more thorough supports for his claims. Nevertheless, their similarity in key aspects results in a similar conclusion *vis-à-vis* philosophy’s critique of Christian faith.

Both Farrer and Barth affirm the actual knowledge of double-agency accessible through faith. However, the firm confidence they hold in this knowledge must not be mistaken for a philosophy of history which claims to comprehend every

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁶³ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 6. Cf. IV.3.1, 82.

¹⁶⁴ Barth’s response to Feuerbach reflects not defensiveness in the face of philosophy’s attack but pity. Cf. IV.3.1, 83.

¹⁶⁵ This contrast can be overdrawn if it is not properly noted when Farrer is speaking generally as a philosophical theologian and when he is speaking specifically as a Christian philosophical theologian. In the case of the former, he is able to discuss Domain 4 type of truth in formal terms that allow for various material differences that might be seen in dramatically different ways by different religions. See Henderson, ‘God,’ 81. On other occasions, Farrer’s thought reflects his own Christian commitments on both a formal and material level as reflected in the passages quoted here. Farrer, *Interpretation*, 5-6. Here it is clear that Farrer depends heavily on a strong doctrine of revelation which involves the self-disclosure of God, though he remains at some distance from Barth’s understanding of revelation.

world-occurrence. Herein lies the reason for and answer to the two critiques of irrationality and arrogance discussed in Chapter II. Barth's rationalism is the particular rationalism of faith and therefore must be accessed appropriately. While critics may not like this thinking, it cannot be deemed irrational solely on the basis of the critic's subjective analysis. Likewise, Barth's constant affirmation of the continued agnosticism accompanying the 'sight of faith' makes the charge of arrogance ill-conceived.

One of the most striking similarities between Farrer and Barth is their assertion of God's ever-present action (double-agency) accompanied by a clear limitation of humanity's discernment of providence. Both theologians mark off the widest possible claim concerning God's providential action while narrowing the possibility of humanity's understanding of *how* and *why* God is acting in particular world-occurrence. Thus I turn to the topic of 'agnosticism' in both thinkers.

Farrer's Agnosticism

Some of the harshest criticisms of Farrer's double-agency arise from critics' displeasure with his agnosticism concerning the discernment of God's agency in world-occurrence. Farrer's account does not seem to answer many pastoral questions arising from human experience. Such readings conclude that Farrer's agnosticism fails to answer the core philosophical or practical concerns that the doctrine is meant to answer. The exasperation of Wiles is palpable,

But in the end the understanding of divine agency offered is so distantly analogical and so unrelated to the causal story that we tell of the happening of events, that we appear to be left without even a direction in which to look to give intelligibility to the concept of particular divine actions of the kind that he affirms.¹⁶⁶

Like Wiles, one might read Farrer's account of double-agency and question its utility.¹⁶⁷

While Farrer's view manifests an agnosticism (particularly regarding a 'causal joint'),¹⁶⁸ he views it to be the logical conclusion of his theology. Farrer acknowledges the limits of his claims, 'Our thesis is no more than that the relation of created act to creative Act is inevitably indefinable, and that its being so is neither an

¹⁶⁶ Wiles, 'Farrer's,' 248.

¹⁶⁷ See Allen, *Christian Belief*, 174ff; Brümmer, *Speaking*, 108-115; Wiles, 'Farrer's.'

¹⁶⁸ His use of the term 'causal joint' is almost always qualified with words or phrases such as 'as it were' or 'the mysterious causal joint'. Farrer uses the term to point to the relation which is presupposed in the claim of double-agency—the prime agency of God and the second agency of the creature. Farrer, *Faith*, 78, 154.

obstacle to religion, nor a scandal to reason.’¹⁶⁹ Given the theological claims of ‘practical religion’, Farrer understands God’s creative action to be continuously effective *from within*. Were we to perceive the ‘causal joint’ between God’s agency and ours, we would be setting God within the world and making the divine Person one of many natural causes. By definition (given in faith), the Christian must profess an agnosticism regarding the ‘causal joint’. Henderson explains, ‘The uniqueness of the relation makes it essentially a mystery, irreducible in principle to any instance of the relatedness among the creatures that populate the world.’¹⁷⁰ According to Farrer’s view, there is a ‘causal joint’ whereby God works in human occurrence, but the joint is imperceptible. Farrer describes his agnosticism saying, ‘Both the divine and the human actions remain real and therefore free in the union between them; not knowing the modality of the divine action we cannot pose the problem of their mutual relation’.¹⁷¹ Farrer does not preclude *all* possibility of sensing God’s activity in world-occurrence, but this possibility is severely limited, provisional and only accessible in faith.¹⁷²

Farrer nevertheless claims that something may be seen in world-occurrence. God’s agency cannot be seen in the divine action, but provisional perception may be seen in *consequences* of the action. Farrer explains, ‘If God’s power is to be detected in anything which science can help us to see, it will not be in the way things started, it will be in the way things go.’¹⁷³ Such a conclusion comes from the basic conviction that God is ‘other’ than creation.

The Christian looks for signs of God’s action in and through world-occurrence, but these signs do not come with a one-to-one correspondence. Rather, the Christian must look to large swaths of history which reveal God’s faithful action over time. Farrer claims, ‘We insisted on two points only: that divine action, to be real, must be particular; and that our appreciations of its particular drift are not in detail verifiable.’¹⁷⁴ In stating these two points, Farrer stands firmly with the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁷⁰ Henderson, ‘God,’ 86.

¹⁷¹ Farrer, *Faith*, 66.

¹⁷² Allen comments, ‘Farrer claims that even though it is theoretically impossible to observe the ‘causal joint’ at which the divine activity produces thoroughly active creatures it is possible to specify some things in nature, history, and individual lives which *manifest* divine agency, such as the contingency of the universe, the general direction of biological evolution, and the history of Israel and the Church. But, again according to Farrer, a believer’s faith is a necessary condition for identifying these and other phenomena in nature, history, and individual lives as manifestations of divine activity and thus providing evidential support for Christian theism.’ Allen, ‘Faith,’ 198.

¹⁷³ Farrer, *God*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Farrer, *Faith*, 68.

theological tradition in asserting the particularity of God's action while distancing his views from that of the tradition by abandoning any hope of verifying the details of these particular actions. Double-agency means that God acts constantly (but imperceptibly) in every detail. Following Farrer's path, Allen claims that any ability to discern God's intentions in world-occurrence is provisional. Allen claims, '...unlike the case in which we can perceive the intention of human agents with ease from a relatively isolated event, such as turning on a stove, we need a large number of events to discern God's providential activities in specific events'.¹⁷⁵ Farrer does not offer a view into the future, but an agnosticism that precludes it. If God's agency is to be seen at all, it must be seen to be a part of a pattern of God's historical constancy, not in the individual Christian's desire to assert the divine meaning of particular events.

Barth's Agnosticism

While Farrer and Barth use different language, they share a skepticism regarding the believer's ability to read divine actions off world-occurrence.¹⁷⁶

According to Barth, faith must

...be content to be a clear perception of individual points and questions making possible practical decisions for the next stretches of the way. It will probably consist less in the maintaining of principles and leading tendencies than in the discovery of a small series of promising standpoints. It will probably display many reservations and gaps.¹⁷⁷

The tentative and provisional nature of discernment stands out in this passage. At the conclusion of §48, Barth explicitly demonstrates an understanding of providence that does not overcome 'reservations and gaps'. Providence allows the believer to 'live with a partial world-view [*Weltanschauung*] which is provisional and modest but also binding'.¹⁷⁸ Thus while providence does not grant a believer a clear view of world-occurrence, it is both 'indispensable' and sufficient for the believer's life and actions. Barth describes both the qualitative and quantitative nature of the eyes of faith, 'Man has always many new things to see even when he ostensibly made a serious beginning long ago, and has thus acquired no little genuine skill, in having open eyes for the ways of God in creaturely occurrence.'¹⁷⁹ Here, Barth

¹⁷⁵ Allen, *Christian Belief*, 178.

¹⁷⁶ Schröder's presuppositions regarding knowledge of providence seem to cause her to overlook Barth's repeated claims such as this one against Christian arrogance. See Schröder, 'See,' 115-135.

¹⁷⁷ III.3, 56.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

simultaneously affirms that a person can develop skillful vision, and that this skill will never discern the whole of God's ways in any sort of programmatic manner. Instead, the believer is called to keep scanning the horizon with trust that God will grant glimpses of the divine working en route to God's eschatological goal.

God's freedom and love prohibit the espousal of a uniform, predictable world-view called 'providence'. Providence's strictly non-apologetic form provides no defense against the non-believer's attacks, which preclude the decisive factor of faith. Human and creaturely limitations do not allow even the Christian to see beyond creaturely contingency and contradiction, much less beyond the contingency which remains above us, but still under God's rule. According to Barth,

What we can see is only necessity and contingency, continuity and discontinuity, law and freedom, which exist side by side with each other and in opposition to each other. That is why God laughs at all our attempts to see His rule with the eye of our human reason, let alone at our efforts to take the throne and play the part of world-rulers ourselves.¹⁸⁰

The contrast between the eye of faith and of human reason could not be more stark.

Farrer's Two Aspects of Religious Truth

In light of the agnosticism discussed above, serious questions arise. Is Farrer's providence pastorally effective? Does the Christian merely project a fairytale onto the same suffering a non-Christian endures? Farrer turns back to 'religious' truth and describes its 'double aspect', the factual and practical sides.¹⁸¹ This double aspect plays a key role in Farrer's 'justice-of-God' theodicy.¹⁸² Farrer explains using the helpful assessment of the life of Augustine. According to *Confessions*, Augustine wasted his youth rejecting his mother's faith before finally becoming a Christian.¹⁸³ Augustine lived factually under God's providence, but not under its practical side and this makes a tremendous difference. Farrer's double-agency claims that God was actively working in and through those rebellious years, however, the rebellion was in no way necessary or mechanically 'caused': 'It would be a blasphemy to suggest that St. Augustine's sins, or mine, had been a positive gain to our Creator.'¹⁸⁴ Had Augustine acted differently, he would have been a *better*, but *different* person. The situation changed after conversion. At that time, Augustine

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁸¹ Farrer, *Love*, 176.

¹⁸² See Wilson and Hartt, 'Theodicy,' 102-103. I return to the discussion of theodicy in Chapter VIII.

¹⁸³ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁸⁴ Farrer, *Love*, 162.

experienced the full, double aspect of providence, both factual and practical. Farrer's providence proclaims that God acts and redeems real persons in and through their personal acts, in making them make themselves. Barth similarly stresses the determinative nature of double-agency in human identity in action.

Factually, God's providential action is real—like divine creation—whether the person believes it or not.¹⁸⁵ Likewise, God acts in every world-occurrence regardless of the non-believer's perception: 'They serve his purposes when they go right, and offer occasions for his mercy when they go wrong. They do not understand themselves; but the believer understands them.'¹⁸⁶ Farrer's description leaves little room for anxiety regarding the scope of God's effectiveness one way or the other. Through right and wrong actions, God's rule remains secure: 'God does not cease to be his God because the man forgets him.'¹⁸⁷

In contrast, the practical aspect 'offers a programme of action, through which men are to transcend their miseries, and enter into the saving purposes of God.'¹⁸⁸ Such a program answers the question, 'What shall I do to be saved?'¹⁸⁹ The program involves faith manifest in trusting God's mercy. Farrer's providence does not 'miraculously' save the bedridden patient from his physical ailment, but transforms the patient's being-in-act. Co-operating with God's work, the Christian lives differently.¹⁹⁰ Farrer writes,

The balance of the world is good to them, though in the eyes of onlookers their misfortunes go beyond endurance. I remember the happiest man in the hospital, lying broken-backed forever in pain on a water bed, overflowing with gratitude to those who tended and those who visited him, and blessing all with his prayers.¹⁹¹

God's constancy *vis-à-vis* the atomic make-up of his body and the cellular reality of his broken bone mean that the sufferer's back remains broken, for God's providential care does not violate the lower levels of existence in creation, both physical and animal.¹⁹² Nevertheless, God's care of persons involves redemption and participation in this work, even in pain, suffering and injustice. For Farrer, this

¹⁸⁵ I.e., if God created, an individual's atheism does not change the fact of his creaturehood.

¹⁸⁶ Farrer, *Love*, 176.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Such a claim must come at the end of Farrer's very real and sober look at actual human pain and suffering discussed above. See *Ibid.*, 161ff. The goodness of the world rests not on casual observation of nature but on the goodness of God acting in and through the world.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁹² Cf. *Ibid.*, 49-76, 77-105. This view raises questions concerning the nature of prayer that lie beyond the scope of this thesis.

makes a world of difference. Farrer describes a kind of universal salvation in a decidedly asymmetrical fashion:

[The non-believer] cannot consciously co-operate in his own salvation, but God can bring it to pass. He cannot directly assist the salvation of others, but God will use other agents. Faith is not a programme for him; but the faith of those who have faith is faith in a programme which embraces him, for it embraces all things.¹⁹³

In this way, a person embracing the practical program offered by God in providence lives a totally different existence than the unbeliever who—while similarly living in the factual sphere of providence—does not.

But what of *sola gratia* if the Christian sufferer ‘co-operates’ in the redemptive work of Christ? Farrer affirms, ‘...no Christian can doubt Christ’s sufficiency’.¹⁹⁴ In the incarnation,

God brings an animal nature into personal identity with himself. But the flesh is not the point of the union; the divine action does not fuse with the throbbing of Jesus’ pulses; *it fuses with the movement of his mind.*¹⁹⁵

The particularity, limits and nexus of Jesus’ life mean that the saving action is ‘developed in discourse, and in mutual dealing with friends or enemies; more especially with friends.’¹⁹⁶ Impacted by this interaction, friends are ‘members of Christ’ and even ‘the completion of Christ’s Incarnation.’¹⁹⁷ Farrer quickly counters charges of the blasphemy ‘which declares us men to be necessary for the completion of the life of God.’¹⁹⁸ In agreement with traditional orthodoxy, Farrer professes God’s perfect sufficiency without creation: ‘God need never have created us, nor, having created us, need he have redeemed us’.¹⁹⁹ Rather, since God redeems us in incarnation, ‘he needs the stuff and embodiment which are involved in a true incarnation; that is, he needs the mystical Church, with which he will appear on the Last Day.’²⁰⁰ Like Barth’s claim that ‘creation is the external basis for covenant’, Farrer argues that God’s gracious decision to create and redeem necessarily involves creation but in a way that neither coerces nor controls God.²⁰¹

¹⁹³ Ibid., 177. I claim Farrer’s universalism provisionally, as he hints at it rather than explicitly asserts it. Here, he speaks of God bringing the non-believer’s salvation to pass using Christian agents in the salvation of others, and the comprehensive embrace of the Christian’s ‘programme of faith.’

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 127.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 129; italics mine.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 128.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 129, 130.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 129.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 130.

²⁰¹ III.1, 94-228.

Farrer's discussion of providence and evil focuses strongly on 'the economy of salvation.'²⁰² Providence affirms God's work in making *persons* responding and corresponding to the redeeming work of Christ; evil is that which stunts and threatens this formation. Farrer's eschatology involves a seemingly paradoxical claim. He writes, 'To enter the mystical body in this life is not the only path of salvation; those who have not been able to see Christ in the world may acknowledge him at the last confrontation.'²⁰³ Here Farrer seems to run the risk outlined by Brümmer above, that such openness beyond death 'means that God does not accept the final consequence of the fact that he has made us persons.'²⁰⁴ On the other hand, Farrer appeals to traditionalists with the claim:

It has been a dogma that after death there is no room for repentance; that we settle our eternal future by the conduct of our present life. This dogma...is not contravened by the hopes which we venture to embrace.²⁰⁵

Admittedly, 'eternal life' presents myriads of problems for theologians.²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Farrer says the earthly life of an individual represents the sum total of time and space afforded for their *personal development*: we are as we live. Salvation and resurrection do not mean people, even Christians, are 'new-minted after the image of God in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.'²⁰⁷ Such a view empties history of meaning, claiming 'God will make sinners into saints, and failures into successes, by an instantaneous act of will.'²⁰⁸ God raises *all people*

²⁰² Farrer, *Love*, 131. Farrer notes this seemingly odd aspect of his discussion and explains its significance by emphasizing the personal: 'The summit of the argument is the soul, or reasonable person, and the multiform evil threatening it.' Only by understanding God's *personal* redeeming purpose can one 'discuss the mystery of his ways with particular men; or how he saves their happiness through, in, and out of the miseries that beset them.'

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

²⁰⁴ Brümmer, *Speaking*, 64. Admittedly, I sacrifice some precision in equating Farrer's reference to opportunity 'at the last confrontation' to Brümmer's opposition to an eternal openness from God (the former representing one occasion beyond death, the latter a never-ending series of such opportunities).

²⁰⁵ Farrer, *Love*, 127.

²⁰⁶ 'The immortalization of our animal humanity is hard enough to conceive, even if we die saints. We are to put off flesh and blood, we are to be remade in the stuff of glory, and *still we are to remain ourselves*...The disposition, the will, the person indeed, so far as personality can be distinguished from its physical embodiment, must surely persist.' *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 117.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* In his winsome, analogical style, Farrer writes, 'No, God has come to defeat Satan in the field of this present age; he has redeemed many souls in their bodily existence; and it seems a lame thing to say, that the redeemed being still too few, he sweeps up the remainder by an act of omnipotence; rather as though an angler, after fishing all day with patient skill, and making a disproportionately poor catch, should open a sluice, drain off the water, and take up with his hands from the dry bottom whatever fish had eluded his hook.' Farrer, *Love*, 118.

from the dead and confronts them in ‘that two-sided fact of last judgement and ultimate salvation’.²⁰⁹

While Farrer’s God does not prompt the fear of punishment as in the tradition, judgment remains.²¹⁰ Faced with the person of Christ, the reality of one’s life will be illumined in all its glory and forgiven its shame. The gracious forgiveness of God does not flatten personal reality shaped in history. Eternal life is assimilation into the body of Christ. Farrer describes heaven and hell in a sermon. Eternal life is an everlastingness suitable to our own nature, such as will permit us, *while remaining ourselves*, to hang on the skirts of God’s eternity’.²¹¹ Later, Farrer claims,

If we have to suppose that any souls are condemned to everlasting misery, surely a striking clock will not be left out of the equipment of their prison; the sound of time relentlessly passing, and never occupied to the hearer’s content. A life on earth continually overtaken by time, and by remorse, is a pattern of damnation: but if we suffer such a hell on earth, it is only for lack of taking hold upon the redemption so freely offered us.²¹²

In essence, Farrer sees the sinner’s life as a wasted opportunity for which he is responsible and judged (though also forgiven).

Farrer’s factual and practical aspects of providence are thoroughly personal. Careful account of both aspects illumines the pastoral efficacy and philosophical coherence of Farrer’s providence. As in Barth’s theology, providence and eschatology relate closely to divine and human personhood. We turn now to Barth’s two-fold providence.

Barth’s Personal, Two-fold Providence²¹³

Barth’s understanding of the single, two-fold will of God runs throughout this thesis. Using Luther’s imagery of God’s right and left hand, Barth claims that all human persons are continually determined by God, in one way or the other. Like Farrer’s ‘factual side’, Barth’s theology claims that all creatures are under God’s providence in double-agency. Whether they confess it or deny it, like ‘every man or every fly’ creatures are ‘upheld by God without being able to do anything towards it

²⁰⁹ Farrer, *Love*, 128.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 125.

²¹¹ Austin Farrer, *A Celebration of Faith* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), 190; italics mine.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 191. The diverse style and volume of Farrer’s writings make the scope of his salvation difficult to pin down. I have cautiously labelled him a ‘universalist’ based on the passages cited above as well as descriptions like this passage (i.e. ‘If we have to suppose that any souls are condemned...’).

²¹³ Since I return to these key points in discussing ‘The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father’ in Chapter VII, I merely outline Barth’s continuity with Farrer here.

or about it.’²¹⁴ Objectively, from outside, factually, the creature is ruled by the personal God. As seen above, God continues to determine humans, even in their rebellion against God, by the negative judgment of God’s determinative left hand.

Nevertheless, Christians also have ‘a very big advantage’ in that they ‘participate in [God’s providence and lordship] from within.’²¹⁵ Like Farrer’s ‘programme of action’, Barth describes the knowledge which leads the Christian to action and participation at God’s right hand. She does not contribute to her salvation, but as she ‘participates in Jesus Christ in faith...[she] participates in the divine providence and universal lordship.’²¹⁶ Faced with suffering, injustice and nothingness in the world, the Christian knows and therefore lives in the reality ‘that his Nevertheless is also a Therefore.’²¹⁷ She can oppose the nothingness and chaos of the world (the Nevertheless) because she knows the certainty of God’s providence revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ (the Therefore).

Clearly, Barth too sees a close connection between ‘participation...from within’ and the economy of salvation. God’s electing will (executed by God’s right and left hand) shape the human person in world history. The personal God does not open His singular will up to the caprices of humans (as in Brümmer’s Game 1), but instead offers them genuine opportunity in double-agency to live in correspondence with it. While this is no magical escape from physical, creaturely or even moral ‘evils’, it both transforms current suffering and leads to very different future occurrences. In one way or the other, God determines the person as she lives her life factually (and perhaps practically) under God’s personal providence.

Conclusion

Farrer’s account of double-agency and its particular rationality offers many tools for a better understanding of Barth’s personalist providence. For both thinkers, God lives in active relation with all creatures, whether the creatures are aware of this action or not. Looking at the physical and animal realms (section one of this chapter) and then the personal realm (section two), I showed that both writers use double-agency as a means of articulating a post-Enlightenment providence. The next sections of this chapter focused on the particular ‘rationalism’ inherent in the

²¹⁴ III.3, 240.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 240, 242. Herein lies the answer to Schröder’s queries, ‘And what does it mean to participate in providence “from within”? That one’s own will is congruent with the will of God?’ Schröder, ‘See,’ 134.

²¹⁶ III.3, 248.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 250.

personalism of double-agency (section three) and the ‘agnosticism’ which both thinkers unashamedly depict (section four). Finally, the conversation concluded with a delineation of the striking parallels between the two thinkers’ explication of the two aspects of personal, human participation in providence.

In the physical and animal realms, Farrer and Barth use double-agency to profess the comprehensive providence of God while reformulating traditional views of impersonal creatures. This revision of ‘cosmology’ corresponds with developments in science and philosophy after the Enlightenment. Farrer’s more philosophical explication of physical and animal double-agency leads to his rejection of Humean miracles, his ordering of science and providence, and his understanding of the implications of ‘the Fall’. Each of these significant divergences with ‘older theology’ is present, but almost universally overlooked, in Barth’s doctrine of providence.

Barth and Farrer exhibit more of a difference in their explication of double-agency in the personal realm. I trace this difference to Barth’s strongly christological and trinitarian approach. Nevertheless, the discussions of transcendence in the service of the personal, the absence of uniformity in God’s personal agency, and the need for a lived response in human perception of double-agency all underscore Barth’s personalism. In this way, the conversation with Farrer highlights the ways in which Barth’s personalist double-agency attempts to preserve both human personhood and rationality, despite critics’ claims to the contrary. Thus it is precisely the concerns of critics like Duthie which Farrer’s thought shows Barth to be honoring. Personalist double-agency attempts to increase the integrity of human personhood as well as the rational coherence of providence.

Having outlined double-agency in various realms, I used Farrer’s ‘Domains of Truth’ to assess Barth’s portrayal of the rationality of faith. Like Farrer’s Domain 4 religious truth, Barth’s doctrine of providence accounts for knowledge or rationality appropriate to the truth it seeks. While his resistance to emphasizing revelation contrasts with Barth’s frequent reference to revelation, Farrer illumines the particular philosophical strength of Barth’s position. Immediately following the discussion of faith’s rationality, I analyzed the way both thinkers unabashedly profess an ‘agnosticism’ regarding providence. Though critics may see it as a weakness, Farrer and Barth accept the agnosticism as a necessary element of their respective articulations of personalist providence.

I concluded the conversation with the parallels between Farrer's 'two aspects of religious truth' and Barth's two-fold providence. This distinction helps, on the one hand, to account for the reality of God's agency over all despite human perceptions of this reality. It also points, on the other hand, to the pastoral effect of the doctrine for humans personally participating in providence.

Throughout the discussion, I have highlighted the similarities between Farrer and Barth far more significantly than I have with either Brümmer or Macmurray. I have done so in the belief that the double-agency of both thinkers is remarkably similar in form. Nevertheless, I have indicated Barth's divergence from Farrer, primarily on the topics of revelation and, as a result, christological content. Furthermore, Barth develops the eschatological implications of his doctrine more thoroughly than I have found in Farrer's corpus.

I turn now to III.3 proper in chapters III-V in order to analyze Barth's most complete discussion of providence in *CD*. I suggest that III.3 read with the tools of philosophical theology re-frames entrenched debates in Barth scholarship and reveals a coherence overlooked by critics and supporters alike.

A CRITICAL READING OF III.3
USING TOOLS FROM
PHILOSOPHICAL THEOLOGY
CHAPTERS VI-IX

CHAPTER VI

§48 THE BASIS AND FORM
OF PROVIDENCE

While §48 constitutes just ten percent of III.3, it holds great significance in understanding Barth's argument. The locus of his revision lies in proclaiming the *intention* of the Divine Subject who acts in election and only subsequently in the *nature* of providential care as such. This focus on God's personal intention and therefore the revealed goal for history necessitates a reciprocal reappraisal of the nature and identity of human and creaturely history. Here I will consider §48 in light of the previous discussions with Brümmer, Macmurray and Farrer in order to trace the contours of Barth's revision more clearly. This chapter follows Barth's three subdivisions: The Concept of Divine Providence, The Christian Belief in Providence, and The Christian Doctrine of Providence.

1. The Concept of Divine Providence

Barth aims to preserve the theological values of Reformed orthodoxy while rescuing it from non-christological and philosophical abstractions.¹ God's sovereignty, the absolute scope of grace, and the decisiveness of predestination—each aspect of Reformed theology remains crucial in some way for Barth. Like Calvin, Barth places no limits on God's lordship over world-occurrence:

Whatever occurs, whatever it does and whatever happens to it, will take place not only in the sphere and on the ground of the lordship of God, not only under a kind of oversight and final disposal of God, and not only generally in His direct presence,

¹ McCormack uses the helpful phrase 'theological values' in his analysis of Barth's doctrine of providence. Bruce L. McCormack, *The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with "Open Theism"* (Edinburgh: Rutherford Dogmatics Conference, 2005), 1.

but concretely, in virtue of His directly effective will to preserve, under His direct and superior co-operation and according to His immediate direction.²

Thus Barth does not ‘correct’ Reformed providence by reducing the breadth or effectiveness of divine control in order to make room for human agency. That said, Barth’s use of the phrase ‘in some sense’ (*in irgend einem Sinn*) suggests the direction of his correction towards a more personal, and less *deterministic*, providence.³ He focuses squarely on the living Subject and therefore, the identity and intention of the providential God.

Barth assesses Medieval scholasticism’s placement of providence under the doctrine of the being of God and Post-Reformation dogmatics’ choice of creation. While following the latter, he does so for distinctively christological reasons. Predestination cannot be equated with providence, nor can the former be merely a subset of the latter.⁴ The content of Calvin’s election and his understanding of it as falling within the sphere of providence interrelate with results that Barth finds unbiblical and therefore unacceptable. Barth’s removal of election from within the larger sphere of providence indicates a strong formal break with the theological tradition. Further, its implications become much clearer using the philosophical tools garnered from Macmurray’s the singular ‘intention of God’.⁵

For Barth, providence deals with the interaction between Creator and creature as such, while ‘the eternal election of grace’ (or predestination) ‘belongs to the being of God and is identical with it.’⁶ Logically, both predestination and providence deal directly with God’s lordship over the creature, but Barth claims that the content of

² III.3, 13.

³ *KD* III.3, 13. As discussed in Chapter IV, Barth’s use of *Bestimmung* necessitates a framework of personal interaction and actually *eliminates* the possibility of mechanical determinism.

⁴ Barth critiques Calvin and many others following him who understood predestination to be a subset of the larger category of providence. For example, in a 1558 essay Calvin spends nearly a quarter of his text defending ‘the secret providence of God’ by dealing directly with issues of predestination. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Calvinism*, trans. Henry Cole (London: Wertheim and Mackintosh, 1857), 44-64. Calvin’s own title for the essay is revealing: ‘A Defence of the Secret Providence of God: By which He Executes His Eternal Decrees: Being a Reply to the ‘Slandrous Reports’ (Rom. III.8) of a Certain Worthless Calumniator Directed Against The Secret Providence of God.’ Dowey explains, ‘Providence is a description of God’s universally although personally active will in creation, while predestination specifically concerns the redemption and condemnation of men.’ Edward Jr. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin’s Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 239. Wendel claims, ‘Predestination can in fact be regarded as in some respects a particular application of the more general notion of Providence.’ François Wendel, *Calvin: Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1963), 178.

⁵ Strong discontinuity between Barth and Macmurray remains, but indication here of their similar formal agreement against the theological tradition merits note.

⁶ For Barth, election is the *opus Dei internum*. In contrast, providence (and thus creation) ‘describes an outer and not an inner work of God.’ III.3, 6. It is almost impossible to overstate the implications of this particular divergence with Calvin on Barth’s whole doctrine of providence.

the former is rooted in the personal inner-being of the triune God while that of the latter is contingent on the fact of creation. Barth thus makes the forceful claim which Calvin's theology could not support, that predestination 'is a matter of the eternal decree *without which God would not be God.*'⁷ Through revelation, the Church can and must know that the identity of God Almighty is this personal God of election. McCormack correctly argues that Barth's election led to his revision of both creation and providence.⁸ For Barth, the crucial error in traditional articulations of either doctrine stems from development 'without reference to the covenantal purposes of God which ground God's creative activity.'⁹ Barth's identification of election with God's ontological personhood sets him miles apart from Calvin's assessment of election as a subset of providence.¹⁰ Barth spends much of the remainder of III.3 explicating the implications of this claim.

Creation and providence constitute secondary elements in Barth's theology, each finding its 'root' in election.¹¹ Barth explains, 'But He would be no less God even if the work of creation had never been done, if there were no creatures, and if the whole doctrine of providence were therefore irrelevant.'¹² While creation and providence remain distinct from one another, together they form the external basis for the covenant.¹³ Creation demonstrates the ontic chasm between Creator and creature, while providence shows God's desire to exist alongside the creature. Both doctrines accentuate God's relationship with his creatures: 'He wholly identifies Himself with the world and man, willing to be fully immanent even in His

⁷ *Ibid.*, 5; italics mine. Chung argues that Barth's christocentric reformulation of election 'ranks as one of the most salient aspects of his revolt against Calvin.' Sung Wook Chung, *Admiration and Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2002), 204. The central role given to election in Barth's doctrine of providence carries the implications of this 'revolt' with it.

⁸ McCormack, *Critically*, 453-463. McCormack's larger claim is that Barth's revision of his doctrine of election in 1936 constituted the decisive move in developing his mature theology.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 454.

¹⁰ Again, Macmurray's discussion of the 'intention of God' illumines Barth's meaning. Kirkpatrick's discussion of 'The Overarching Divine Intention' acknowledges the coherence of an all-encompassing divine intention while also conceding the 'inherent circularity' of its logic: 'No single act can stand alone, outside the pattern, and no pattern can be discerned without a series of single acts linked by a unifying intention.' Kirkpatrick, *Together*, 130. His discussion echoes Barth's own discussion of the signs of God's providence as seen over history. III.3, 198-238.

¹¹ III.3, 6. Barth's claims here echo those concerning election in II.2. Barth writes, 'All the joy and the benefit of His whole work as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, all the blessings which are divine and therefore real blessings, all the promise of the Gospel which has been declared: all these are grounded and determined in the fact that God is the God of the eternal election of His grace.' II.2, 14.

¹² III.3, 5. Barth's larger structure reflects this claim as III.3 finds its logical placement in *CD* III's 'The Doctrine of Creation' while election constitutes the second half of 'The Doctrine of God' in *CD* II.

¹³ Barth discusses the interrelation between the covenant and creation at length in §41. III.1, 42-329.

transcendence.’¹⁴ In agreement with ‘older theology,’ Barth claims that creation and providence describe God’s working relationship with the world. Yet in contrast with this theology, Barth relates both doctrines *solely* to the outworking of the one will of God in election. Barth defines providence as ‘...the unconditional lordship of the will and Word of the Creator over the creature—a lordship which in both cases *has its meaning in the divine election and covenant as its final secret and basis.*’¹⁵ The Creator, Preserver and Lord is not the God of the philosophers, the Almighty or even Creator in general, but the personal God of election. For Barth, creation and providence must find their meaning in that which the incarnation has revealed about God’s inner-being.

Macmurray’s concept of God’s intention gives clarity to Barth’s ordering of providence. In contrast with Macmurray’s less specific description, Barth attempts to articulate providence based on his christological understanding of God’s will in election. The singularity of this intention encompasses all things, but does so with a particularity and reality not present in traditional articulations. In contrast with the tradition, Barth defines God’s will as known and irreducible in election, making abstractions from world-occurrences theologically unintelligible apart from this intention. Election becomes the hermeneutical key for interpreting world-occurrence generally, and human action specifically. All things reflect obedience or disobedience in relation to the living God of election. The myth of neutrality evaporates in the face of the personal God with whom all creatures have to do.

Barth’s repetition of his point about the ordering of providence means that few commentators miss its presence, but the full ramifications of this counter-intuitive concept often remain unexplored. While the material differences between Barth and Macmurray lead them in different directions, nevertheless, the formal similarities reveal the philosophical implications of Barth’s break with older theologians. Thus the conversation with Macmurray regarding God’s personal intention for the world serves as a strong corrective to critics who appear mystified by Barth’s re-ordering of providence and the diversity of world-occurrence under the one will of God in election.

¹⁴ III.3, 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., 8-9; italics mine.

2. The Christian Belief in Providence

Barth uses §48 to set out the explicitly Christian content of providence. Drawing on three questions from the Heidelberg Catechism, he demonstrates the positive link connecting creation and providence to grace and covenant.¹⁶ Here Barth identifies the God of providence as ‘the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ from the outset. Barth then describes three essential ‘delimitations’ (*Abgrenzungen*).

First, Christian belief in providence ‘is faith in the strictest sense of the term...it is a hearing and receiving of the Word of God.’¹⁷ Barth places providence entirely in the realm of confessional faith along with other specifically Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, Christology and atonement. Belief in providence never arises from observation of the world, but only from actual, personal interaction with God. Barth admits that the evidence in the world seems overwhelmingly *against* belief in providence.¹⁸ Christian belief ‘begins where we can cling only to the Word of God,’ not our experiences or observations.¹⁹ Using the rubric of ‘nevertheless’ (*Trotzdem*), Barth accentuates the distance between faith arising from divine action and a ‘pious’ belief rooted in any created reality.²⁰ Historically, the same error has taken many shapes:

...from an orthodoxy which lost its inward context, by way of a Pietism which exalted the Christian subject to be the measure of all things, to the Rationalism which will listen only to the human subject as such and the expression of his own opinions, postulates and hypotheses.²¹

These approaches fail to express a theological view, because they each ground their views not in the divine but the human subject. The result, though varied in its forms, is not personal providence, but an anthropocentric world-view (*Weltanschauung*).

This ‘delimitation’ bears strong resemblance to the type of knowledge described in Farrer’s Domain 4 discussed above. Thus Christians must believe in a manner appropriate to the subject. ‘Hearing and receiving the Word of God’, the Christian cannot neutrally believe in providence, but must ‘undergo the impact of the whole fact.’²² In both cases, faith is not set over and against natural knowledge, as if

¹⁶ Barth’s claim resembles his lectures given on the Heidelberg Catechism in 1947. This comes as no surprise as *KD* III.3 was completed just three years later in 1950. Barth, *Heidelberg*, 57-63.

¹⁷ III.3, 15.

¹⁸ Barth maintains his polemic against natural theology, here taking the shape of rejecting human attempts to read providence from world-occurrence.

¹⁹ III.3, 16.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Farrer, *Interpretation*, 5.

it could either deny or be denied in a showdown of views. Rather, faith bears testimony to God as Subject and humanity interacting with that Subject in the totality of its being. In Barth, as in Farrer, personalist tools open the way for a contemporary articulation of providence.

Second, Christian belief in providence is ‘simply and directly faith in God Himself, in God as the Lord of His creation watching, willing and working above and in world-occurrence.’²³ Here Barth begins to develop the connection between God’s work and the world in double-agency. God’s lordship over creation ‘takes place in the world, but is concealed in world-occurrence as such, and therefore cannot be perceived or read off from this.’²⁴ As for Farrer, universal double-agency for Barth entails agnosticism. Instead of a master-key, the *person* of Jesus Christ reveals God’s lordship. Just as he accentuates God as Subject creating and giving faith in his first delimitation, so in his second delimitation Barth precludes any other objects of faith: ‘Hence the object of the belief in providence can only be God Himself, as God Himself in His revelation in Jesus Christ is its only basis.’²⁵

Here lies the crux of the second delimitation. Human existence inevitably, and rightly, leads to inquiry into the meaning and patterns of history. These investigations grant *provisional* understanding, but none is ultimate, none the object of faith. Barth uses Luther’s ‘masks of God’ referring to scientific, economic, and social patterns in history. Wrongly understood, these masks become idols, replacing the personal God behind them.²⁶ They prompt individuals to hide behind ‘isms’ and conceal themselves from God and others, turning the personal world into an impersonal machine.²⁷ While Hegel, Lessing, Marx and even Christian thinkers offer helpful insights, their theories are not providence but creaturely ideas under providence. Seen improperly, otherwise helpful theories inhibit rather than increase understanding: ‘If [the ism] fills and dominates his vision, it thus blinds him to God and makes him unfit for that intercourse with His providence.’²⁸ Describing faith’s rationalism, Barth neither opposes other ‘types of knowledge’ nor excludes the possibility of seeing ‘God as truth and evasion of him as credulity’.²⁹ In this way,

²³ III.3, 18.

²⁴ Ibid., 19-20.

²⁵ Ibid., 20.

²⁶ Love misses the centrality of personalism in his otherwise helpful dissertation, lamenting the absence of a world-view in III.3. Love, ‘Role’, 458.

²⁷ III.3, 21.

²⁸ Ibid., 23. Like Domain 4 knowledge, Barth’s doctrine of providence is only ‘accessible’ through faith. The ‘ism’ blinds the human from the personal God.

²⁹ Farrer, *Interpretation*, 2.

Barth (like Farrer) encourages research and investigations of all types, while emphasizing the personal nature of belief in providence.

Barth's third and 'most important' delimitation focuses on the incarnation. Barth identifies the providential God with 'the Word which became flesh and is called Jesus Christ.'³⁰ In a formal break from traditional orthodoxy, Barth starts not with Creator or creation, but with revelation in Jesus Christ: 'The question whether there is in this relationship a Lord, and who this Lord is, is settled before it is asked.'³¹ As with Farrer's, Barth's providence is not a subject to master, but a living relationship whereby the Christian must 'undergo the impact of the whole fact'.³² The person of God revealed in Jesus is the categorical divide between religio-philosophical systems and the Christian belief in providence. For those who note formal similarities between other religions (notably post-Christian Judaism and Islam) and Christianity, Barth argues that commonalities reveal themselves to be inconsequential in light of the distinction between a God with an 'obscure and hidden character' and the personal God revealed in Jesus.³³

Since faith is personal and self-involving, the order of knowledge differs. Barth writes, 'The Christian belief does not gaze into the void, into obscurity, into a far distance, height or depth, when it knows and confesses God as the Lord of the history of created being. It really knows this God, and therefore His rule.'³⁴ From this particularity, Barth progresses to the wider, more veiled areas of divine-creaturely interaction. In Jesus Christ, we see 'God with us' and 'God for us.' This one God is God in eternity and the character revealed in Christ necessarily corresponds with the 'God over us.'³⁵ None of this negates the formal reality of God's 'majesty, transcendence and lordship over His creature,' but it precludes divine tyranny or caprice. The order is crucial:

The One who is for us as the Son is over us as the Father. As God has elected to be for us in His Son, He has elected Himself our Father and us His children. We are

³⁰ III.3, 26.

³¹ Ibid., 27.

³² Farrer, *Interpretation*, 5.

³³ III.3, 28. For example, Zwemer states, 'Islam is indeed in many respects the Calvinism of the Orient.' Samuel Zwemer, 'Calvinism and the World of Islam' as quoted in Lorraine Boettner, *The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1932), 318. Barth might perhaps acknowledge the claim but only in order to explicate his break with Calvin on the subject.

³⁴ III.3, 28.

³⁵ Ibid., 29.

not in strange hands, nor are we strangers, when He is over us as our Creator and we are under Him as His children.³⁶

The shift away from mechanical and towards personal terminology transforms the discussion. Personal knowledge is decisive. Gracious election thoroughly determines both God's internal triune being and God's external work in the world. God cannot be other than our Father, and we God's children: 'Even as our Creator He is not alien and ungracious, but gracious.'³⁷ As election precedes creation, it *inherently* reflects the nature and intent of the Creator towards the creature.³⁸ Contra Brümmer's model which may represent in general the logic of the tradition Barth breaks with, Barth claims that God elected creatures into covenant relationship *before* creation. Thus the identity of both Creator and creature begins before creaturely existence, much less creaturely choice. Barth sums up the negative aspect of his delimitations: 'We are not only not obliged but forbidden to use a non-Christian concept of God, i.e., a concept which does not rest on a christological basis.'³⁹

As with Farrer, Barth's doctrine of providence must be seen through 'the eyes of faith.' Moreover, this faith looks not on the blueprints of history or a 'universal plan,' but at the person of God in Jesus Christ. Barth's belief in providence offers a rather modest philosophy of history (even in comparison with Macmurray), but strengthens the doctrine with a dramatically increased clarity regarding the God of election revealed in Jesus Christ. While these delimitations all helpfully contribute to Barth's revision of providence, their development of the importance of the first and second Persons of the Trinity calls attention to the relative absence of the Holy Spirit in the discussion.

3. The Christian Doctrine of Providence

Barth concludes §48 describing the relationship between creaturely occurrence and covenant history in the context of revelation. Barth makes the audacious claim, '*It is quite plain what God wills* as the Lord of the being created by

³⁶ Ibid. Mangina notes that Barth's use of fatherly imagery 'echoes the language of the Lord's Prayer' and signals his rejection of a 'zero-sum game' regarding agency. Mangina, *Witness*, 99.

³⁷ III.3, 28.

³⁸ This parallels Macmurray's logic discussed in Chapter IV. Macmurray argues that all creaturely activity must ultimately contribute to the realization of God's intention because 'his intention is embodied in their nature. To act in defiance of the will of God is to intend the impossible.' Macmurray, *Clue*, 95.

³⁹ III.3, 30.

Him'.⁴⁰ Unlike discussions seeking specific divine intentions corresponding to specific world-occurrence (e.g., Why did God will John's cancer? Why did God will the tsunami? etc.), what God wills is election, and God carries out that singular will in every aspect of creation and history. At this center, Barth claims, '...there is for it no obscurity concerning the nature and will and work of the Lord of history, no ambiguity concerning His character and purpose, and no doubt as to His ability to see to His own glory in this history.'⁴¹ In light of God's revealed will, the mystery of *how* God works in the world becomes more mysterious, while ultimate questions gain clarity.

Barth situates God's covenant and salvation history in world history. Like an 'astonishingly thin line', salvation history runs within the totality of all creaturely existence.⁴² Innumerable other lines run around, against and over it, but ultimately these other lines 'can have no other starting-point or goal than the one divine will of grace.'⁴³ Macmurray's law of self-frustration brings conceptual clarity to this discussion. For Macmurray, those opposing God's will ultimately bear witness to it in spite of their intention. For Barth, faith professes that, regardless of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, this thin line determines all history. This correlation between salvation history and creaturely history cannot contribute but only *correspond* to God's salvific work. Between the starting-point of creation and God's goal,

...man as a creature would be able to cling only to the identity of God and therefore the parallelism of his own being as a creature with history in covenant with God, but not to a positive significance of his creaturely history for the other [covenant history].⁴⁴

Barth's determination to avoid Pelagianism may lead to misinterpretation of this statement. The contrast between Brümmer's Game 1 and my adaptation seen in Game 3 helps to illustrate the logic of Barth's doctrine of providence, with its corresponding eschatology. While humans cannot contribute to (or thwart) the completion of the covenant, according to Barth's wider argument their history *coram Deo* witnesses in this world and carries its reality, determined by God, eternally.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 33; italics mine.

⁴¹ Ibid., 34.

⁴² Ibid., 36.

⁴³ Ibid. Barth will return to the importance of this starting-point and goal for all of history in his various discussions of the limits of human life between birth and death. The latter pair reflects the ultimate reality of the former pair.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 39.

If creaturely occurrence properly corresponds to covenant, God determines this correspondence, and it is no less miraculous than creation itself.⁴⁵ That said, Barth leaves more room for creaturely participation than most in the Reformed Tradition.

If in its continued existence the creature may serve the will of God in His covenant, grace and salvation, it does this in the individuality and particularity given it with its creation by God, in the freedom and activity corresponding to its particular nature. The creatures of the earth thus live their own lives.⁴⁶

Individual correspondence is real. The creature can act ‘according to its own manner and freedom’, but never in isolation (as presumed in Brümmer’s frameworks).⁴⁷ In accord with his actualistic ontology, Barth claims the creature is most free and spontaneous *in proper relation* to God. Barth allows for the self-determination of the individual and the divine determination. As with Farrer, the double-agency of providence precludes sole-causality (*Alleinwirksamkeit*) on the part of God; human agency is real, though never solitary. Webster helpfully describes Barth’s view of freedom this way,

Christian freedom is not absolute, a-topic independence, unconditioned possibility. It is, on the contrary, ‘our deliverance from the ocean of unlimited possibilities by transference to the rock of the one necessity which as such is [the] only possibility.’⁴⁸

Thus the Christian experiences real freedom and self-determination through intentional obedience to God. Barth expresses this reality in paradoxical language: God ‘has seized man, or rather freed him’ for God’s lordship, and humanity ‘is apprehended and freed by the Word of God.’⁴⁹ Human freedom can only be understood *in relationship* with God.

Barth broaches the subject of limits and freedom, both in God and creatures. Unlike many before him, Barth speaks of a ‘*self-evident limit* in [God’s] own being, in the unity and steadfastness of His will, in His own glory and mercy, in the immutability of His purpose.’⁵⁰ God’s ‘limits’ are self-determined by God. While

⁴⁵ Ibid., 41-42. While speaking specifically of the integration and co-ordination of creatures into the covenant of grace (rather than providence in general), Barth echoes Calvin’s claim, ‘We see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception.’ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvi, 1.

⁴⁶ III.3, 42.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Webster, *Moral*, 111.

⁴⁹ III.3, 28, 24.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 43; italics mine. McCormack clarifies that it is Barth’s rejection of metaphysics that allows him to define omnipotence as God’s self-limitation rather than allowing omnipotence to preclude such self-limitation. McCormack, *Actuality*, 26.

Barth continues to find words such as omnipotent and sovereign useful in providence, the revealed personality of God re-defines them:

He has revealed Himself as the One who in essence is free, sovereign and omnipotent grace...This is the eternal glory of God revealed in His Word. This, revealed yet again in His Word, is His glory as Lord of the history of His creature.⁵¹

God remains always free, but *cannot* act in contradiction to the divine will. For Barth, God's 'freedom' is determinate in Jesus Christ, and this constitutes a positive aspect of the divine Agent. While Barth's language seems similar to that of other views, God's personal will historically revealed in Jesus Christ removes the possibility of God acting to the contrary. This christological specificity precludes any possibility for tyranny or caprice in a way that formally similar views cannot. For Barth, God's freedom does not imply an ability to act arbitrarily or in contradiction to this personal identity.⁵² There can be no *Deus absconditus* (hidden God). This self-determination allows Brümmer's framework of Game 2 to be adapted to our Game 3 without making God into a 'robot'.

By identifying God's will with election in Jesus Christ, Barth removes the complexity, mystery and multiplicity of providence. God no longer wills this or that occurrence in abstraction from history. Instead, all occurrences remain under God's sovereignty and are actively 'determined' in correspondence to this singular will. Freely or inadvertently, positively or negatively, openly or obscurely, every detail of world-occurrence is 'determined' by the living God in its correspondence or lack of correspondence to election in Jesus Christ. Here Macmurray's description of creaturely action as free or self-frustrating helps in explicating the philosophical coherence of inadvertent, negative or obscure witness and correspondence to God's will.

While never constructing a complete system or perfect analogy, Barth gives the creation and the human creature in particular an important role in the work of

⁵¹ III.3, 34. Zachman correctly identifies the impact of Barth's christocentrism on his vocabulary in responding to Schröder (in a way that bears equally well on Davaney's critique): 'Far from embracing a concept of God connected with power and lordship...Barth offers a thorough and radical critique of the traditional view of divine lordship and power, and categorically rejects the way Calvin and the orthodox understood both concepts.' Randall C. Zachman, 'Response to "I See Something You Don't See",' in *FSW*, ed. George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 139.

⁵² Barth's revolt against metaphysical conceptions of freedom can be seen throughout *CD*. The 'metaphysical prelude' positing a *liberum arbitrium* to ground the claim of both the fall of humanity and that of the angels is specifically dismissed in §51. III.3, 531. Such an understanding of freedom would allow for the kind of dualism that III.3 attempts to exclude from providence. *Das Nichtige* and the good creation must not be understood along these lines, rather, election determines the particular existence of both though in very different ways. I return to this discussion below in Chapter VIII.

God. Drawing on Calvin's dramatic description, Barth calls creation the '*theatrum gloriae Dei*'.⁵³ Creaturely existence serves as the stage on which God enacts his gracious election; creation is the external basis of covenant.⁵⁴ World history intersects in various ways with salvation history, so that the two must be considered together, yet without identification of one with the other. The relationship is like a mirror as pictured in I Corinthians 13:12. As the internal and external bases of God's will, both creaturely occurrence and divine rule relate to the same ultimate purpose, but there remains a proper ordering. Barth draws on Chalcedonian Christology as an analogy for the coordination between covenantal history and world-occurrence: 'The contrast and connexion of heaven and earth, of the inconceivable and conceivable world, is not the same as that of God and man in Jesus Christ; but it is similar.'⁵⁵ The reality and certainty of God's purpose in the covenant unites creaturely history with covenant history. Like Christology, the mystery of the relation between the two realities is not erased; divine and human remain together without confusion or separation. Aware of the dangers of dualism, Barth attempts to draw on christological resources in constructing a doctrine of providence.

Conclusion

This chapter argues that Barth's personalist articulation of providence emerges strongly at the start of III.3. Dividing §48 into three parts, Barth significantly revises traditional articulations of providence by underscoring the personal identity of God revealed in Christ. In section one, I use Macmurray's 'singular intention of God' to develop the far-reaching implications of Barth's reordering of providence and election. Seen this way, Barth's claim that without election 'God would not be God' gains clarity. In section two, I analyze Barth's continued personalist revision in his three 'delimitations' used to guard providence against impersonal abstraction. Here Farrer's Domain 4 'religious knowledge' highlights Barth's particular rationalism. Emphasizing the necessity of faith in accessing knowledge of providence, Barth precludes neutrality and requires human self-involvement. Barth's connection of belief in providence with 'God Himself' sets providence apart from other types of knowledge without sacrificing rationality.

⁵³ Ibid., 47. Barth returns to his theatrical imagery in discussing 'The Divine Ruling' and the limitations of human life. See III.3, 232ff.

⁵⁴ III.3, 94ff.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 49. Barth's distinctive understanding of Heaven and its ambassadors plays a role in his providence doctrine as we will see in discussing §51.

Using a personalist approach, Barth argues for the provisional utility of other types of knowledge while prohibiting impersonal ‘world-views’ from replacing the providential God.

Barth’s christocentrism shines throughout §48. The person of Jesus Christ is the person of God. Thus, in contrast with writers like Macmurray, Barth fills his personalist providence with christological content in a way that results in a modest philosophy of history. Having laid the personalist foundations of his providence, Barth describes the relational reality of limited humans in covenant with the self-determined God. Returning to the discussion of Game 3 and Macmurray’s law of self-frustration, we can see that Barth describes providence as God’s determinative agency, in one way or another, to witness to God’s electing intention. The preceding chapters illumine Barth’s personalist revision of providence in its profundity and guard against readings which deem it either incoherent or merely a repetition of Reformed orthodoxy. Turning now to §49, I continue my deployment of personalist tools in interpreting Barth’s detailed description of ‘God the Father as Lord of His Creature’.

CHAPTER VII

§49 GOD THE FATHER AS LORD OF HIS CREATURE

In §48, Barth asserts that election shapes providence from the outset. In §49, he details the outworking of this claim. The editors of the English edition write, '[P]rovidence is thus to be understood on the presupposition of the election of grace fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the covenant of grace concretely actualised in salvation history.'¹ This close relationship means that providence necessarily mirrors Barth's significant modifications to election, in spite of his appropriation of 'older theology's' terminology and structure. Barth follows the traditional three-fold division of providence utilizing the terms *conservatio*, *concursus* and *gubernatio*, but substitutes more personal terminology for his guiding concepts and subsection headings. Thus Barth introduces §49, 'God fulfils His fatherly lordship over His creature by preserving, accompanying and ruling the whole course of its earthly existence.'²

1. Divine Preserving (*Conservatio*)

Barth addresses preservation first. Preservation guarantees the creature's reality and co-existence with the Creator. It consists in the continual, dynamic decision of God to preserve the creature in God's 'free and unmerited goodness.'³ While generalized preservation may not seem contentious, the lens of election gives it contours unseen by or even opposed to traditional concepts. Barth elucidates four aspects of christological preservation.

i) Human Mortality

First, God preserves the creature *in its limitations* eternally. This logically continues his polemic against creaturely/human immortality in III.2.⁴ Barth writes,

¹ Ibid., ix.

² Ibid., 58.

³ Ibid., 60.

⁴ See III.2, 587ff, 632ff. McDowell argues convincingly against interpreting Barth's eschatology based on an immortality of the soul model. John C. McDowell, *Hope in Barth's Eschatology : Interrogations and Transformations Beyond Tragedy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), 127ff. McDowell emphasizes the christologically personal character of Barth's eschatology. McDowell, *Hope*, 136ff.

Everything has its own time and no more than that time...all created being as such, is a limited being. To no creature does it belong to be endless, omnipresent or enduring. The preservation which God grants to the creature is the preservation of its limited being.⁵

Limits, natural death and the end of creaturely time each partially constitutes creaturely perfection. Eternal life is not more time for the individual. Connecting these limits to agency in history, Barth adds a covenantal dimension to his insistence on limits. Farrer's positive explication of limits in creaturely action illumines Barth's rejection of eternal life as limitless immortality. Barth writes,

Creaturely history can take place only amongst and on behalf of a plurality of many subjects which exist side by side with and in succession to each other. A creature which had an infinite existence would as such be excluded from the history of the covenant of grace which is the meaning of all creaturely occurrence.⁶

Barth sees what the 'presuppositions' of older dogmatics blinded them to; namely, that creaturely mortality, though negative, is not a curse.⁷ The limited time and space of creaturely life, including death and the 'passing of the individual and of creation as a whole', *allows* creatures to 'participate in the history of Jesus Christ and His people, and therefore in eternal life.'⁸ Starting with creaturely limitations, Barth sets his *conservatio* in contrast with traditional claims. As in philosophical theology, personal agency requires limits. Barth draws this same connection and implies an eschatological vision which differs dramatically from historic views. He thus opens the way for genuine personal agency in this world in part by eliminating it in 'eternal life.'

ii) *Mediated Preservation*

Second, God uses creation itself as 'the means by which it is preserved in being.'⁹ Though 'wholly and utterly as a free act of God', divine preservation is *indirect and mediate* through creation itself: God 'preserves the context of [the creature's] being and...preserves it in this context.'¹⁰ Barth draws a sharp distinction between God's *direct* work of grace in covenantal history and God's *indirect* work of

While I approach eschatology through Barth's doctrine of providence here, I see this view as compatible with McDowell's in large part, if not in detail.

⁵ III.3, 61. Barth repeatedly returns to creaturely limitations in discussing providence. 'The limitation of human life' actually becomes a sign of providence in Barth's theology. III.3, 226ff.

⁶ III.3, 62.

⁷ While Barth acknowledges death as negative, the incarnation reveals 'that it is right and necessary for [the human] to have to die.' III.2, 632.

⁸ III.3, 63.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

preservation. Here again, Barth appeals to philosophical language in his theology. The 'creaturely nexus' or 'nexus of being' serves God's indirect and direct actions. As in Farrer, it is never violated, disregarded or uninvolved. While God preserves the creature indirectly through the means of this nexus, God does not exclude it when working directly in covenant history: 'He does not act by means of creation, but He certainly does not act apart from it. He acts towards it and within it.'¹¹

Like Farrer's, Barth's double-agency means that God actively determines every creature according to its nature at all times. What science views as natural laws, Barth sees as divine action. Created by God, all creatures behave according to their God-given natures. God works through those specific natures to accomplish God's will. Contra traditional theology, Barth's doctrine of providence precludes Humean miracles. The personal God does not interrupt or violate the integrity of God's creatures. This raises the question of the miracles depicted in Scripture: Do these portray God interrupting or violating the creaturely nexus? Appealing to the imperceptible realm of heaven (as part of creation), Barth posits creatures with created natures that naturally function in ways that *seem* miraculous to humanity. Thus 'miracles' actually result from natural creaturely behavior which functions beyond limited human perception.

The philosophical significance of Barth's move here is greatly expanded in the discussion of §51 below, yet even in this brief description, Barth's concern for the integrity of creaturely life and God's ability to act shine through. While not a philosopher *per se*, Barth clearly remains aware contemporary philosophical debates.¹² His acknowledgement of the creaturely nexus and its integrity parallels similar moves by Farrer. Barth certainly moves well beyond a 'God of the gaps' theology.

iii) Resulting from Election

While the mode of preservation is imperceptible to the creature, it is irrefutable on the basis of election in Jesus Christ. Barth reverses his earlier position regarding *creatio continuata*, rejecting it on the grounds that it obscures 'the identity

¹¹ Ibid., 65. Barth returns to the details of this claim in §51 where Heaven is described as 'the place of God' which allows for 'genuine intercourse' between Creator and creature. III.3, 432.

¹² Mangina notes Barth's particular 'existentialism' and his concerns with its themes: '...themes such as freedom, agency, finitude and death play a prominent role in his theological anthropology.' Mangina, *Witness*, 94. The same could be said of his providence.

of the creature in its continuity.’¹³ Identical with the inner-being of God, election assures that ‘the creature may have permanence and continuity.’¹⁴ In proper order, God elects to be gracious and therefore elects the creature to be the object of divine grace and therefore to preserve it in existence. As divine ‘act’, ‘work’ and ‘power’, preservation remains connected to God’s intention. Deduced from this ‘primary assertion’, preservation ‘is necessary and compelling.’¹⁵ Barth claims, ‘Because of God it [the creature] cannot not continue; it cannot perish.’¹⁶

Does this claim make creation essential to God? Barth might answer ‘yes and no’. In abstraction, the claim that God needs creation constitutes blasphemy. God lacked nothing before creating and created fully out of grace alone. However, in light of the incarnation, God *needs* creation as the external basis of covenant. Based on the creaturely existence of Jesus Christ, creation must continue (in some sense) eternally.¹⁷

iv) *Election and Rejection*

Finally, *conservatio* proclaims the preservation of the elected creature and the defeat of the rejected. Barth turns here to the threat from which God preserves the creature. If God’s electing will is understood like Macmurray’s intention of God, then it encompasses all world-occurrence. In creation, God distinguishes ‘that which He willed from that which He did not will’ and grants creaturely existence on that distinction.¹⁸ In *conservatio*, God maintains this division. Developing a new dimension of his actualistic ontology, Barth broaches the subject of ‘nothingness’ as that ‘which has and can have its actuality (*Wirklichkeit*) only under the almighty No of God’.¹⁹ The preserved creation is threatened throughout its limited time and space

¹³ III.3, 69. Barth specifies this identity as ‘the very thing upon which everything turns at this point’ in the doctrine of preservation. This differs dramatically from his earlier position: ‘The Church, like the created world as a whole, lives by the divine *creatio continua*’ or even at the beginning of III: ‘What we shall have to understand specifically as God’s providence, as the preservation and government of man and the world by Him, is also creation, continuing creation, *creatio continua*.’ I.2, 688-689; III.1, 60. Hartwell notes this shift in his discussion of Barth’s actualism. Hartwell, *Theology*, 35-37.

¹⁴ III.3, 71.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71. Such a statement has implications for our previous discussion with Brümmer. Since both God and creature are ‘determined’ before creation in election, preservation asserts the certainty of God maintaining this reality to the end. Barth’s intertwining of reconciliation and creation recast Brümmer’s framework. Here, Barth makes a theological claim that cannot be understood or made from an anthropological perspective, but can only be revealed by the personal God.

¹⁷ Farrer makes a similar argument. Farrer, *Love*, 129-130.

¹⁸ III.3, 73.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 74. Barth discusses *das Nichtige* more fully in §50.

by chaos and destruction. In its 'negative actuality' (*negative Wirklichkeit*), nothingness menaces the creature with overwhelming power. Nevertheless, God preserves the creature from it.

Here Barth distances himself further from tradition. Opposing general metaphysics, Barth rejects various assumptions about evil, demons and threats to creation while maintaining their peculiar 'reality'.²⁰ Every facet of creation remains good. Barth excuses only Anselm from his critique of prior theology, but then notes Anselm's agreement with 'the older theology in general' that the devil 'was originally an angel' (i.e. a creature who was not preserved from this threat).²¹ Drawing on the 'normative philosophy of the time', older theologians developed an abstract concept of evil as 'mere non-being as opposed to being'.²² Biblically, nothingness has an actuality which is far 'more significant and serious'.²³ Barth explains, 'In its relation to God chaos is always an absolutely subordinate factor, but it is always absolutely superior in its relation to the creature.'²⁴ All 'things', even nothingness, 'are' only in relation to the God who wills in election: 'God elected and willed one thing. Therefore that which He did not elect and will, the non-existent, comprises the infinite range of all the possibilities which He passed over and with good reason did not actualise...'²⁵ Only seen through the lens of election can

²⁰ See John C. McDowell, 'Much Ado about Nothing: Karl Barth's Being Unable to Do Nothing about Nothingness,' *IJST* 4, no. 3 (2002): 322. McDowell sets Barth's fondness for 'Kant's critique of metaphysics' in Barth's Christian framework. Barth's position in interaction with philosophy merits more care than is often offered. For example, Hebblethwaite includes Barth in 'the folly of more traditional theological opposition to metaphysics.' Brian Hebblethwaite, *The Ocean of Truth: A Defence of Objective Theism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 37-38. Ward offers a more patient assessment of Barth in regard to 'the metaphysics of modernity and postmodernism.' Graham Ward, 'Barth, Modernity, and Postmodernity,' in *CCKB*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 274-295.

²¹ III.3, 75. Barth's break with older theology on this point is far more significant than most commentators indicate. The whole of his providence rooted in the singular intention of God in election would be undermined if any *created* being could fall into nothingness. Barth furthers this point in his discussion of angels and their opponents in §51. See III.3, 477-531.

²² III.3, 76.

²³ *Ibid.* Barth explicates *das Nichtige* more fully in §50. While some view Barth's use of 'nothingness' as incapable of seeing evil in its true magnitude, recent studies have strongly challenged this critique. For some of the strongest criticisms, see G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Harry R. Boer, American ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 216ff; John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1977), 149-150, 192-193. For recent defenses of Barth, see Krötke, *Sin*, xi, 35ff; McDowell, 'Much,' 319-335; Webster, *Moral*, 65-76.

²⁴ III.3, 76.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 77.

nothingness take on both its seriousness and ‘reality’ under the lordship of God. Here, the ‘metaphysical basis’ of older theology fails.²⁶

Through the lens of the incarnation and crucifixion, Barth sees what the older theology ‘completely overlooked’.²⁷ There, God’s gracious preservation

...is effective and revealed...not from the safe height of a supreme world-governor, but in the closest possible proximity, with the greatest possible directness, i.e., Himself to become a creature.²⁸

In his life and suffering, Jesus completed God’s No and gave ‘the creature its freedom.’²⁹ Barth thus ties *conservatio* directly to the atonement, writing,

This is the eternal will of God fulfilled and accomplished once and for all in time in Jesus Christ. And in the light of this will and work we have to regard the question of the *conservatio* of the creature as one which has already been decided.³⁰

The accomplished *servatio* (salvation) in Jesus Christ removes any possible *conservatio* of the creature (i.e. co-operation salvation). Barth’s theo-logical ordering is clear in Jesus: ‘Because *servatio*, therefore *creatio* and therefore *conservatio*.’³¹ The Christian believes in providence, not from experience, but on the basis of God’s personal will revealed in Christ.

Barth turns to the theological claims of preservation in relation to the creature’s need. Contra ‘the older theology’, Barth refuses to abstract the creature’s conflict with nothingness from the covenant of grace. God’s election assures creaturely salvation and—as the external basis of covenant—creaturely life is preserved precisely for *participation* in salvation. God foreordains the creature for grace and therefore for dependence on God. The creature’s neediness thus carries within it God’s promise. Here we see the significance of Barth’s claim, discussed in conversation with Farrer, that the creaturely world did not magically morph after the fall. Likewise, God was not ‘halted and baffled by sin’.³² The perfect creaturely life

²⁶ Ibid. McCormack persuasively argues that Barth’s final articulation of election prompted a consistent effort to create a ‘post-metaphysical’ theology, particularly in regard to providence. McCormack, *Actuality*, 26.

²⁷ III.3, 78.

²⁸ Ibid., 79. Barth’s insistence that providence must be tied to incarnation and election in Christ contrasts with Calvin’s central discussion of providence in the *Institutes*. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvi.9. Here Calvin asserts the reality of God’s providence and the hidden-ness of God’s purposes, making no reference to the revealed identity of the providential God in Jesus Christ.

²⁹ III.3, 79.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 80.

³² II.2, 90. Barth explains the ordering of creation, providence and sin *after* election: ‘Neither the height in the height of creation nor in the depth of sin is he outside the sphere of the divine decision.’ Barth’s particular supra-lapsarian view stands against such a conception of God’s redemption as reactive. See II.2, 134-135, 139-145.

God created for the covenant of grace has contours unseen in paradisiacal views of Eden.³³ Barth explains the nature of creaturely life:

...then to be present as only the creature can be present, in the divine preservation, in total need, is strength as well as weakness, riches as well as privation, perfection as well as imperfection, the highest exaltation as well as shame and need, is *something which not only has to be but ought to be.*³⁴

The incarnation proclaims the creaturely existence of the Creator in Jesus Christ. In this life, God ‘repeated that creating, approving, dividing and calling’, thereby routing nothingness forever.³⁵ Barth sees this as a fundamental affirmation of the blessedness and perfection of creaturely existence, here and now. None of this is visible apart from election.³⁶

Objectively, God saves creation in Christ. Here Barth’s thought breaks from Brümmer’s Games 1 or 2, and is better represented by Game 3. Subjectively, humans may participate in the active knowledge of the objective truth accomplished. Thus the Christian—even in suffering—lives in her ‘Father’s house’ rather than the sphere of chaos, based on her standpoint from the incarnation.

Barth’s discussion parallels his critique of Calvin’s predestination.³⁷ Barth emphasizes his doctrine’s pastoral direction, explicitly building it upon the certainty of the correspondence between what is revealed in the Son and the actuality of the Father. There is no *Deus absconditus*. In Jesus Christ, God ‘has revealed His whole heart and all the goodness of His Godhead.’³⁸

Having established the asymmetrical relation between *servatio* of election and *conservatio* of creaturely life, Barth affirms creaturely freedom under God’s lordship. The totality of creaturely existence continues:

³³ Mangina helpfully notes the relational rather than geographic emphasis: ‘Barth thus stresses that Eden is not so much a perfect place, a utopian Paradise, as simply a good place: the place where God and human beings live together in covenant fellowship.’ Mangina, *Witness*, 92.

³⁴ III.3, 81; italics mine.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁶ Barth makes a remarkable statement regarding this connection of salvation and the goodness of creaturely life in the Old Testament, ‘As life itself shows, neither in prosperity nor in adversity is there any comfort or security either for the people or the individual except in the election, in the covenant, in the history of the covenant with its concrete experiences, and finally and decisively in Yahweh Himself as He who acts as Lord of the covenant.’ *Ibid.*, 84.

³⁷ Barth’s devastating critique of Calvin comes in questioning the clarity of the God who predestines. Barth questions the Calvinist, ‘Is it the case that...the electing God Himself is not Christ but God the Father, or the triune God, in a decision which precedes the being and will and word of Christ, a hidden God, who as such made, as it were, the actual resolve and decree to save such and such men and to bring them to blessedness, and then later made, as it were, the formal or technical decree and resolve to call the elect and to bring them to that end by means of His Son, by means of His Word and Spirit?’ II.2, 63-64. See also Berkouwer, *Triumph*, 93-97.

³⁸ III.3, 80.

Humanity itself may continue as the sum of the temporal and spatial totality of human creation on earth and under heaven and in relation to the whole conceivable and inconceivable cosmos. And finally, the unknown and known creatures of the cosmos may continue, following their own path in relation to man and in that autonomy over against him which to us is enshrouded in mystery.³⁹

Creaturely agency arises from the covenant blessing of God. Barth extols the goodness of human limits as opportunity and the source of freedom, not as a sad consequence of Adam's fall. Farrer's logic of personal agency helps to illumine Barth's thought here. Barth writes,

[The creature] has freedom to experience and accomplish that which is proper to it, to do that which it can do, and to be satisfied. It is in this freedom that it is preserved by God...The fact that it is here and now, that it exists in one way and not another, is its opportunity (*Gelegenheit*); the opportunity which does not recur; an opportunity which corresponds to the oneness of God and the uniqueness of the work of liberation which He accomplished in Jesus Christ.⁴⁰

The specificity of the incarnation affirms God's gift of limited life to all creatures. In attempting to live outside of these limits, the human 'loses itself in generalities or grasps concretely at another opportunity which is not its own.'⁴¹ Personal formation does not recur. Macmurray's 'law of self-frustration' helps in deciphering Barth's assertions of humanity under providence:

Of all creatures only man seems to have this impossible possibility of repudiating his preservation by God as a preservation within appointed limits. But he cannot alter the fact that like all creatures he is in fact preserved in this way, and rightly so, and to his own salvation.⁴²

This description of humanity's 'impossible possibility' regarding preservation also clarifies Barth's position over against Brümmer. Regardless of humanity's *attitude* towards God, election places humanity in the covenant of salvation and therefore in relation to God before the creature came into being. Thus in opening his discussion of individuals' election, Barth explains,

The man who is isolated over against God is as such rejected by God. But to be this man can only be by the godless man's own choice...this choice of the godless man is void...he belongs eternally to Jesus Christ and therefore is not rejected, but elected...the rejection which he deserves on account of his perverse choice is borne and cancelled by Jesus Christ...he is appointed to eternal life with God on the basis of the righteous, divine decision.⁴³

³⁹ Ibid., 84. Barth emphasizes the opportunity given to the creature throughout this passage with his repeated use of *darf* and *dürfen*. Barth develops the significance of the twofold creation (heaven and earth) in regard to providence further in §51.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 85 (97).

⁴¹ Ibid., 86.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ II.2, 306.

While this description corrects Brümmer's model with the introduction of christological asymmetry, the providence it presents is neither coercive nor capricious.

Creaturely life in its God-given limits and dependence, according to Barth, is blessed opportunity. Humans act as relative subjects in their 'determination for existence in the divine covenant of grace.'⁴⁴ Having set his position apart from the theological tradition regarding the relation of election and providence, the unity of God's will, and a personalism rooted in Christ, Barth now rejects determinism in asserting 'the freedom of individual action (*die Freiheit eigenen Wirkens*)' in limitation.⁴⁵ Christian providence differs from 'much that has been said in apparent exaltation of the sole efficacy of God but really in disparagement of the creature and therefore the Creator.'⁴⁶ Unlike 'the heathen gods who envy man', the triune God 'allows him to be the thing for which He created him.'⁴⁷

As God's only personal creatures with this choice, humans live in the fullness of relationships and limits. The contours of their lives are not dictated by a divine blueprint making events happen mechanically. Rather, Barth sees God and human action in Psalm 104:23-24: 'man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until evening. O Lord, how manifold are thy works.'⁴⁸ Barth explains this affirmation of humanity's work until evening (time and space for living) this way,

...to which it belongs that he can use his senses and understanding to perceive that two and two make four, and to write poetry, and to think, and to make music, and to eat and drink, and to be filled with joy and often with sorrow, and to love and sometimes to hate, and to be young and to grow old, and all within his own experience and activity, affirming it not as half a man but as a whole man, with head uplifted, and the heart free and the conscience at rest...⁴⁹

Barth affirms that humans *live* their lives in God-given limits. God preserves the creature for the self-determination of her personality. In covenant, God continues to determine world-occurrence without determinism.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ III.3, 86.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid. Like Farrer's double-agency, Barth's thought rejects a monistic view which would attribute sole causality to the Almighty. Nimmo correctly highlights the distinction Barth makes between omnicausality (*Allwirksamkeit*) and sole causality (*Alleinwirksamkeit*) in *KD*. Barth proclaims the former while firmly rejecting the latter. Nimmo, *Being*, 128. God's right and left hands are the rubric Barth frequently uses to explicate this distinction. Similarly, Webster remarks, 'For Barth, the real enemy is divine sole causality.' Webster, *Moral*, 177.

⁴⁸ III.3, 87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Tanner, 'Creation,' 124ff.

Barth concludes his discussion of preservation looking to eschatology. Ultimately, God will guide all creation to its temporal end. Barth explains, ‘And the time will come when the created world as a whole will only have been...it will have fulfilled its purpose.’⁵¹ The ‘freedom of individual action’ will come to an end:

Its life will then be over, its movement and development completed, its notes sounded, its colours revealed, its thinking thought, its words said, its deeds done, its contacts and relationships with other creatures and their mutual interaction closed, the possibilities granted to it exploited and exhausted.⁵²

While human life affords opportunity and individual agency, eternal life does not. This world offers the unrepeatable opportunity of personal development. Participating in God’s life eternally, humans remain the persons determined in world history, though forgiven and redeemed by God. God keeps all creatures *in their limitations* ‘eternally before Him.’⁵³

vi) *Indications in Providence to Eternal Life*

While *conservatio* has received far less attention than *concursum* in secondary literature, its implications may be more contentious. Admittedly, Barth never wrote his planned eschatology.⁵⁴ Yet contrary to the claims of some scholars, *conservatio* connects seamlessly to Barth’s reformulation of eternal life.⁵⁵ Other scholars who see this connection do not like its implications.⁵⁶ Berkouwer has noted Barth’s peculiar insistence on humanity’s participation in ‘the eternal life of God’ and that human life is not continued.⁵⁷ Berkouwer’s criticizes Barth’s methodology, writing,

[Here Barth’s] way of thinking which is alien to the whole of Scripture suppresses the eschatological perspectives of the New Testament...[and] arise *neither* from Christology *nor* from the Scriptures, but only from an anthropology which...dominated Barth’s thinking *from the beginning*.⁵⁸

⁵¹ III.3, 87.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 88.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁴ Busch, *Barth*, 487. While Barth never started *CD V*, he “thought that a good deal could be inferred ‘indirectly and even directly from the earlier volumes about the much asked-after sphere of eschatology.’”

⁵⁵ I am arguing against claims such as Bromiley’s when he writes, ‘This preservation...should not be confused with the resurrection, which belongs to reconciliation and redemption. Commentators can easily make fools of themselves by jumping to a hasty, illogical, and totally unfounded conclusion at this point.’ Bromiley, *Introduction*, 144.

⁵⁶ See Berkouwer, *Triumph*, 329ff; J.B. Soucek, ‘Man in the Light of the Humanity of Jesus,’ *SJT* 81 (1949): 81.

⁵⁷ Berkouwer, *Triumph*, 158-164. Berkouwer supports this interpretation of Barth citing *Credo* (1935) as well as tracing the disappearance of ‘endless time’ in *KD* III.2 and III.3 (1948 & 1950 respectively).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

Similarly, von Balthasar accuses Barth's *Romans* of a 'theopanism' whereby human agency is asserted only in temporal space between a monistic protology and eschatology.⁵⁹

My argument throughout the conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer has been that Barth revises providence through personalism. Primarily focusing on God's person, Barth turns now to the eternal integrity of human personhood. Salvation for all creation is factually certain in Jesus Christ, and the personal sinner is saved for participation in the eternal life of God.⁶⁰ The actual person—determined under providence in their earthly life—will participate in God eternally, with every detail revealed in shame or glory, corresponding to the work of God's right and left hands.⁶¹ While Berkouwer is right about Barth's rejection of 'continuation', he is wrong regarding 'continuity'. As with Farrer's depiction of Augustine, Barth's portrayal of persons posits a precise *continuity* between earthly persons and personal participation in God's eternal life.⁶² The judgment and mercy of God reveal reality. These claims become clearer in the wider context of *CD III*.

In III.2 Barth exegetes a first and second death in Scripture. The second is the 'absolutely negative' punishment 'we deserve as guilty sinners', but 'vanquished

⁵⁹ Von Balthasar writes, 'The best way of characterizing this ideology is by describing it as a dynamic and actualist *theopanism*, which we define as a monism of beginning and end (protology and eschatology): God stands at the beginning and the end, surrounding a world-reality understood in dualistic and dialectical terms, ultimately overcoming it in the mathematical point of the miracle of transformation.' Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 94.

⁶⁰ In Christ, the person participates in God's immortality rather than processing an immortality of his own; cf. III.3, 63. If my argument holds, debates about *apokatastasis* change dramatically. All persons are saved in Jesus Christ, but this salvation does not erase personal history, it completes and preserves it. In other words, God's determinative providence saves the sinner in their individuality: forgiving that done in double-agency with God's left hand, and affirming that done with God's right hand.

⁶¹ Barth's summarized systematics were written just four years before III.3 and echo these claims. Addressing 'life everlasting', Barth emphasizes the correlation between grasping 'the beauty of this life' and 'the significance of 'resurrection.'" Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G.T. Thomson (New York: Harper, 1959), 153. Love of this life contrasts starkly with the 'heathen' belief in 'life after death'. Christian hope looks to resurrection which 'means not the continuation of this life, but life's completion.' Barth, *Outline*, 154. Barth's eschatology adds urgency to his ethics. Barth explains, 'The Christian hope does not lead us away from this life; it is rather an uncovering of the truth in which God sees our life. It is the conquest of death, but not a flight into the Beyond. The reality of this life is involved. Eschatology, rightly understood, is the most practical thing that can be thought.' Barth, *Outline*, 154. Barth later supported this view in a letter from 1961, 'Eternal life is not another and second life, beyond the present one. It is this life, but the reverse side which God sees although it is as yet hidden from us—this life in its relation to what He has done for the whole world, and therefore for us too, in Jesus Christ...the decree of God...will stand before our eyes, and that it will be the subject not only of our deepest shame but also of our joyful thanks and praise.' Barth, *Letters*, 9.

⁶² 'This psycho-physical being in its time is he himself.' III.2, 633.

in virtue of the death which Jesus Christ suffered in our place'. This death is factually defeated and 'is behind...[as] an enemy of man'.⁶³ In light of christology and soteriology, however, 'This means that it also belongs to human nature, and is determined and ordered by God's good creation and to that extent right and good, that man's being in time should be finite and man himself mortal'.⁶⁴ Barth acknowledges the connection to 'eternal life':

Its content is not...his liberation from his this-sidedness, from his end and dying, but positively the glorification by the eternal God of his natural and lawful this-sided, finite and mortal being...this being of his in his time...will be revealed in all its merited shame but also its unmerited glory, and may thus be eternal life from and in God.⁶⁵

Providence proclaims the limited opportunity given by God to the person preceding their salvation in God's eternal life. Barth writes,

There is no question of the continuation into an indefinite future of a somewhat altered life...What [the New Testament] looks forward to is the "eternalizing" (*Verewigung*) of this ending life...It will then be eternal life in God and in fellowship with Him.⁶⁶

This is not bad news, but Gospel; humans can look forward to this eternal life. Nevertheless, the shared eternity of a person determined proportionately more by God's right hand differs dramatically with the person determined more by God's left hand. Judas's shame is different from Peter's or Paul's determination by God's right hand. Here, as seen in conversation with Macmurray, Barth's use of determination opposes mechanical 'determinism'.

Barth further underscores this concept in his discussion of the divine command in III.4. Barth establishes this connection in III.2 explaining,

This view of human nature, with its frank recognition of the fact that it ends...[gives] to human life an importance as something which will one day be completed and not be continued indefinitely...an urgency which would obviously be lacking if we set our hopes on deliverance from the limitation of our time, and therefore on a beyond, instead of on the eternal God Himself.⁶⁷

Barth returns to the correlation between humanity's limited life and its eternal seriousness in §56,

⁶³ Ibid., 628.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 632.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 633. Barth's inclusion of *shame* and glory as aspects of a person in God's eternal life remained to the end of his life; cf. Barth, *Letters*, 9. This idea of shame helps accentuate Barth's opposition to any levelling-down of human personhood in eternity. While saved and forgiven, the human remains the person shaped in history, under providence.

⁶⁶ III.2, 624 (760).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 633.

The individuality, or singularity of each man is in the last analysis only a reflection of the uniqueness of the offer which is made to him. He now exists in his fleeting time as one who passes; and then he exists no more for ever...Only on this one occasion when it is made can it be valued or despised, used or misused, by each...But the eternal disposing and consoling of God relate to the existence offered him in his time in all its uniqueness.⁶⁸

As in Brümmer's diagrams, Barth's doctrine of providence has eschatological implications. Barth's, however, stresses every moment of life *coram Deo* as opportunity to be seized or missed in correspondence with election. 'The opportunity must be grasped' or the person loses it and 'is merely vegetative or animal and not human.'⁶⁹ Barth's doctrine of providence amounts to a life-long Game 3 existence which shapes the person for eternal participation in the life of God.

From the standpoint of Barth's doctrine of providence, this 'eternalizing' understanding of 'eternal life' answers perplexing philosophical questions. Setting aside the psychological difficulties of conceptualizing 'eternal life' with God without agency or the ability to say 'Yes or No' to God, these limits strengthen Barth's doctrine of providence. By eliminating individual agency from his eschatology, Barth can assert the certainty of God's intention in Jesus Christ without denying human personhood. Eschatologically, human persons, saved by God, participate in Christ and therefore in God's eternal life. Moreover, the claim logically stresses the importance of all creaturely life, ethics and history far more than Brümmer's Game 1. Eschatologically, the antinomies are resolved and no new tensions can arise as the result of limited creaturely autonomy.⁷⁰

Barth concludes his description of *conservatio* portraying the cosmic breadth of God's preservation. Not only is all humanity and every creature granted eternal preservation by God, but Barth goes on to explain,

Therefore nothing will escape Him: no aspect of the great game of creation; no moment of human life; no thinking thought; no word spoken; no secret or insignificant enterprise or deed or omission with all its interaction and effects; no suffering or joy; no sincerity or lie; no secret event in heaven or too well-known event on earth; no ray of sunlight; no note which has ever sounded...He will allow it to partake of His own eternal life And in this way the creature will continue to be, in its limitation, even in its limited temporal duration.⁷¹

Mystery remains in Barth's understanding of eternal life. Nevertheless, his emphasis on creatures partaking in *God's* eternal life points towards an existence in which

⁶⁸ III.4, 570.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 580.

⁷⁰ It seems likely that Brümmer's models presupposes eternal life to include personal agency and intention.

⁷¹ III.3, 90. Significantly, eternal life somehow *includes* suffering, lies, etc. In Barth's theology, these would be 'determined' by the work of God's 'left hand' as unintentional witness to election.

humans are no longer able to say ‘Yes or No’ to God.⁷² Barth’s eschatology preserves the particularity of creaturely life and human personalities forged in it.

2. Divine Accompanying (*Concursus*)

Barth turns next to ‘Divine Accompanying.’ Presupposing preservation, Barth claims that *conkursus* ‘refers to the lordship of God in relation to the free and autonomous activity of the creature (*freien Eigenwirksamkeit des Geschöpfes*).’⁷³ Our previous discussion of actualistic ontology in conversation with Macmurray proves crucial here. Barth writes, the creature’s ‘being is its activity.’⁷⁴ Creaturely activity founded on God-given actuality sets up the dilemma of *conkursus* and double-agency. Here substantialist understandings falter. Barth has already asserted God’s determination of all world-occurrence, and will continue to do so. Yet he simultaneously claims that providence means ‘primarily that He maintains it in its own actuality, that He gives it space and opportunity for its own work, for its own being in action, for its own autonomous activity.’⁷⁵ These two seemingly incompatible claims have prompted the critique of incoherence. Our insights from philosophical theology, however, provide helpful tools for understanding both claims in their unity.

Barth begins his discussion with three basic affirmations. First, unlike the creature, God *always* acts:

Alongside the act of the creature there is always the act of the divine wisdom and omnipotence...When by divine preservation the first creature came to exist in activity, God had already acted, offering His grace, making His mercy in Jesus Christ operative and effective to the creature, revealing the majesty of His beloved Son.⁷⁶

Barth strikes the christological chords of primordial election. Thus God ‘inevitably and inescapably accompanies the creature, no matter what may be the attitude which the creature adopts towards Him.’⁷⁷ Barth’s move relativises humans’ decisions in the larger covenantal framework, thus recasting a framework such as Brümmer’s.

⁷² Conceptions of eternal life with personal agency face similar problems. For example, Brümmer’s minimal definition of ‘life’ would open the way for endless questions regarding salvation. Like Satan, might not humans rebel against God? If not, Brümmer seems to violate his own minimal terms of ‘life’ since neither God nor human would have the capacity to say No eternally.

⁷³ III.3, 90. The interaction between divine omnipotence and human freedom fills volumes of Barth’s writings and is not exhausted here; however, the contours of his thinking can be seen.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 91.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 92.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

Second, Barth claims that in accompanying the creature, God ‘affirms and approves and recognises and respects the autonomous actuality (*selbständige Wirklichkeit*) and therefore the autonomous activity (*selbständige Wirken*) of the creature as such.’⁷⁸ A great deal hinges on this second point. If this cannot be affirmed, Barth’s doctrine of providence becomes determinism and God would ‘play the part of a tyrant’.⁷⁹ Barth explains, ‘...the decisive consideration must be the material one that the God who accompanies the creature is the Lord of the covenant of grace.’⁸⁰ Covenant precludes both the claim that God ‘willed to act alone’ or ‘by means of non-autonomous agents or instruments.’⁸¹ This emphasis accentuates the fact that God acts both *towards* and *with* the creature. Covenant and grace stand in antithetical opposition to caprice, tyranny or despotism.⁸²

Finally, God accompanies the free creature as Lord: ‘God rules in and over a world of freedom.’⁸³ Barth seems to sense his proximity to Reformed determinism here and quickly rejects any mechanical lordship which would portray free creatures as mere puppets or tools. Nevertheless, Barth writes, ‘This is how it is provided that His will is done on earth as it is in heaven, that nothing may or can take place as the action of the creature which is not in a very definite sense (*bestimmten Sinn*) His own action.’⁸⁴ Barth continues to affirm the integrity of the creature, ‘No compulsion is exercised towards the creature. No necessity is worked out in relation to it.’⁸⁵ The tension between these two assertions could only breed fear without the determinate, personal content given in the incarnation. Therefore, ‘...we must again think of the form in which God is almighty, genuinely and supremely almighty, in Jesus Christ and in the covenant of grace.’⁸⁶ In Christ, the trinitarian will and being shine clear:

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ See Ibid., 112-117. Barth deals explicitly with the common critique that Calvin and those who followed him seem to portray God’s omnipotence as descriptive of a tyrant. This is also the general subject area where Barth discusses Islam directly.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 93. Barth’s emphasis on grace reflects Kirkpatrick’s conviction that two ‘radical changes in our traditional way of thinking’ are demanded. First, we must ‘accept ourselves (and the power through which we can act heterocentrically) as gifts received, not accomplishments achieved.’ And second, ‘God can (and does) act in history and that God will continue to act upon individuals in order to bestow the enabling gift of love.’ Kirkpatrick, *Together*, 179. Barth makes both these claims very clearly.

⁸¹ III.3, 93.

⁸² The whole of III.3 attempts to portray God in terms of covenantal grace and therefore repeatedly denies any implicit or explicit charges of divine tyranny, caprice or despotism. Davaney’s presuppositions concerning divine power lead her to insist in Barth’s incoherence on this point rather than taking it seriously as a literal claim with differing presuppositions. Davaney, *Divine*.

⁸³ III.3, 93.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 93 (105). This statement strongly suggests double-agency.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 94.

‘...the fatherly lordship of the Creator; the childlike obedience of the creature; and the Spirit in whom both take place together.’⁸⁷ At this point, divine lordship and human autonomy confirm rather than negate one another. The sum of these three points prevents double-agency from slipping into incoherence. Farrer’s formal structure of double-agency illumines that of Barth’s explicitly christocentric articulation. Each of these three aspects of *concursum* points back, in implicit and explicit ways, to God’s election in Jesus Christ. I continue my discussion of *concursum* below in two sections. First, I review and critique Barth’s use of the causal concept. Second, I turn to Barth’s three-fold understanding of ‘The Divine Accompanying’ (*praecurrit*, *concurrit*, and *succurrit*).

The Causal Concept

Barth follows these claims with an historical look at the ‘causal concept’ in providence. While insightful, the analysis mystifies in its insistence on maintaining the term ‘causality’ while redefining it beyond all recognition. These alterations correspond with the philosophical shift towards the personal and firmly part ways with the Aristotelian substantialism on which the causal concept was constructed.⁸⁸ The singularity of God’s will in election, actualistic ontology, and double-agency each show Barth’s *concursum* to be much closer to personalist philosophy than to the causal concept. I turn now to the details of ‘causality’ with the goal of further assessing Barth’s distance from past theologies.

Scholastic, Reformed and Lutheran theologians used Aristotle’s ‘causality’ as their ‘controlling concept’ for *concursum*.⁸⁹ Barth attempts to eliminate this ‘ordinary but harmful conception of cause, operation and effect’ and replace it with an explicitly Christian conception.⁹⁰ Barth’s ‘causality’ arises from ‘who God is and what He wills and how He works.’⁹¹ Theology must emphasize the relationship between creation and the covenant of grace, must speak specifically of the God and humanity revealed in Jesus Christ, and must hold world history and salvation history together. These specific material features of Barth’s acceptance of causal terminology illumines the ‘dynamic and teleology’ of *concursum*.⁹² Nevertheless, the

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ See Allen, ‘Faith,’ 197-198; Brümmer, *Speaking*, 85-86.

⁸⁹ III.3, 98.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 118.

⁹¹ Ibid. Personal categories fit Barth’s description far better.

⁹² Ibid., 100.

alterations make Barth's use so distant from the 'ordinary...conception of cause' that it ultimately becomes its opposite.

Barth's five 'conditions' on which Christians can accept causality in *concursum* reflect his proximity to Farrer and Macmurray as well as his distance from causal determinism.⁹³ First, Barth rejects mechanical causality while affirming a place for 'a mechanical component to the extent that in their mutual relation they have the element of necessity.'⁹⁴ As in Macmurray, freedom transcends but is partially constituted by necessity. Barth's thought here reflects the insights of philosophical theology above regarding the nature of agency and determination. An agent's freedom requires a relative necessity. Far from being mutually exclusive, one implies the other.

Second, Creator and creature are persons, not 'things' (*Sachen*).⁹⁵ Humans have no capacity for 'examining, recognising, analyzing and defining' either *causa*.⁹⁶ Unlike 'things', persons 'must always be *self-revealed (selbst offenbar)*.'⁹⁷ The logical agnosticism regarding personal knowledge which remains un-revealed is neither mystical nor magical, but inherent in personal interaction. This amounts to a basic tenant of personalism. Macmurray explains, 'All knowledge of persons is by revelation...if you refuse to reveal yourself to me, I cannot know you, however much I may wish to do so.'⁹⁸ Farrer's cosmology similarly illumines the need to obtain personal knowledge in a manner appropriate to the personal, rather than physical or animal, realm.

Third, Barth argues that the divine and creaturely *causae* cannot be two species in a genus. Fundamentally, the two *causae* differ 'because their basis and constitution as subjects are quite different and therefore absolutely unlike...'⁹⁹ The divine *causa* is 'self-grounded, self-positing, self-conditioning and self-causing.'¹⁰⁰ Unlike humanity, God is personal subject in and of the divine being. Here Barth makes his trinitarian basis more explicit,

⁹³ Ibid., 101-105. While each of these conditions merits further attention, the discussion here will be confined to Barth's continuity and discontinuity with contemporary philosophical theology.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 101.

⁹⁵ Barth notes that the German for cause '*Ur-Sache*' can easily be falsely connected with a thing '*Sache*.'

⁹⁶ III.3, 101.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 102 (115); italics translator's.

⁹⁸ Macmurray, *Persons*, 169. Macmurray's opposition to 'revelation theology' seems to contradict his own logic if God is personal in this sense.

⁹⁹ III.3, 103.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

It causes itself—and it is the Christian knowledge of God which gives us the decisive word on the matter—in the triune life which God enjoys as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and in which He has His divine basis from eternity to eternity.¹⁰¹

Barth sees God's triune being actualizing divine life and thus eliminating the need of an external Other to act personally. While it is doubtful Macmurray would have accepted such an explanation, nevertheless Barth's trinitarian logic meets the formal claims of the Scot's definitions of agency discussed in Chapter IV.¹⁰²

In contrast, the creaturely *causa* is grounded *entirely from outside*. The creature's autonomous activity comes as a gracious gift from God and relies on external determinations from both God and other creatures. Barth explains,

It owes the fact that it is a *causa*, and is capable of *causare*, not to itself but first of all to God, who created it and as the Creator still posits and conditions it, and then to the other *causae* of its own order, without whose conditioning or partial conditioning it would not exist...What likeness is there then between the creature and the Creator who in His unity and trinity posits Himself without any outside assistance at all?¹⁰³

The creaturely *causa* remains a legitimate, real *causa*, but cannot be compared with the divine *causa* on whom it is based. This difference between the two *causae* opens the way for Barth to speak meaningfully about the twofold *causare* of *concursum*. It also sheds light on the goodness of God's determination as well as the myriad of other determinations which constitute the actuality and blessedness of creaturely life.¹⁰⁴

Barth's fourth condition is merely the application of the third. He refuses to place philosophy above theology, projecting 'a kind of total scheme of things.'¹⁰⁵ While I have argued throughout this thesis for a personalist reading of Barth's doctrine of providence, this point emphasizes the need to keep the personalist lens grounded entirely in christological specificity. This fourth condition both limits and provides space for our conversations with philosophical theology. Reading III.3 requires careful navigation between the Scylla of becoming philosophy and the Charybdis of ignoring it.

Finally, Barth expresses the positive Christian material for which the first four conditions open the space. *Concursum* specifically and providence generally must positively proclaim 'a clear connexion between the first article of the creed and

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² See Macmurray, *Persons*, 166.

¹⁰³ III.3, 103.

¹⁰⁴ I accentuate this point in contrast to the derogatory sense of determinism whereby the creature is seen as a puppet with no choice, freedom or life. Macmurray's use of determination illumines its positive necessity in action.

¹⁰⁵ III.3, 104.

the second.’¹⁰⁶ The divine *causa* can only be understood when its ‘content and interpretation’ describe ‘the operation of the Father of Jesus Christ in relation to that of the creature.’¹⁰⁷ Echoing John 3:16 Barth summarizes,

Basically, the doctrine of the *concursum* must be as follows. God, the only true God, so loved the world in His election of grace that in fulfilment of the covenant of grace instituted at the creation He willed to become a creature, in order to be its Saviour. And this same God accepts the creature even apart from the history of the covenant and its fulfilment.¹⁰⁸

Beginning with election and its covenantal fulfilment, Barth finds all creaturely activity accepted into God’s own activity.

Since God’s electing will sets the limits for God’s acting and *causare*, *concursum* cannot be abstracted from God’s intention. Barth explains,

Therefore His *causare* consists, and consists only, in the fact that He bends their activity to the execution of His own will which is His will of grace, subordinating their operations to the specific operation which constitutes the history of the covenant of grace.¹⁰⁹

While God ‘co-operates with [the creature] in its work—always and everywhere’, divine causality ‘consists only’ in the realization of God’s will: the election of grace. Here are resonances with Farrer and Macmurray, God’s singular will determines God’s double-agency in and through creatures. Many critics discussed in Chapter II seem unable to make sense of or accept this repeated claim. While this clear connection between the first and second article of the creed greatly strengthens Barth’s doctrine of providence, it calls attention to the underdevelopment of the connection to the third article. The Holy Spirit is almost entirely absent in this lengthy fine-print section.

Barth concludes his discussion by reviewing how all four negative conditions are necessarily met in fulfilling his final and positive condition. First, automatic causality, despotism and absolute compulsion have no grounding in the gracious activity of God. Second, neither the *causa prima* nor the *causa secunda* may be seen as a ‘thing’ since grace presents a mysterious interaction over which no one can stand. *Knowledge* of this causal concept can only come through *participation* and self-involvement: ‘It is clear that the *causa prima* can be known only in prayer, and the *causa secunda* in gratitude, or else not at all.’¹¹⁰ Third, the incomparability of the

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 105.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 106.

causa prima and the *causa secunda* is fully acknowledged and preserved. The covenant of grace unites the holy God and the sinful human through Jesus Christ. This reality precludes any synthesis or master-concept and preserves the ‘gracious mystery of an encounter.’¹¹¹ Finally, all philosophical schemes are excluded. Barth explains,

For when the two subjects are so very different, but so closely inter-related, clearly it is only by revelation and in faith that the *causa princeps* and the *causa particularis* can be known both in and for themselves and in the *concursus* of their two-fold *causare*.¹¹²

Here Barth points to the importance of God’s otherness from creation as well as His free and complete involvement throughout creation.

Barth’s ‘acceptance’ of the causal concept amounts to personalism.¹¹³ Barth’s five conditions discussed above so closely parallel his description of a ‘person’ in II.1 that the distinction seems meaningless.¹¹⁴ While the content of his discussion remains helpful, retaining causal terminology detracts from the content of his argument and needlessly complicates it.

Three-fold Divine Accompanying

Providence claims an asymmetry between Creator and creature. Historically, misunderstanding has abounded when this asymmetry is centered on power.¹¹⁵ In Christ, divine potency is not primarily that of force; rather, ‘The love of God is primary.’¹¹⁶ Omnipotence becomes defined as capacity to love, not to coerce. Barth explains,

The divine potency, and therefore the divine working in relation to that of the creature, is above that of the creature because God is eternal love... The creature can only be loved by God, and then at best love Him in return. The love of God is essential. As Father, Son and Holy Ghost, God is love in and of Himself, and in the overflowing of this love He loves the creature.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 107.

¹¹³ Barth’s personalist providence as seen in his 5 ‘conditions’ for keeping the causal concept beg the question of what Barth gains in retaining it. Barth is clearly nervous of the concept and hedges it in various ways. Farley curiously claims that ‘Barth enthusiastically accepted the terminology’ of causality. Farley, ‘Providence of God,’ 307.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter III.

¹¹⁵ This is the fundamental flaw in Davaney’s assessment of Barth. The irony of her critique is that Davaney’s primary problem with Barth is what she perceives to be his inevitable fall into monism. Had she understood the importance of Barth’s ordering of relational love over power, her book would have had a much different shape.

¹¹⁶ III.3, 107.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

God's potency stems not from greatness or infinity; 'The greater needs the less, and infinity one, no less than the reverse.'¹¹⁸ Instead, God's omnipotence and precedence results from the eternal love of trinitarian Being. In contrast, the creature began its limited time, lives out its autonomy and is no more, *always loved by God*.¹¹⁹ Herein lies the irreversibility and asymmetry of Barth's logic. Objectively, the creature is loved by God. Subjectively, the creature can (and often does) live ignorant of this factual truth.

Barth makes the distinction between immanence and transcendence. As seen in conversation with Farrer, this distinction centers of God's person rather than an abstract spatiality. Regarding the creaturely world, Barth claims, 'God is present and active in all that occurs within it, is more fixed than any natural law or mathematical axiom.'¹²⁰ However, 'the further proposition that all occurrence is immanent in God is necessarily false.'¹²¹ It is precisely in divine transcendence that God is immanent.

This asymmetry entails an irreversibility of *concursum*: 'God "concur" with the creature, but the creature does not "concur" with God.'¹²² Barth subdivides *concursum* into three realms of time: 'As God co-operates with the activity of the creature, His own activity precedes, accompanies and follows that activity, and nothing can be done except the will of God.'¹²³ Passages like this mislead critics to assume Barth's proximity to Reformed Orthodoxy's determinism. Barth applauds the historic Reformed conclusion; 'that it is absolutely the will of God alone which is executed in all creaturely activity and creaturely occurrence.'¹²⁴ Nevertheless, 'the tragedy of the Reformed doctrine of providence and more particularly of the divine *concursum*' is found here as well.¹²⁵ Applying 'purely formal concepts of God and His will and work,' Calvin, Zwingli and others pointed 'us to the dark when they spoke about the decree of God fulfilled in creaturely events.'¹²⁶ As a result, Barth claims these Reformed theologians 'lay sick in the same ward' as Romanists, Lutherans, Arminians and Moderns in not filling out their claims from Christology.¹²⁷ Barth goes so far in his polemic against the Reformed as to claim,

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

¹¹⁹ Brümmer's original framework cannot accommodate such a claim.

¹²⁰ III.3, 109.

¹²¹ Ibid., 110.

¹²² Ibid., 112-113.

¹²³ Ibid., 113.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 104.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 115.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 116.

...their opponents had the advantage that in their statements they did not seem to take more account of the demands of ordinary reason and practical piety than did the sinister heralds of an even more sinister deity. For this is what the Reformed divines appeared to be.¹²⁸

These harsh words indicate Barth's *desire* to articulate a radically different providence, but did he accomplish the task?

Barth defines three terms christologically in explicit contrast with the Reformed fathers. Lacking the biblical center of Christ,

...“God” would be a purely formal concept, denoting a supreme being endowed with absolute, unconditioned and irresistible power; the “will of God” would be a purely formal concept denoting the unconditioned and incontrovertible purpose of this supreme being; and the “work of God” would denote the unconditioned and irresistible execution of this purpose over against and in and on the activity of the creature.¹²⁹

According to Barth, these definitions simply cannot logically yield a Christian providence. Instead, Barth defines the terms:

When we say “God” we have to understand the One who as Father, Son and Holy Ghost in eternal love, and has life in Himself...

When we say “the will of God” we have to understand His fatherly good-will, His decree of grace in Jesus Christ, the mercy in which from all eternity He undertook to save the creature, and to give it eternal life in the fellowship with Himself...

And when we say “the work of God” we have to understand His execution in history of the covenant of grace upon the basis of the decree of grace, with its fulfilment in the sacrifice of His Son and its confirmation in the work of the Holy Spirit awakening to faith and obedience...And in all these things what is needed is a radical re-thinking of the whole matter.¹³⁰

These definitions shape Barth's reformulation of providence. In doing so, Barth claims to be ‘worlds removed’ from traditional views.¹³¹ Following these introductory remarks, Barth addresses the three aspects of *concursum* in turn; *praecurrit*, *concurrit*, and *succurrit*.

i) *Praecurrit*

God precedes all creation with the divine will. Thus before creating the creature, ‘God created the conditions and pre-conditions and pre-pre-conditions.’¹³²

Barth explicitly acknowledges the philosophical gains of this move,

...the predetermining activity of God cannot be given a Kantian sense as the *a priori* of reason as opposed to an empirical event. On this view the opposition and

¹²⁸ Ibid. Barth's use of ‘sinister’ here shows at his profound desire to distance his providence from the Reformed tradition.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 113.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 117-118.

¹³¹ Ibid., 118.

¹³² Ibid., 119.

connexion between divine and creaturely activity would be immanent within the world. Our understanding is a safeguard against any such transformation.¹³³

Rejecting the dualism inherent in the *Cogito*, Barth speaks of ‘a preceding activity and not merely a preceding knowledge of the merciful God.’¹³⁴ Divine foreknowledge ‘is a movement of His omnipotence.’¹³⁵ Distinct (though not separated) from the totality of God’s will and work, foreknowledge must not be perceived dualistically.¹³⁶ For Barth as for Farrer, foreknowledge means certainty rather than necessity.

Here Barth stands against both Lutheran and Reformed ‘half-measures’ that seem to set God in a competitive framework with humanity. The divine *praedeterminatio* neither ‘only begins with the creaturely action’ (Lutheran) nor overwhelms it with a sole dominion (Reformed).¹³⁷ *Praedeterminatio* consists neither in the ‘totality of creaturely activity’ nor in ‘the laws of science’.¹³⁸ Each has its place, but neither erases nor encompasses providence. Rather, the merciful Creator fully predetermines and foreordains each creature for its particular freedom; ‘The least thing no less than the greatest derives directly from Himself. But the least thing no less than the greatest has its own sphere of action.’¹³⁹

ii) *Concurrit*

Barth moves from *praecurrit* to *concurrit*. Bringing both the divine and creaturely agents into the same timeframe, *concurrit* raises the most acute questions regarding double-agency. Centering on his particular understanding of (a) double-agency, Barth emphasizes the (b) asymmetrical ordering of (c) the one will of (d) the triune God in election. I address each aspect in turn.

¹³³ Ibid., 120. Barth stands close to Macmurray here; cf. Macmurray, *Self*, 39ff.

¹³⁴ III.3, 120.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ See Farrer, *Love*, 164. McCormack also draws on William Lane Craig’s work distinguishing between certainty as a predicate of God’s person versus necessity as the predicate of events. McCormack, *Actuality*.

¹³⁷ III.3, 120.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 121ff. Barth’s discussion of the ‘laws of creaturely activity’ both refute claims that he degrades science and order these laws under divine providence; cf. Link, ‘Gestalt.’; Schröder, ‘See.’ Barth praises the provisional gains of science, ‘The laws known to us are well-grounded hypotheses on the basis of which we can go forward prepared in some measure for further experience and thought and equipped for further reliable knowledge, with the certain expectation that all further events which confront us will at any rate take place within this or that order or form.’ Nevertheless, accentuating agency (both divine and creaturely) over laws, Barth explains, ‘No law, not even that which is absolutely valid and therefore absolutely effective in that sense, has as such the power to cause even the most trivial of creaturely events actually to take place.’ III.3, 125.

¹³⁹ III.3, 130.

(a) *Concurrit* means double-agency.¹⁴⁰ Barth stresses the active working of God and creature, writing, ‘As the creature works in time, the eternal God works simultaneously in all the supremacy and sovereignty of His working. The *concursum divinum* is a *concursum simultaneum*.’¹⁴¹ Whitehouse helpfully explains, ‘In an unconditioned act of Fatherly Lordship, God established the act of the creature precisely as the act of the creature.’¹⁴² Like Farrer, Barth never allows for creaturely action independent of divine action. In *concurrit*, Barth explains, ‘To describe *concursum divinum* we cannot use the mathematical picture of two parallel lines. But creaturely events take place as God Himself acts.’¹⁴³ Humans, even Christians, must acknowledge an ignorance regarding the precise workings of this double-agency. Following Cocceius, Barth warns,

...that the How? of the relation between God and the creature escapes our understanding no less than the How? of creation. This is something which is known only to God, for He alone knows His own power and resources... We have to confess that we have no conception of the divine doing and knowing, and no concepts to describe them.¹⁴⁴

Much of this mystery lies in the asymmetry between the divine and creaturely agents.

(b) *Concurrit* is asymmetrical. Barth’s famous defenses of divine transcendence remain valid. Barth therefore warns of the ‘danger of reversibility’ defending ‘the *divine concursus* with the creature’ while rejecting any ‘creaturely *concursum* with God’ as ‘patent blasphemy’.¹⁴⁵ *Concursum* as double-agency can be ‘maintained and perceived and understood only in the light of the operation of the divine subject.’¹⁴⁶ Appealing to Christology, the ‘one-ness of the action’ of divine and human agent (like the two natures of Christ) must be asymmetrically ordered so that the divine determines the creaturely. This distinction is lost in synergistic or monistic systems. The asymmetry towards the divine agency assures God’s sovereignty while grounding and determining the authentic and creaturely agency.

(c) *Concurrit* encompasses all world-occurrence in the singularity of God’s intention. Building on God’s constancy established in II.1, Barth brings the seemingly infinite variety of world-occurrence into correspondence with the will of

¹⁴⁰ I presuppose double-agency as discussed in Chapter V throughout this discussion.

¹⁴¹ III.3, 132.

¹⁴² Whitehouse, *Authority*, 39.

¹⁴³ III.3, 133.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 135. Barth echoes Calvin’s claim, ‘We see the presence of divine power shining as much in the continuing state of the universe as in its inception.’ Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvi,1.

¹⁴⁵ III.3, 134.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

the triune God.¹⁴⁷ Grammatically, Barth consistently speaks of the plurality of world-occurrences serving God's singular purpose of election.¹⁴⁸ For example, Barth writes,

...there are no lacunae in the fulfilment of the decree of salvation and grace (*der Vollstreckung des Heils- und Gnadenratschlusses*) without which heaven and earth would not be, and in the execution of which they were created; all with the same certainty as that all things (*alle Dinge*) and events (*alles Geschehen*) must serve the one final purpose (*Endzweck dienen müssen*).¹⁴⁹

Like Farrer and Macmurray, Barth speaks of God's will with a singularity that is entirely comprehensive; there are no gaps.¹⁵⁰ Seen through the christocentric lens, *concurrit* gains clarity and order. The 'general activity of God in and over the creature' must be 'seen in light of this true centre (*Mitte*) and meaning (*Sinn*) and aim (*Ziel*) of all creaturely occurrence (*geschöpflichen Geschehens*).'¹⁵¹ This, according to Barth, removes the wrongful speculation of older theology. It also reflects the philosophical coherence of both Macmurray and Farrer in their understanding of the will of God.

(d) *Concurrit* speaks of the divine work of the triune God and creation. The singularity of God's will is no prison. Barth writes, 'Like the divine essence, the divine activity is single, united and therefore unitary, but it is also manifold, and therefore not uniform, monotonous and undifferentiated.'¹⁵² God's power over the creature

...is so complete because it is differentiated, because it can find and re-determine (*neu zu bestimmen*) each one according to its particular nature, because it can use it

¹⁴⁷ Barth already hints at his providence in II.1, saying, 'The real act of God, the basis and presupposition of creation, reconciliation and redemption, is what has occurred and still occurs in accordance with God's will under the name of Jesus Christ...Here if anywhere in this work, which embraces all others, we have to do with God Himself.' II.1, 513.

¹⁴⁸ The exception that proves the rule is *Willen*. While appearing plural, *Willen* is always singular. *Collins German Dictionary*, ed. Peter Terrell et al. (Glasgow: Collins, 1980), 757. Barth frequently refers to God's singular purpose, intent, meaning, aim, etc. in election. Thus this singularity remains notable throughout III.3.

¹⁴⁹ III.3, 132.

¹⁵⁰ 'He would not be God at all if He were not the living God, if there were a single point where He was absent or inactive, or only partly active, or restricted in His action.' *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 142. Interestingly, Barth adapts and uses Luther's Eucharistic phrasing of 'in, with and over' (*in, mit und über*) throughout his discussion of *concurrit*, though emphasizing an asymmetrical irreversibility. Barth makes this awareness explicit in referencing the danger of reversals in the Hegalian dialectic threatened in 'Lutheran Christology and Lutheran Eucharistic teaching.' III.3, 134. The English translation leaves this out in this particular passage but preserves it elsewhere; cf. *KD* III.3, 161.

¹⁵² III.3, 137. Barth repeatedly emphasizes the constancy of God but never posits divine predictability or monotony.

in its particular place, because in controlling it, it gives to each one that which is proper to it, that which God Himself ordained should be proper to it.¹⁵³

God's rich simplicity opposes inconsistency and 'all forms of self-contradiction.'¹⁵⁴ Since God is 'eternally rich in His threefold being', 'the differentiated nature of the world created by Him derives from Himself'.¹⁵⁵

Such a claim brings Barth to the statement that God rules by 'Word and Spirit.' Striking the chords of all §49, Barth explains, 'The fact that the Lord of the world is our Father stands or falls with the fact that even in the world His activity is the activity of His Word and Spirit.'¹⁵⁶ Thus *concurrit, concursus* and providence must be explicated in trinitarian language. This richness of divine activity by Word and Spirit constitutes 'the decisive point' for Barth.¹⁵⁷ The creature who comprehends this in faith cannot fear for her freedom, for it is in the outpouring of trinitarian being that the creature lives and moves and has her being. Far from seeing creaturely activity 'destroyed or suppressed by His omnipotent operation', she finds her freedom affirmed and grounded in the richness of the Trinity. God's eternal, internal richness assures that

...there is no reason to be afraid that the variety of creaturely activity will as it were be ironed out by His activity, and that we ourselves will have a guarantee with the wisdom of a *suavissima dispositio* that everything in our little cosmos can maintain its own place and individuality.¹⁵⁸

Like Farrer, Barth envisages eternity preserving individuality and personal history.¹⁵⁹ The 'fear complex' meant to protect human individuality cannot hold in light of God's triune being. Barth concludes,

Surely it betrays an appalling ignorance of the Word and Spirit of God, and therefore of the true and triune God, or it betrays perhaps a forgetfulness of all that we ever knew, if we are afraid of this God and afraid for the creature at this point.¹⁶⁰

Trinitarian providence, while keeping an agnosticism regarding the 'how?' of *concursus*, removes the fear of the personal God's gracious, continual agency in achieving the one goal of election.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 138.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 139.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 143.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 150.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ This specificity and affirmation of creation rather than natural theology opens possibilities for a Barthian ecology.

¹⁶⁰ III.3, 150.

iii) *Succurrit*

Succurrit completes *concursum*.¹⁶¹ As persons, humans intend to achieve something in their actions. Limited creatures, however, cannot control the continuing effects of their completed actions, such as attainment of intention, unforeseen consequences, etc. The eternal God, however, continues to work; ‘God does not retire when the creature has attained its end and goal’.¹⁶² Thus Barth acknowledges a limited time and space where the creature genuinely acts, but asserts divine lordship over the human’s act before and after, stating, ‘The act could only begin with God, and it can only end with God.’¹⁶³ Abstracting actions and effects from God’s action is precluded. Barth’s claim here echoes his emphasis throughout III.3 on limits set by God; all creatures and the creation as a whole have a beginning and an end which God precedes and follows.

3. Divine Ruling (*Gubernatio*)

Barth’s final subdivision deals with *gubernatio*. Here Barth fills out the ‘meaning and purpose, plan and intention’ of providence. While often treated in a position of secondary importance by commentators, *gubernatio* addresses many of the most pressing questions raised by providence.¹⁶⁴ The preservation and accompanying of the creature are not merely ends in themselves; rather, they serve to bring creation and every creature to their divinely appointed goal, which is God. Barth emphasizes the personal,

[T]he fact that God alone rules includes the further fact that He Himself is the only goal which He has appointed for the creature and towards which He directs it. Proceeding from God and accompanied by God, the creature must also return to God. It must; for this is its greatness and dignity and hope.¹⁶⁵

The goal is not some destination, time or situation outside of God, but the person of God. Understanding *gubernatio* requires a twofold rule. First, Christians look to world-occurrence from the specificity of the Bible. Second, Christians look back from world-occurrence to the particularity of the Bible and the history of the

¹⁶¹ Barth notes the overlap here with *gubernatio* in accounting for the brevity of his discussion. Ibid., 151-154.

¹⁶² Ibid., 152.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ This omission seems especially striking in light of Barth’s explicit claim that *gubernatio* asserts God’s rule ‘in transcendence over the cosmic antithesis of freedom and necessity.’ Ibid., 164. Thus any discussion of human freedom in relation to divine sovereignty might benefit from analysis of this subsection.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 158.

covenant.¹⁶⁶ Echoing his claim that election is not a subset of providence, Barth stresses the particularity of the Biblical witness before moving outward to world-occurrence. Answering the question, ‘Why is it that God rules alone?’ Barth replies,

...because He is the One who in His freedom is gracious, and in His grace free; He alone is the One who can elect, and who can confirm His election by giving Himself; He alone is the faithful One who cannot be wearied or thwarted by any unfaithfulness.¹⁶⁷

Clearly, for Barth, this kingship and ruling stands firmly in connection with election.

As seen in conversation with Macmurray, the singular, twofold election of God in Barth contrasts with a dualistic understanding of election and rejection. Thus Barth reasons ‘we shall depart widely’ from the historic use of *providentia generalia, specialis, ordinaria* and *extraordinaria*.¹⁶⁸ Since election encompasses both humanity’s Yes and No (acceptance and rebellion), the dual spheres of divine action are excluded. *Providentia specialis* refers not to the ‘miraculous’, exceptional care of the Church alone, in contrast with the ‘recognisable laws’ of *providentia generalia*. Such a distinction would presuppose Humean miraculous disruptions, which Barth rejects. Instead, both *providentia specialis* and *extraordinaria* refer to clarity of ‘the centre’ which assists in interpreting the ‘circumference’.¹⁶⁹ Properly understood, special providence establishes the ‘norm’ rather than a ‘single infringement of the norm’; the particular forms the ‘controlling original’ and the general the ‘subservient copy’.¹⁷⁰ While the difference between God’s right and left hand precludes ‘a confusing levelling down’ of the distinctions, Barth focuses on the diversity of human comprehension rather than a world-order with breaks in it.

Gubernatio asserts double-agency in all its philosophical difficulties. Barth offers no ‘solution at all to the technical problem raised’ but eliminates coercive models, instead appealing to the actual, personal God and humanity in relation.¹⁷¹ As seen above, Barth adamantly rejects any suspension of creaturely agency in divine ordering.¹⁷² Divine lordship affirms creaturely reality rather than injuring it.

¹⁶⁶ See Ibid., 183-184.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 186-187.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 184-185.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 385.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 189. Barth insists that humans are ‘not merely like chessmen—let alone like chessmen already out of the game—but all of them, from Moses and Paul to Judas Iscariot...are there with their own individual being and the individual activity which corresponds to the at being.’ III.3, 189.

¹⁷² III.3, 165.

In active preservation, God gives creatures ‘room for their particular activity’ without interference.¹⁷³

The comprehensive scope of providence coupled with Barth’s election radically revises traditional Reformed views. Barth’s form shares commonality with Macmurray while his material reliance on revelation differs dramatically,

Why does He will to control all creaturely activity and its effects, and to what extent is this control really an ordering?...[B]ecause in and with and by and for all things He wills and actually accomplishes one thing—His own glory as Creator, and in it the justification, deliverance, salvation, and ultimately the glorification of the creature as it realises its particular existence as a means of glorifying the Creator. He gives it this office by subordinating its particular ends to this common end, by allowing it even in the particularity of its activity and effects to have a place in the fulfilment of His own plan.¹⁷⁴

Here Barth reverses the logic of many philosophers and theologians. God’s comprehensive, providential ordering of all things in relation to God’s ‘single goal’ actually provides for rather than cancels human particularity. As double-agency, providence is a ‘direct relation of God to each individual creature.’¹⁷⁵ The triune God revealed in Jesus Christ orders this relation without tension but in an ‘inwardly calm and clear and positive’ manner.¹⁷⁶

Following his twofold rule above, Christians freely look for traces of providence in world-occurrence, but agnosticism remains. Barth claims, ‘...of course this does not mean that the lordship and economy can be directly seen and demonstrated in world-occurrence as such.’¹⁷⁷ Barth explains,

And so the belief in God's providence undoubtedly consists in the fact that man is freed to see this rule of God in world-occurrence, this secret history of His glory. This does not mean that faith becomes sight...Yet this does not mean that it is blind.¹⁷⁸

Thus the Christian joyfully looks for signs of God’s providence in the world, moving from Scripture to world-occurrence and from world-occurrence back to Scripture. The Christian’s eyes and the eyes of the Church look expectantly for God’s action in the world through faith. As with Farrer, faith seeks understanding even in the acknowledgement of mystery.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 168.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 168-169. This passage brings out the connection between providence and ‘chaos’ which Barth discusses more fully in §50.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 169.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 189.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 196.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 23.

The final, striking section of *gubernatio* intersects creatively with philosophical theology. Barth returns to his agnosticism and the sight of faith. Those claims (and disclaimers) are presupposed in turning to ‘signs and witnesses (*Zeichen und Zeugen*)’ of providence:

1. The history of Holy Scripture.¹⁷⁹
2. The history of the Church.¹⁸⁰
3. The history of the Jews.¹⁸¹
4. The limitation of human life.¹⁸²
- [5. The angels.]¹⁸³

Barth clarifies the genuine, but limited, importance of these signs: ‘...they do testify and confirm and demonstrate, from where and by whom that occurrence is ruled. They do not tell us how it is ruled.’¹⁸⁴ In this sense, the person and intention of God remain accessible in these ‘certain constant elements’ as long as they are viewed from the revealed center.¹⁸⁵

The first three signs share a self-evident commonality not present in the final two. Each discussion revolves around God’s faithfulness in and through these ‘historical sequences.’¹⁸⁶ Staying far from triumphalism, Barth emphasizes the ‘nevertheless’ (*trotzdem*) nature of these histories in revealing providence. Barth asserts a firm confidence in the living God in spite of dark portrayals of these histories.¹⁸⁷ Like Farrer, Barth claims that long expanses of time reveal patterns of divine action absent in specific world-occurrence. While these histories are important, it is the final two signs which carry the greatest importance in relation to philosophical theology.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 200-204.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 204-210.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 210-226.

¹⁸² Ibid., 226-236.

¹⁸³ While Barth numbers and structures his discussion around four witnesses, he ends his section with a description of a fifth: the angels. These final three pages of fine print further strengthen the claim that III.3—in its four paragraphs—constitutes a sustained discussion of providence in a way that is seldom acknowledged by commentators.

¹⁸⁴ III.3, 199.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 198. Barth harkens back to the image of centre and circumference repeatedly in *CD* III.3, reminding his readers of the particularism which must move from election in Christ outward.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 226.

¹⁸⁷ For example, Barth’s discussion of ‘the history of the Jews’ could easily lead to the charge of anti-Semitism. Barth writes, ‘...the Jews are a people in the distinctive way which in the last resort we can describe only as negative.’ Ibid., 216. And ‘It is a source of irritation to us...that in the actual existence of the Jews, in their strange being as a people which is not a people, we are positively confronted with the fact of God’s electing grace...It annoys and irritates us that the Jew is undoubtedly there as he has been there for 1900 years.’ III.3, 223.

Barth acknowledges the obvious in explaining that ‘the limitation of human life’ is ‘apparently a quite illegitimate leap’ from the ‘histories’.¹⁸⁸ This discontinuity signals its importance for Barth. Unlike the other ‘concrete historical sequences with a definite content’ relating to covenant, limitations are ‘a general and formal condition of human life’.¹⁸⁹

The good gift of human life consists in limited time; bound by birth and death.¹⁹⁰ This twofold limitation ‘is the basic disposing of our human life’ and reflects ‘the two great acts of God at the beginning and end of all things, the creation and the consummation.’¹⁹¹ Thus for those with ears to hear and eyes to see, these ‘unavoidable brackets’ reveal God’s lordship in creating ‘the sphere of spontaneity’ for every creature.¹⁹² Regardless of human perceptions, ‘it is an ordination, an act of lordship, which encloses our whole life and to which we owe its spontaneity.’¹⁹³ Mortality and limitations may seem to be a curse, but in actuality, they partially constitute human capacity for action. They are necessary for the field of the personal.

Characteristically, Barth articulates the full strength of his claim in christological terms. Limitations receive affirmation and significance in the incarnation. Humans ‘are put in exactly the same place as that of the Son of God when He went the short and narrow way from the cradle to the cross’.¹⁹⁴ Jesus Christ—‘in the same limited being’—‘now reigns at the right hand of the Father.’¹⁹⁵ Human limitations reflect Christ’s limitations and therefore genuine freedom in its fullness. In the harmony of Christ’s limitations and his reign at God’s right hand, humans can discern providence. As seen in the discussion of God’s will above (and the representation of providence in Game 3), God’s self-limitations make divine love for the creature possible.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁸ III.3, 226. Barth discusses human limitations at length in his anthropology and ethics as well. See III.2, 587-640; III.4, 565-685.

¹⁸⁹ III.3, 226.

¹⁹⁰ Busch insightfully discusses Barth’s views under ‘The Gracious Restriction of Time’. Busch, *Great*, 276-279.

¹⁹¹ III.3, 229.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 236.

¹⁹⁶ This is also the logic behind Barth’s peculiar emphasis on God’s resting on the 7th day of creation. By limiting what God creates, God opens the possibility for love and relationship. Barth writes, ‘The most important biblical representation of the relationship but also the difference between creation on the one side and the covenant and providence on the other is the account of the seventh day of creation which concludes the first creation saga.’ *Ibid.*, 7. Cf. III.1, 219ff; III.3, 70-71.

Finally, Barth's preliminary discussion of angels as 'the primary and supreme signs and testimonies to the divine world-governance' points to their significance in providence. Calling angels another 'constant element which is more important' than the others, Barth describes angels in their heavenly, primary and essential nature.¹⁹⁷ I discuss angels further in Chapter IX, but note Barth's reference here to their role as a 'sign' of providence.

4. The Christian under the Universal Lordship of God the Father

Barth's doctrine of providence as the dynamic reationality of God and free humans reaches its crescendo in the final pages of §49. Having focused extensively on God's three-fold care, Barth turns to the human. Here, providence's pastoral efficacy stands or falls. Simply professing God's determination of world-occurrence easily leads to fatalism, not providence. If God's election is sure in Christ, is the difference between Christian and non-Christian merely the awareness of this information? If all creatures participate in providence, does faith ultimately become irrelevant? In the end, doesn't election make human history meaningless since saint and sinner, Paul and Judas all advance God's will? The philosophical conversations above illumine the particular meaning of Barth's emphatic *Nein!* to these questions.

Barth's doctrine of providence is personal, self-involving and active. It is not a 'type of speculation in which you are interested only as a more or less clever spectator.'¹⁹⁸ Like Farrer's Domain 4 knowledge, Barth's doctrine of providence is fully engaged interaction rather than a purely cognitive or speculative model. Knowledge of providence 'is nothing at all if it is not an exercised science or craft.'¹⁹⁹ Farrer's categories of truth clarify Barth's claims regarding knowledge of providence, while not denigrating scientific knowledge. Readers miss Barth's meaning entirely if they overlook the nature of this truth or read him dualistically.²⁰⁰

Like Farrer and Macmurray, Barth rejects Cartesianism and sees theory and practice as inseparable. Knowledge of divine agency in world-occurrence is only possible for the believer 'in faith, in obedience, and in prayer.'²⁰¹ Barth claims these three elements are simultaneously active in Christian life. Barth is so emphatic on

¹⁹⁷ III.3, 236.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 244.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Contra* Schröder and Link.

²⁰¹ III.3, 245. Farrer's claim that 'religious knowledge' comes only through 'faith, obedience and love' greatly resembles Barth's argument.

this account that he compares the Christian's interconnected life to the interconnectedness of the Trinity:

...as the three trinitarian modes of the divine being do not limit and complete each other as parts of the Godhead, but are the one God in a threefold identity, so that each of the modes includes the other two within itself and is within the others, so the faith and obedience and prayer of the Christian are the one Christian attitude, and they are all individually that which the others are as well.²⁰²

Not one to casually draw connections between God and humanity, Barth underscores the mutually inclusive nature of each aspect. Based on this unity and distinction, no antithesis can be posited 'concerning the more contemplative or active nature of Christianity, or the respective merits of waiting and hastening, of grace and freedom, of comfort and exhortation...all this is superfluous.'²⁰³ Instead, the Christian life under providence 'is not a matter either of pure theory or of pure practice, but always of the step or leap from the one to the other, from seeing to doing, from knowing to acting.'²⁰⁴ Here Barth attempts to transcend the antitheses of traditional providence. He states,

Antitheses of this kind are always relics of a wrongly speculative approach to the divine providence and lordship. As they are truly considered in the dynamic and total form possible only in the Christian life, and as they are repeated in this subjective sphere, the divine providence and lordship render all such antitheses superfluous.²⁰⁵

This opposition to 'a wrongly speculative approach' reveals Barth's awareness of the philosophical implications of his theology. As for Farrer, the rationalism of faith is for Barth real but totally self-involving. Mere speculation renders perception of this rationalism inaccessible.

Unlike 'mere seeing or knowing', Christian knowledge requires intentional, personal participation.²⁰⁶ The Christian 'recognises the relation in which he and all other creatures are placed' and 'has a real knowledge of the whole matter'.²⁰⁷ This is what the Christian sees that others do not see. As 'the true creature', the Christian 'actually says Yes to being a creature.'²⁰⁸ In Macmurray's terms, she sets God at the

²⁰² Ibid., 246.

²⁰³ Ibid., 245.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Barth's commonality with Farrer and Macmurray in opposition to Cartesian models stands out here.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 284.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 240.

‘centre of value’ and is actualized as a child of God.²⁰⁹ In Farrer’s terms, she participates in God’s ‘programme of action’ from within.

Like Farrer, Barth describes two different ways of participating in providence, from ‘without’ and from ‘within’.²¹⁰ Objectively, all creatures participate in providence from without. Creatures are preserved, accompanied and ruled by God, regardless of their perception or attitude. Most creatures (rocks, animals and many humans) exist unaware of this factual reality. The Christian seizes the gracious opportunity to participate in providence from within ‘as a creature which not only experiences this rule in practice but perceives and acknowledges and affirms and approves it’.²¹¹ This knowledge focuses on the personal God first and only then on world-occurrence.

From within, Christians participate in Christ and ‘see’ God’s rule in good and bad, though never attributing the latter to divine ‘authorship’. He sees,

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the humiliation but also in the exaltation of His humanity, and himself united with Him, belonging to Him, his life delivered by Him, but also placed at His disposal. And seeing Him, he sees the legislative, executive and judicial authority over and in all things...He sees himself subjected to this authority as the one who is united with and belongs to the Son...God the Father as the ruling Creator is obviously not an oppressor, and Christ as a subject creature is obviously not oppressed.²¹²

This strong christological emphasis relativises the confusion of world-occurrence. United in fellowship with Christ, he sees God’s Fatherly love and responds, freely and without coercion, in faith, obedience and prayer. The relation between Creator and creature manifest in Jesus Christ transforms traditional debates concerning double-agency which *presume conflict*. Participation from within involves ‘not an obscure law, but a friendly permission and invitation’.²¹³ This participatory knowledge, represented in Game 3’s Outcome I, leads to confidence in God’s grace, not an arrogant claim to control or interpret God’s action.²¹⁴ Providence’s pastoral

²⁰⁹ Macmurray, *Persons*, 158.

²¹⁰ III.3, 239. This language mystifies readers such as Schröder. Schröder, ‘See,’ 134. Farrer’s ‘double aspect’ of religious truth offers a similar distinction, with the Christian entering a ‘programme of action, through which men are to transcend their miseries, and enter into the saving purposes of God.’ Farrer, *Love*, 177.

²¹¹ III.3, 39. As Mangina notes, Barth’s thought echoes Wittgenstein’s claim: ‘the world of the happy man is a different one from that of the unhappy man.’ Ludwig Wittgenstein as quoted by Mangina, *Witness*, 93. The participatory knowledge of Christian providence encourages and emboldens the Christian to live today knowing she ‘is already, here and now, not in foreign territory but in the house of the eternal Father.’ Barth, *Heidelberg*, 58.

²¹² III.3, 241.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 242.

²¹⁴ Schröder misses this point entirely; see Schröder, ‘See,’ 134.

strength comes from the Christian's active faith, obedience and prayer in the face of joys, suffering, and persecution, not explanations or magical escapes.

Since Barth's doctrine of providence rests entirely on God's personal action revealed in Christ, the pastoral effect comes from looking first to God and only then to world-occurrence. In contrast with Macmurray, Barth's strong Christology allows for tremendous modesty regarding the interpretation of history.²¹⁵ Barth poetically describes this Christian agnosticism,

In practice, of course, he is faced every day afresh with the riddles of the world-process...he will be the one man who knows that there is no value in any of the master-keys...He is the one man who will always be the most surprised, the most affected, the most apprehensive and the most joyful in the face of events.²¹⁶

The Christian, practicing his faith, cannot interpret world-occurrence better than the atheist.²¹⁷ Thus Schröder's charge that Barth's doctrine of providence constitutes arrogance loses legitimacy. Objectively, both Christian and atheist serve God (one way or another). Neither interprets the specific significance of a given victory, tragedy, joy or sadness particularly well. Subjectively, the two stand worlds apart. The non-believer does not understand himself (his objective reality created and redeemed in covenant). The Christian, however, sees the grace of opportunity *coram Deo*. In suffering or joy, he can obey God's command and enter into God's saving act. Drawn into the center through fellowship with Jesus Christ, the Christian finds freedom to respond, making God's providence 'actual to him in faith, in obedience, and in prayer.'²¹⁸ This is the work of the right hand of God's determinative providence and carries positive eternal consequences.

Barth describes the Christian's 'genuine and actual share in the universal lordship of God' as the 'freedom of the friends of God' (*Freiheit der Freunde Gottes*).²¹⁹ Human freedom is truly realised in relation to God. It is determined, but not determinism. Rather, God determines the Christian *as a friend of God*. Lest this be misunderstood as abusive caprice, Barth makes a remarkable statement showing the depth of his personal and relational providence:

²¹⁵ The inverse relation between Christology and philosophy of history operates for Macmurray.

²¹⁶ III.3, 242-243.

²¹⁷ Passages such as this one refute criticisms such as Schröder's when she laments, 'For Barth the subject of the seeing is not Christian faith as such, but the Christian. Isn't this an expression of spiritual arrogance combined with a lack of self-understanding?' Schröder, 'See,' 134. Zachman correctly responds, 'Schröder seems to take it as self-evident that believers do in fact see the providence of God in the world, but there are many statements in Barth that would lead us to think that all such seeing is impossible.' Zachman, 'Response,' 140.

²¹⁸ III.3, 245.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 285.

He is not alone in His trinitarian being, and He is not alone in relation to creatures. He is free and immutable as the living God, as the God who wills to converse with the creature, and to allow Himself to be determined by it in this relationship (*in diesem Verkehr mit ihm sich auch von ihm her bestimmen lassen will*).²²⁰

Christian providence involves God's primary determination of the creature, but it also involves the Christian's determination of God.²²¹ The personal God revealed in Jesus Christ is not an immutable monad, enslaved in power and isolation, but rather omnipotent and immutable in living relationship. For Barth, God's being as the electing God involves being determined (*bestimmen*) by the other who is not God. This is no dualistic understanding whereby the Christian takes some percentage from God in a zero-sum equation. According to Barth, God 'has determined that without abandoning the helm for one moment He will still allow Himself to be determined by [the friends of God].'²²²

As seen in conversation with Macmurray, Barth's doctrine of providence proclaims that God accomplishes election in one way or another. God's friends participate in this rule intentionally, joyfully and wholly. Others do so involuntarily and miserably. As seen in Chapter V, both participate factually, but only the former does so practically. Lest this distinction seem inconsequential, we return to Barth's discussion of Judas and Paul discussed in Chapter IV. Both serve as 'apostles' proclaiming Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Jesus stands between them (as between the two thieves on the cross).²²³ Double-agency proclaims that God acts precisely in Judas' wicked 'handing-over'. Judas remains responsible for this 'conscious and deliberate sin' and corresponds with Christ as *rejected*.²²⁴ God works, however, precisely in this action to advance God's salvific intention. In contrast, Paul accepts God's invitation and turns 'from emptiness to fulness.'²²⁵ He, like the thief at Christ's right hand, accepts grace and proclaims it. Neither the Christian nor the non-Christian has a 'capacity' to thwart God's intention, but each is graciously offered opportunity. Their nature is to 'witness' in their personal obedience or disobedience *coram Deo*. They must witness—in one way or another, at the right or

²²⁰ Ibid., 285 (323). The English translators' decision to translate *bestimmt* as 'conditions' and *bestimmen* as 'determined' just four words later reduces the force and relationship of Barth's claim. The proper ordering of God's determination of the creature and the creature's determination of God is essential as Barth reaches the climax of his discussion of the Christian under God's lordship here.

²²¹ Davaney's statement that, 'In no way can these derived [creaturely] powers be understood to control and determine God' does not account for Barth's conclusion here. Davaney, *Divine*, 36.

²²² III.3, 285.

²²³ See II.2, 484.

²²⁴ Ibid., 503.

²²⁵ Ibid., 484.

left hand of God. Negatively, opportunity is missed and God shows mercy. Positively, the Christian believes, obeys and prays, and in so doing ‘moves the finger and hand and sceptre of the God who rules the world.’²²⁶ As such, the ‘subjective element...conceals and contains and actualises the most objective of all things’: God’s personal, providential rule. Since God’s *conservatio* preserves every creature—who are as they act in *concursum coram Deo*—forever, each action carries eternal significance, despite Barth’s implicit *apokastasis*.²²⁷

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that Barth’s three-fold providence is a thoroughly personalist articulation from start to finish. While Barth’s maintenance of *conservatio*, *concursum*, and *gubernatio* can lead to the mistaken conclusion that §49 merely restates past doctrines, personalist tools gleaned from conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer reveal it to be the ‘radical correction’ Barth believed it to be.²²⁸

Barth’s *conservatio* revises ‘older theology’ in regard to both creaturely history and eschatology. In resonance with personalist views of limits, mediation, and actualistic ontology, Barth revises significant aspects of traditional doctrine such as immortality. Barth develops his ordering of election and providence to demonstrate the asymmetrical relationship of the *servatio* of election to the *conservatio* of providence. As in Macmurray’s intention of God, this allows Barth to develop the limited ‘opportunity’ of autonomous human action *coram Deo* in establishing personal identity, determined by God. Most significantly, I argue that Barth’s personalist revision of providence logically corresponds with the ‘eternalising’ of human persons in eternal life of God. Just as Brümmer’s frameworks shape the possible corresponding eschatological outcomes, so too does Barth’s doctrine of providence as portrayed in my Game 3. While Barth did not hesitate to portray human eternal life without the autonomy granted to it in history, he did not develop his eschatology in sufficient detail. While this is understandable

²²⁶ III.3, 288.

²²⁷ If my understanding of Barth’s doctrine of providence and its corresponding eschatology are correct, the debates around *apokastasis* change dramatically. Yes, all are saved in Jesus Christ, but the actual *persons* are shaped in world history through the double-agency of Game 3. *That* God saves is the singular action of the triune God. *Who* God saves—the actual person—is the individual determined by God in this lifetime *through* her ‘own supremely responsible decision[s].’ I.1, 161-162.

²²⁸ III.3, xxii.

in light of his planned but unfinished volume V of *CD*, it leaves significant implications of providence underdeveloped.

Barth's *concursum* continues to emphasize the personal throughout. Barth argues for both the absolute scope of God's determinative action and human autonomy in limitation. Using a formal argument similar to Farrer's double-agency, Barth is largely successful in avoiding the antinomy present in pre-modern articulations of providence. Barth's thoroughly actualistic ontology exceeds the personalism of philosophy by anchoring the person, will, and work of God entirely in the christological content given in revelation. While I argue that Barth's *concursum* cannot be understood properly without tools such as those offered by philosophical theology, its christocentric and trinitarian content establish it as essentially theology rather than philosophy.

The discussion of *gubernatio* emphasizes both the particularism and the agnosticism inherent in Barth's personalist providence. Reliant as it is on revelation, Barth's doctrine of providence comprehends the general from the particular. Like Farrer's double-agency, Barth's rejects interventionist views of divine action, and with it traditional explications of *providentia specialis* and *extraordinaria*. Barth's agnosticism, like Farrer's, is nuanced in describing signs of providence in the patterns emerging from extended periods of history. Unlike Farrer, Barth ties each of his three histories to the specificity of the Christian tradition. The peculiar inclusion of human limitations (and angels) among signs of providence is illumined by Barth's formal similarities with personalist philosophy.

Barth ends §49 by developing the impact of his theological personalism in focus on the human subject. Drawing on Farrer's double-agency in the personal realm and its accessibility only through 'lived response', I analyzed Barth's insistence that Christians *actively* know providence through faith, obedience, and prayer. The self-involving action described resonates with personalist philosophy, but Barth adds considerable potency to his claim in linking proper Christian life with trinitarian life *ad intra*. Barth concludes §49 with a claim that Christians actually determine God in this relationship. This final claim illustrates the personal, relational significance of Barth's 'radical correction' of Reformed orthodoxy. Ironically, he has explicitly tried to address many of the specific critiques and concerns later leveled against him by the critics discussed in Chapter II. Turning now to his discussion of nothingness, we see Barth's attempt to address evil, sin and chaos in the wake of World War II.

CHAPTER VIII

§50 GOD AND NOTHINGNESS

Barth addresses the most problematic aspects of providence in §50; evil and sin. It also leads us to one of the most complex portions of Barth's theology. The following discussion is admittedly not a solution to §50 but a suggested interpretation based on the conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer. Having described Barth's personalist providence, I argue that Barth's nothingness is inherently impersonal, with no positive relation to the personal God.

Barth's doctrine of nothingness is widely accepted as a dramatic break from the Reformed tradition, but seldom integrated into his providence as a whole.¹ Building on the preceding discussions, I explore five areas of importance and the significance of Barth's nothingness in regard to providence. These areas are:

- i) Nothingness as the negative aspect of election
- ii) Nothingness and creaturely history
- iii) Nothingness and theodicy
- iv) The 'ontology' of nothingness
- v) Nothingness and eschatology

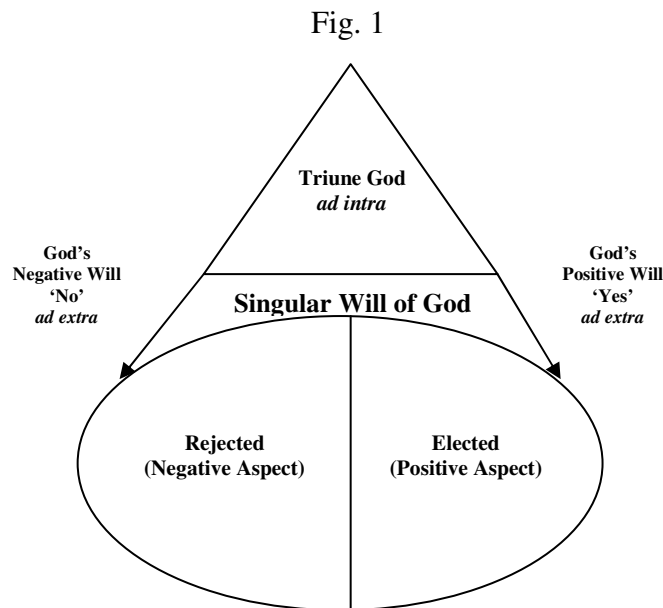
The first two points begin in a highly formal manner and seem speculative.² These, however, form the basis of the other points and can hardly avoid a speculative tone (relative to creatures) in light of their relation to election 'before the foundations of the world.' They also lead to a far more practical, ethical theology than most readers see in Barth. In addition, they demonstrate the absurdity of calling God the 'author of sin' or distancing humans from their *personal* guilt and responsibility in sinning.

¹ A number of works are helpful in deciphering §50, though few set it in the wider context of III.3. I argue that each would benefit from this broader context. Thus many of the contradicting views in this list offer insight to the larger whole. See Paul S. Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988); Hick, *Evil*, 132ff; Krötke, *Sin*; McDowell, 'Much.'; Ruether, 'Left.'; von Balthasar, *Theology*, 188-191.

² Hick writes, 'This view may be criticized...as an infringement of [Barth's] ban upon speculative theorizing, and from outside that thought world, as a naively mythological construction, which cannot withstand rational criticism.' Hick, *Evil*, 141.

i) *Nothingness as the negative aspect of election*

Barth understands the beginning of nothingness to be simultaneous with God's primordial election (and therefore rejection).³ In doing so, he attempts to 'indicate and remove a serious confusion...in the history of theology.'⁴ The 'ontic context' of nothingness 'is that of God's activity as grounded in His election.'⁵ Just as God's Yes in election precedes and determines creation, so God's rejection precedes and determines nothingness.⁶ As in Macmurray, dualism is avoided by using a single, twofold intention of the personal God. Figure 1 represents these two spheres, the positive of election and the negative of rejection.⁷



The line down the center is fixed by the action of God. Barth's form mirrors Macmurray's ordering—the positive contains and is constituted by its own negative. God's will in election is as comprehensive as it is simple. Barth writes,

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...Both of these activities, grounded in His election and

³ See III.3, 351ff.

⁴ Ibid., 295.

⁵ Ibid., 351.

⁶ Krötke defends Barth against Berkouwer's critique of dualism arguing, 'A dualism between God and nothingness is ruled out because God's Yes stands at the beginning of all things.' Krötke, *Sin*, 26.

⁷ Admittedly, diagrams (like analogies) risk implying too much. The diagrams are meant to portray ordering and relations, not 'things'. Despite their shortcomings, I find them descriptively helpful.

decision, are necessary elements in His sovereign action. He is Lord both on the right hand and on the left.⁸

God's wrath and rejection are each a 'necessary element' (*ein notwendiges Element*) in election. God's action and intention, like all actions, have a positive and a negative aspect. Nothingness derives its peculiar existence in this improper way, as 'impossible possibility.'⁹

Crucially, Barth grounds *God's* election in God's being *ad intra*, but not the resulting creation or nothingness itself. While creation is God's work *ad extra* in its positive connection to God's willing, nothingness is not. In order to preserve this claim, Barth makes the astounding statement,

[Through God's rejection,]...existence and form are given to a reality *sui generis*, in the fact that God is wholly and utterly not the Creator in this respect. Nothingness is that which God does not will.¹⁰

Nothingness exists but creates itself *in its purely negative relation* to God's will.¹¹ Thus God cannot be the 'author of sin' or evil, but stands fully above them in a powerful non-willing. Again, this election and rejection logically precede creation.

Barth tests his claims using Scripture. Having already discussed Genesis 1 extensively as the 'external basis of covenant', he reiterates the presence of nothingness *from the beginning*.¹² The Fall (Gen. 3) 'confirms the accuracy of our definition' of nothingness.¹³ Barth explains, 'It is purely and simply what God did not, does not and cannot will.'¹⁴ In contrast with 'older theology' Barth formally precludes a place for nothingness, sin and evil *in the creation*.

Primordial election is God's self-determination to be for the other in Jesus Christ. This claim results in the three elements portrayed in Figure 1: God *ad intra*, God's Yes *ad extra* and God's No *ad extra*. Logically following these conditions, God then creates the world *ex nihilo*. This creation, in its totality, is deemed good by God. It is without blemish or fault and fills the area of God's elect. Thus every aspect of creaturely existence has a positive correspondence with God's Yes *ad extra*.

⁸ III.3, 351.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ruether helpfully explains that nothingness '...can be philosophically defined as autonomous (in the sense of non-derivable from God) and yet not autonomous (in the sense of ever having existed in any other status but that of a conquered enemy)...' Ruether, 'Left,' 8.

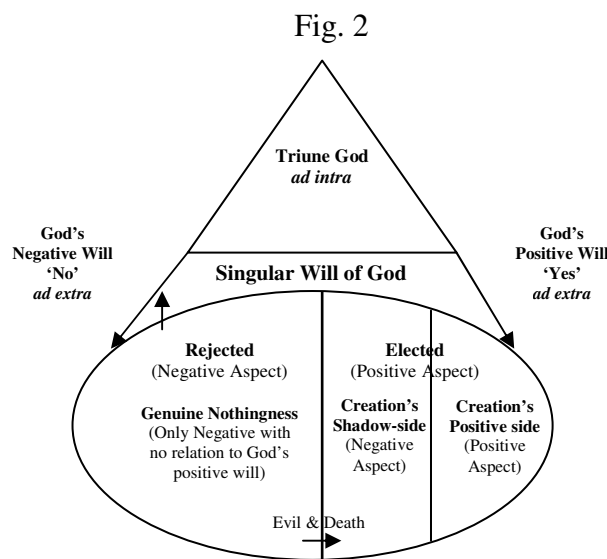
¹² See III.1, 94-228.

¹³ III.3, 352.

¹⁴ Ibid.

ii) *Nothingness and creaturely history*

Having portrayed this primordial reality *ad extra*, Barth turns to the creature. God's positive will and the work of God's right hand perfectly fills the right portion of the diagram with creation (Fig. 2). Everything in this sphere—down to the smallest detail—has a positive relation to God (whether the creature is aware of it or not). These are the limits of the creature. The line dividing creation from nothingness is both firm and certain in God's constancy. As seen in conversation with Farrer, Barth's cosmology posits a nature and limits for all of God's creatures. The nature of every creature made by Barth's Creator limits it from the abyss of nothingness. Though humans intend to live outside of positive relation to God, this



amounts to Macmurray's 'unreality' and can only end in human frustration.

Barth now describes creation's twofold character as that which is elected in Jesus Christ. This carries two claims. First, God's creatures have 'a positive as well as a negative aspect', both in relation to God's positive will in election (i.e. fully in the right portion of Fig. 2).¹⁵ Second and conversely, genuine nothingness can only be taken seriously by discerning it from the negative or shadow-side (*Shattenseite*) of creation. Nothingness is *not* creation's negative aspect (see the left portion of Fig. 2).

Creation itself resembles Macmurray's formula discussed in Chapter IV—the positive contains and is constituted by the negative. Building on III.1, Barth claims the Bible 'unmistakeably indicates' this twofold character and aspect of creaturely

¹⁵ Ibid., 295. Barth refers his reader to his discussion of this twofold character in III.1, §42, 3.

existence.’¹⁶ The fact that the negative aspect ‘is as it were on the frontier of nothingness and orientated towards it’ must not signify identification or mingling with nothingness.¹⁷ Creation’s negative aspect—with all its limitation, pain, tears, loss and death—is not of itself involved in opposition and resistance to God’s creative will’ (*Gottes Schöpferwillen*).¹⁸ Jesus’ incarnation reveals creation’s goodness in that God

...made Himself the Subject of both aspects of creaturely existence. And having made it His own in Jesus Christ, He has affirmed it in its totality, reconciling its inner antithesis in His own person.¹⁹

Christ’s humiliation and exaltation affirm that creation’s twofold character ‘corresponds to the intention of God’ (*der Absicht Gottes*).²⁰ Positively, the creaturely nature is ‘worthy of its Creator.’²¹ Negatively, the creature is ‘dependent on Him.’²² In this negative aspect, Barth furthers his claim from §49 that limits constitute both a gift from God and a sign of providence. Barth returns to the incarnation, stating,

Since God’s Word became flesh, He Himself has acknowledged that the distinct reality of the world created by Him is in both its forms, with its Yes and its No, that of the world which He willed. He has thus revealed its right to this twofold form, and therefore the goodness of creation.²³

Barth perceives his claim here to be a radical break with theologians of all kinds. Affirming the positive and negative aspects of creation as good, Barth leaves no room for evil in either Creator or creature. In Christ, God determined sorrow, adversity and even ‘the darkest night and the greatest misfortune’ to sing ‘the praise of God just as it was, and was therefore right and perfect.’²⁴ While Christians strangely only realize this ‘in our few better moments’, every moment of creaturely

¹⁶ III.3, 295. See III.1, 17ff.

¹⁷ III.3, 296.

¹⁸ Ibid. Ruether writes, ‘Whatever God wills is good, and if he chose to create his world non-divine, finite and mortal, that is in no way to be seen as a defect. That is the nature and destiny which God willed for his creation, and whatever God wills is to be taken as unequivocally good.’ Ruether, ‘Left,’ 5.

¹⁹ III.3, 296.

²⁰ Ibid. Again, Barth’s language of personal agency resonates with that of the philosophical theology of his day much more than with the causal language of the theological tradition. This further calls into question Barth’s cautious approval of the causal concept discussed in his fine-print section from III.3, 94-107. In light of all Barth’s revisions of the meaning of ‘cause,’ he would have done better to drop its use all together in favor of the language of agency. It is notable that Barth uses the term rarely in the rest of *CD* after this fine-print section.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 301.

²⁴ Ibid., 297.

life—positive and negative—is blessed *opportunity* to live already in the Father’s house.²⁵ Unlike the ‘paradise lost’ of Reformed orthodoxy, Barth sees impersonal creation impacted by human sin to be ontologically continuous with its original state. Farrer’s exposition of physical ‘evil’ as the ‘misfit between the properties of different systems placed in mutual relation’ helps illumine Barth’s meaning.²⁶ While earthquakes, cancer, and violent animals bring pain to humans, they remain part of God’s good creation and do not constitute genuine nothingness.

Barth’s second claim follows the first. Given creation’s twofold character, theologians must discern nothingness from creation’s negative aspect. Unlike the shadow-side, nothingness properly has nothing to do with God or the creature. Opposed to both, nothingness is pure adversary, but humanity constantly misses this point. Barth’s language throughout emphasizes the failures of human *cognition* regarding nothingness. Confusion, stupidity, concealment, the masquerade and camouflage, the infamous trick, misapprehension—each term points to a fundamental error running throughout theological history.²⁷ Such cognitive language, however, must not become mere speculation and undermine Barth’s claim that identifying the shadow-side and nothingness constitutes a comprehensive error. Barth writes, ‘The confusion itself and as such is a masterpiece and even a triumph of nothingness.’²⁸

When nothingness becomes a part of a system or a world-view, it gains an impossible legitimacy *within* creation. Such attempts grant nothingness a place “‘in the same boat” as the whole of creation and finally the good Lord Himself.’²⁹ Seen improperly, nothingness can never be taken with the seriousness with which God determines it in election. In consequence,

²⁵ Elsewhere, Barth writes, ‘In this world I am not away from home but in the house of my Father who is not against me but for me.’ Barth, *Heidelberg*, 60.

²⁶ Farrer, *Love*, 50.

²⁷ In his famous fine-print section, Barth allies himself with Mozart alone because he ‘knew something...that neither the real fathers of the 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 not the Existentialists...either know or can express and maintain as he did.’ III.3, 298. Adding to the praise, he continues, ‘...in the music of Mozart—and I wonder whether the same can be said of any other works before or after—we have clear and convincing proof that it is a slander on creation to charge it with a share in chaos because it includes a Yes and a No.’ III.3, 299. Barth’s explicit attempt to distance his views from past attempts signals another plank in his ‘radical correction’ of providence.

²⁸ III.3, 299. The outworking of Barth’s claim continues to develop in §51 where he quickly rejects the idea that Satan or demons are fallen angels; i.e., part of God’s good creation.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 300. The seriousness of this cognitive threat is seen here as Barth traces its logic back to the conclusion that nothingness finds a place in the triune being of God. Barth strongly refutes this claim.

Real sin can then be regarded as a venial error and mistake, a temporary retardation, and *comprendre c'est pardonner*. Real evil can then be interpreted as transitory and not intolerable imperfection, and real death as “rest in God.” The devil can then be denied or described as the last candidate for a salvation which is due to him too by reason of a general *apokatastasis*.³⁰

By allowing nothingness this place in creation, nothingness gains ‘a positive relationship with God’s will and work.’³¹ As seen in the diagram, nothingness falls under God’s authority, but has no part in creation or God’s positive will.³² Barth explains the consequences of the error he opposes,

[Nothingness’] nature and existence are attributed to God, to His will and responsibility, and the menacing and corruption of creation by nothingness are understood as His intention and act and therefore as a necessary and tolerable part of creaturely existence.³³

Barth categorically rejects such systematization. Arising only from God’s negative rejection, nothingness cannot be attributed to God.

Nothingness invades history as humans turn towards it and attempt to actualize the impossible. Turning away from God, humans attempt to say Yes to nothingness. The results are terrible, as the human ‘is not only confronted by [nothingness] and becomes its victim, but makes himself its agent (*Täter*).’³⁴ History continues to reveal that although the relationship between God and humanity is ‘marked by the fact that man is the sinner who has submitted and fallen a victim to chaos’, nevertheless, God ‘continues and completes the action which He has already undertaken as Creator in this respect, negating and rejecting’ nothingness.³⁵ Barth claims that history (from creation to its eschatological end) is a singular action of God which encompasses all world-occurrence under divine Lordship. Nevertheless, the creature foolishly submits to, falls victim to and makes herself the ‘agent’ of nothingness.³⁶

All creatures and even nothingness itself ‘are’ only in connection with the activity of God (*mit dem Handeln Gottes*).³⁷ With the right and left hand, God

³⁰ Ibid. Weber mistakenly claims, ‘It is to be noted that this passage is very important because it shows how false it is to number Barth among the advocates of “*apokatastasis*”.’ Weber, *Barth's*, 189. Weber fails to see that it is precisely in Barth’s rejection of uncreated nothingness that he logically argues for the salvation of *all creation* in Christ. Barth’s own rejection of *apokatastasis* centers instead on the nature of divine grace ‘only as free gift.’ IV.3.1, 477. In this way, God can neither be required (as in *apokatastasis*) nor prohibited from granting universal reconciliation.

³¹ III.3, 301.

³² Ibid., 292.

³³ Ibid., 301.

³⁴ Ibid., 352.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 353.

determines the ‘limits’ of both creatures and nothingness. Actuality derives from the respective form of existence in confrontation with God. From the ‘Christian point of view’, there is no ‘autonomous existence independent of God.’³⁸ God’s electing will (*opus proprium*) necessarily includes God’s active non-willing, rejection (*opus alienum*). As seen in Macmurray, this single, twofold form avoids the pitfalls of dualism. Barth grounds all divine activity in election, and therefore all non-divine existence in negative relation with this *one* intentional act.³⁹ Here we see the impact and strength of Barth’s revision of election into the divine ontology which *leads to* creation and providence, rather than placing election as a subset of God’s will (with the number of divine intentions equaling at least the number of world-occurrences).⁴⁰

Election from before the foundations of the world allows Barth to describe nothingness as under God’s lordship, but outside the sphere of creation. While never ceasing to claim God’s active sovereignty over all things, Barth nevertheless emphatically denies any *positive* connection of nothingness to God’s will. Seen from the standpoint of the incarnation, Barth writes,

[Nothingness] was obviously nothing that He Himself had chosen, willed or done.⁴¹

It is obvious that this neither can nor may be understood as something which He Himself has posited or decreed, and that it cannot be subsumed under any synthesis.⁴²

Any understanding of providence must therefore make sense of God’s lordship over nothingness without positing it as divinely ‘chosen, willed or done’. At the same time, Barth’s earlier claim that God’s will determines all creaturely occurrence must not reduce this claim to nonsense. Again, Barth’s shift from causal language to personal relationality is a crucial interpretive key to his explication here.

Materially, sin cannot be generalized; it is personal. In the incarnation, we see the uselessness and confusion of positing an ‘abstract law of God’ as the grounds of knowledge of real sin.⁴³ In Christ, we learn the reality, not of an abstract perfection, but of concrete life *coram Deo*. Barth explains,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Here we also see the power and coherence of Barth’s singular doctrine of double-predestination over and against that of Calvin’s election of some and rejection of others.

⁴⁰ McDowell clarifies, ‘This conflict had its origin ‘before’ (understood *logically* rather than simply *temporally*) creation, with the separation of creation and nothingness, and preservation of the former....’ McDowell, ‘Much,’ 325.

⁴¹ III.3, 304.

⁴² Ibid., 304-305.

⁴³ Ibid., 309. Barth’s use of ‘abstract’ in contrast to ‘concrete’ or ‘real’ has theological and philosophical significance. See Hunsinger, *How*, 32; Johnson, *Mystery*, 60-61.

In relation to his gracious Creator man ought to be both free and bound by nature, not to a divine or even heavenly but to a creaturely and earthly perfection, corresponding though not equal to the perfection of his Father in heaven.⁴⁴

Created for this relationship in covenant, humans (even after the fall) ‘could and should live in this righteousness.’⁴⁵ Sin cannot be perceived in contrast with a heavenly law of which humans pathetically fall short. Instead, humans reject God’s ‘merciful, patient and generous will’ and repudiate ‘the goodness of God.’⁴⁶ Sin reflects not imperfection, which could be traced back to humanity’s Creator, but genuine, personal guilt.⁴⁷ In Christ, we know ‘that our fellowship with Him is our true and natural state.’⁴⁸ Therefore, God’s command is not the threatening law, but the gracious command of ‘the God who is unconditionally for him, who from the very outset is his God and Father.’⁴⁹ Humanity’s sin is a rejection of this good gift—limited, dependent life in relation to God. Even in its negative aspect, life is grace, an opportunity in relation to God.

Again, Brümmer’s seemingly logical framework of relationality cannot be applied to Barth’s asymmetrical, covenantal understanding. Creation and eschatology show the objective reality of humanity in the unbreakable covenant of God. Nevertheless, in history humans mysteriously live as if this were not true and prompt the left hand of God. Within the limits of creation, humans seem to be able to stand outside the covenant, able to say ‘Yes or No’ to God. By ordering election as he does, Barth shows this as an impossibility. As seen regarding Judas in Chapter IV, sin is personal in that only the covenant partner can break the covenant. Preserving the covenant, God determines the creature with the redeeming wrath and judgment of God’s left hand. While continuing to save the creature from nothingness, God’s left hand nevertheless shapes the person in a very different way than the positive determination of the right hand.

Barth makes another distinction. While sin is ‘the concrete form of nothingness’ as ‘man’s own act, achievement and guilt (*Tat, Vollbringung und Schuld des Menschen*)’, it does not exhaust nothingness.⁵⁰ Biblical sin is both ‘man’s

⁴⁴ III.3, 308.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Webster brings this reality into relation with Barth’s exposition of original sin. Webster, *Moral*, 65-76.

⁴⁶ III.3, 308.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 309.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 310 (352).

full responsibility' and 'his surrender to the alien power of an adversary.'⁵¹ Nothingness involves 'real evil and real death as well as real sin' in their 'opposition to the totality of God's creation.'⁵² While election leaves no doubt regarding salvation, God's providence permits human persons the perverse choice of disobedience. Since actualistic ontology means 'As we will, we are; and what we do, we are', this person—determined in double-agency with God's left hand—will participate in God's eternal life.⁵³

Evil, death, and sin all attack both creature and Creator, though they can be distinguished. Evil and death 'primarily and immediately attack the creature but indirectly and properly the Creator, whereas sin primarily and immediately attacks God and only indirectly the creature.'⁵⁴ As Creator, God rules evil and death supremely and with utter clarity; they present no immediate threat to God's person. The situation is different with humanity. Attacked by evil and death, humans selfishly (and futilely) act 'godlessly' and therefore sin. The attack negatively determines their person and correspondingly prompts God's left hand. Since the personal God *ad intra* is the God of election, sin attacks God as the confused act and achievement of humans.

In all cases, nothingness opposes both Creator and creature in the *totality* of its assault. As seen in conversation with Macmurray, God's intention is both singular and totally comprehensive in Jesus Christ. The 'heart of the Gospel' reveals comprehensiveness of the 'total Saviour (*ganzen Heiland*) of the New Testament' over 'this total enemy (*totalen Feind*)'.⁵⁵ While inclusive of the forgiveness of sins, Christ's work also took 'away the power of death...as the condemnation and destruction of the creature.'⁵⁶ The resurrection is then 'the manifestation of the divine act which...was affected in His work, the work of His person.'⁵⁷ On these christological grounds, Barth explains,

In plain and precise terms, the answer is that nothingness 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.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Ibid., 310. Barth further develops the latter claim in his discussion of 'The Lordless Powers'. Barth, *Christian Life*, 213-233.

⁵² III.3, 310.

⁵³ I.2, 793.

⁵⁴ III.3, 310.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 311.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 312. This harkens back to Barth's distinction of two types of death discussed in Chapter VII.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 305.

Seen in Jesus, nothingness is the totality of all God has decisively overcome. While affirming creaturely existence both in its positive and negative aspects in the incarnation, God rejects and conquers a 'real' opponent. In a rare and explicit compliment to the Eastern Church, Barth chastises 'all the Western' Church for its 'minimising and devaluating' of 'the total saviour' and 'this total enemy' Christ conquered.⁵⁹ God's gracious election and the rejection of nothingness cannot be broken into various abstractions but must be taken in their actual totality. If this structure and the diagram are correct, Barth's theology necessarily entails a sort of universalism. As in the diagram, God's personal will (and execution in Jesus Christ) encompasses the totality of the positive and negative aspects. Providence proclaims God's sovereignty over both, in one way or another.

In summary, Barth claims that nothingness can only be seen by looking back at that which was fully destroyed in the cross and resurrection of Christ. There one sees both the full affirmation of the creature in its two-fold creatureliness as well as the routed enemy of the Creator and creature bound together in covenant. None of this could possibly be known to the creature—limited as it is in creatureliness—except through divine, personal revelation. In this revelation, however, the Christian finds true knowledge of 'real nothingness.'⁶⁰

iii) Nothingness and Theodicy

Written as it was in 1950, Barth's lengthy discussion of nothingness does not directly address the evils of the Holocaust less than 5 years earlier. Based in christological specificity, Barth rejects theodicy framed as 'the problem of evil'.⁶¹ Critics presupposing these abstract, philosophical terms will necessarily be disappointed by Barth's approach. Like Farrer, however, Barth does offer a 'theodicy' in the more ancient justice-of-God tradition.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 311-312. Barth particularly notes the 'far too moralistic and spiritualistic' focus of historic Protestantism. Here Barth's point resonates with Farrer's Domain 4 knowledge in its comprehensive nature.

⁶⁰ Over the course of 35 pages, Barth carefully assesses gains and liabilities of Müller, Leibniz, Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Sartre. While ultimately dismissing all of them for their failures (primarily in the realm of Christology), the discussion shows both Barth's command of and appreciation for philosophical tools in his theology. Ibid., 312-349.

⁶¹ Barth refused 'theodicy' in 'the problem of evil' tradition due to its philosophically abstract nature apart from christological material. See Ibid., 365. McDowell uses a literary analogy for Barth's refusal to construct a theodicy in its traditional metaphysical, apologetic sense while still addressing its themes: '...it is not that Barth objects to the use of *words* to *describe* evil, but that theodicy's pseudo-scientific grammar has vaulted over the limitations created by theological speech so that now only theological babbling may be heard.' McDowell, 'Much,' 323.

Wilson and Hartt helpfully distinguish two types of theodicy: traditional and modern.⁶² Theodicy comes from the Greek θεός (God) and δίκαιος (justice or righteousness). Traditionally, theologians have looked to the cross and then outward to the evil and sin that necessitated it. In essence, Christ's death, resurrection and eschatological victory are 'the justice of God' which equip theologians to then turn to assess evil: '...“theology,” the human word about God...draws to a close; and “theodicy,” the setting forth of an otherwise hidden justice, takes over.'⁶³ In contrast, modern theologians—rightly horrified by genocide, suffering and systemic violence—start with these problems and ask 'why?' Thus modern theologians use 'theodicy' loosely to address the 'problem of evil' framed by world-occurrence. This methodology has two effects. First, God is put on trial; e.g., 'Why did the good and almighty God permit (cause?) the Holocaust?'. Second, the reality of evil is unquestioned while the existence, character and power of God all become suspect. Barth and Farrer unflinchingly stand in the 'justice-of-God' tradition and reject modern theodicy.

Knowledge of nothingness comes from Christ alone. Barth explains, '...the objective grounds of our knowledge of nothingness is really Jesus Christ Himself.'⁶⁴ Seen through the christological lens, nothingness is 'unmasked' and deprived of its camouflage in the negative aspect of creation.⁶⁵ In the incarnation, God reveals both creation's twofold goodness and nothingness as 'a possessive and domineering alien.'⁶⁶ Becoming a creature, God confirms creation 'in its totality (*in ihrer Totalität*) as an act of His wisdom and mercy, as His good creation without blemish or blame.'⁶⁷ In both this positive and negative affirmation, Barth confirms the perfection of the whole creation and the 'reality' of nothingness as 'that which rendered necessary' Christ's birth and death.⁶⁸ It also reveals the 'hostile determination' of nothingness as 'an antithesis not only to God's whole creation but to the Creator Himself.'⁶⁹

Apart from Christ we cannot see this. Formally limited as creatures, we can only know that which is 'relative to our creatureliness' (i.e. inside the right portion of

⁶² Wilson and Hartt, 'Theodicy,' 102-103.

⁶³ Ibid., 102.

⁶⁴ III.3, 306.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 305.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 304-305.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 303.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 304.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the diagram).⁷⁰ When attempting to explicate sinfulness, we have no capacity to see sin ‘except as an element in our creatureliness.’⁷¹ Inevitably, humanity mistakes the shadow-side of its creatureliness for ‘true sin.’ Foolishly, we think we are ‘able to take a detached view of ourselves, and to correlate the evil in us with the good which is certainly not lacking.’⁷² Barth’s argument here echoes Macmurray’s (and Farrer’s) rejection of Cartesianism discussed above. Seen in this abstraction from the whole of our lives, nothingness becomes relative, domesticated and cannot be seen as the ‘indictment of the existence of man in its totality (*in ihrer Totalität*).’⁷³ Again, Farrer’s Domain 4 knowledge and Macmurray’s description of persons in relation prove helpful in understanding Barth’s claim that nothingness indicts the totality of human existence, not various abstractions from it.

Only the divine Person comprehends and reveals the reality of nothingness and humanity’s *guilt* in sin. In Christ, however,

...and in His light real nothingness, the real sin that wages war with God and is assailed and overcome by Him, stands revealed as the sin of man, and so revealed that I may no longer regard it as a defect or something natural but must rather recognise in it the alien and adversary to whom I myself have given place.⁷⁴

The incarnation provides the sole basis whereby God’s knowledge of nothingness (a knowledge unattainable within creaturely limitations) is revealed in human form: truly God and truly human. In this way, however, sin is ‘recognized as man’s personal act and guilt (*des Menschen eigene Tat und Schuld erkannt*).’⁷⁵

This contrast of theodicies raises serious challenges to Barth. First, does Barth’s theology lead to Christian action or apathy in the face of evil and sin? Second, does Barth’s ontology of ‘nothingness’ take sin seriously enough? Finally, is Barth’s justice-of-God a strong enough justice for the horrors of the 21st century?

iv) *The Ontology of Nothingness*

In a largely appreciative essay, Rosemary Radford Ruether presents a specific example illustrating her dissatisfaction with Barth’s distinction between God’s relative and absolute left hand, between natural disorder and evil.⁷⁶ Turning to

⁷⁰ Ibid., 306.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 307.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 306 (347).

⁷⁶ Ruether’s critique deserves particular attention because of the profundity of her portrayal of Barth’s position. Unlike others, Ruether sees most of what Barth tries to accomplish. Nevertheless, I believe her failure to see the strength of Barth’s ontology leads her astray here. Ruether, ‘Left,’ 15.

American society's 'structural evil' which oppresses minorities, Ruether believes Barth's theology opens the door to 'a terrible complacency' instead of active, unflinching opposition.⁷⁷ To do this, Christians need greater resources than Barth offers. Ruether explains,

When...the Negro American speaks of the white American as a "white devil," this is no accidental epithet, but it is and it is intended to be a real theological judgment...This is why the militant Negro...calls for the burning of [the white devil's] city, literally the "overthrow of his world."⁷⁸

Ruether—like the Reformed tradition—assumes an ontology whereby the creature can be transformed into *something* which is identified as demonic and evil. By identifying this Other in this way, militant, violent opposition to the creature is not only possible, but demanded by the gospel.

Ruether reasons correctly that Barth's doctrine of providence precludes such reasoning. The actualistic ontology described in conversation with Macmurray makes this identification impossible. Continuing with the example, Barth would appeal to the incarnation to affirm that the white American remains objectively loved by God in Jesus Christ (based on election). Nevertheless, in turning towards nothingness in their actions, these persons are determined and preserved by God's left hand of judgment. Their sin is actual, personal guilt in turning from the personal God to chaotic nothingness. In doing so, they actualize terrible consequences and bring Lordless powers into the causal nexus.⁷⁹ Creatures, however, never cease to be objectively loved by God. These persons, like Judas, have 'no independent existence in the presence of God.'⁸⁰ Election, like Macmurray's 'intention of God', is not thwarted by human rebellion. One way or the other, God determines humans to testify that sinning, rejected humans are elected by God.⁸¹

Does this lead to 'a terrible complacency' whereby the Christian sighs in the face of evil instead of burning the city? Barth believes the viewpoint of Jesus Christ calls the Christian to even greater opposition. Called by God to be a co-belligerent (*Mitstreiter*) at God's side, the Christian faces nothingness with the certainty of its defeat on the cross; no fear remains.⁸² Election assures victory and determines the fight against nothingness to be 'first and foremost the problem of God Himself.'⁸³

⁷⁷ Ibid.: 15-16.

⁷⁸ Ibid.: 16.

⁷⁹ See Barth, *Christian Life*, 213ff.

⁸⁰ II.2, 506.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² *KD* III.3, 409.

⁸³ III.3, 354.

Yet God calls personal humans to ‘share in the contention...summoning His creature to His side as His co-belligerent.’⁸⁴ Thus without affirming suffering, injustice and pain, Barth frames these aspects of life as opportunities whereby Christians move ‘the finger and hand and sceptre of the God who rules the world.’⁸⁵ Barth leaves no room for complacency.

Nevertheless, Christians cannot call *creatures* demons or evil. Following the crucified Lord’s words, they see the creature as distinct from the nothingness ruling her. In faith’s knowledge of election (and rejection), the Christian prays, ‘Forgive them Father, for they know not what they do.’ Election claims every creature in Christ, and the Christian affirms the creature even in the face of injustice and violence. This affirmation, however, means active opposition, even to the point of martyrdom rather than ‘a terrible complacency’. The individual Christian and Church obey the command of God to oppose nothingness in every form. This necessarily leads to special ethics explicated in III.4.⁸⁶ It grants logic and meaning to the call of losing life in order to gain it. To be sure, agnosticism remains. The Christian can never look directly at nothingness and evil and ask the questions of modern theodicy. Nevertheless, Barth’s theology stresses the personal action of humans depicted in adapting Brümmer’s framework in Game 3. Living obediently *coram Deo*, humans actively obey God and become God’s co-belligerents. Every moment presents an opportunity to cooperate in providence which wields the scepter that rules the world and positively determines the person who will live in the eternal life of God.

Ruether laments ‘the ambiguity’ between the shadow-side and radical evil in Barth. Certainly, Barth’s agnosticism is evident in his emphasis on the cognitive difficulties caused by nothingness. Ruether’s example, however, shows its own dangers as well. Consider the Palestinian who opposes the ‘Israeli devil’ and burns his city as ‘the apocalyptic spokesman of God’s wrath.’⁸⁷ Relatives of the Israeli victims might understandably see a bomb not as God’s wrath, but as the act of a ‘Palestinian devil’. Thus a confused cycle of evil begins. Restricted as humanity is

⁸⁴ Ibid., 355.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 288.

⁸⁶ McDowell helpfully argues for the ethical power of §50: ‘The cross militates against an idealistically anaemic view of humanity’s place within a world corrupted by *das Nichtige*. Barth’s is, as Webster rightly argues, ‘an ethical account of wickedness.’ McDowell, ‘Much,’ 334. See Webster, *Moral*, 75-76.

⁸⁷ I have substituted Palestinian and Israeli here in the place of white and Negro American. This seems justifiable in light of Ruether’s writings. See Rosemary R. Ruether, ‘Introduction,’ in *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), xi-xiv.

in the limitations of the creaturely realm, it cannot possibly discern true nothingness from creation's shadow-side. From the standpoint of the incarnation, however, the Church sees what others cannot see and fights nothingness, while affirming the creature in its grasp. Since the person and Church know the certainty of salvation and the importance of this life in constituting God's eternal life, Barth's eschatology allows no room for complacency or neutrality.⁸⁸

v) *Nothingness and eschatology*

As discussed in Chapter VII, Barth's eschatology involves 'eternalizing' of creation and its participation in the eternal life of God. Such a view gives coherence to Barth's claim that nothingness, while real in a provisional sense during the time of creation, is 'the eternal yesterday'.⁸⁹ As with Brümmer's analysis, providential care corresponds to eschatology. Barth's doctrine of providence and eschatology are no exception.

Barth's 'final and decisive insight' is that 'nothingness has no perpetuity (*Bestand*).'⁹⁰ Nothingness 'is from the very first that which is past.'⁹¹ The rejection and negation of nothingness is 'inevitable' as 'the obverse of the divine election and affirmation.'⁹² The end was written with the beginning; eschatology and election together. Far from bestowing substance, God's *opus alienum* gives nothingness 'only the truth of falsehood, the power of impotence, the sense of non-sense.'⁹³ Unlike the *opus proprium Dei*, the *opus alienum Dei* 'does not take place by an inner autonomous necessity.'⁹⁴ Thus while God's gracious election continues eternally even after its fulfilment, the *opus alienum* 'becomes pointless and redundant and can be terminated and ended.'⁹⁵ Nothingness loses even its peculiar being with the return of Christ. Here Barth guards against a logical challenge, 'It is of major importance at this point that we should not become involved in the logical dialectic that if God loves, elects and affirms eternally He must also hate and therefore reject and negate

⁸⁸ See Barth, *Outline*, 154.

⁸⁹ III.3, 355.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 360.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* Barth's polemic against human immortality and his striking claim that the limits of humanity serve as a sign of God's providence further stress the importance of time in relation to providence. As seen in conversation with Brümmer, much of the coherence of his providence would be lost if human agency is included in 'eternal life'.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 361.

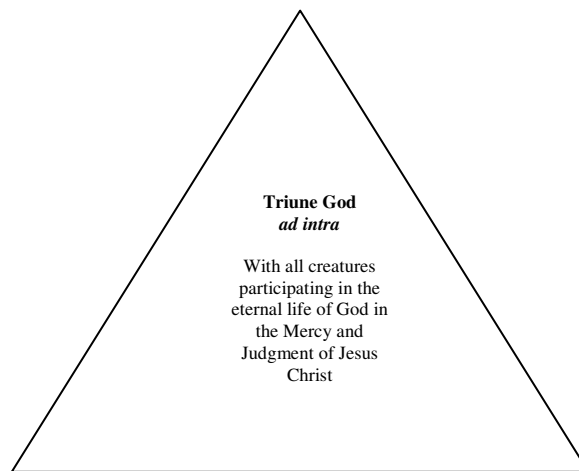
⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

eternally.’⁹⁶ Barth argues that the time and space of world history allow for a dialectic that will not be true eschatologically. Barth describes the asymmetry, ‘There is nothing to make God’s activity on the left hand as necessary and perpetual as His activity on the right.’⁹⁷ These claims become remarkably easier to understand in light of the eschatology suggested in Chapter VII. God ‘eternalizes’ the human *person*—determined in history by God’s right and left hand—to participate in *God’s* eternal life (see Figure 3). In this way, election continues eternally, though as a part of God’s being *ad intra*, while God’s rejecting and the resulting nothingness cease with the cessation of human agency and limited autonomy.

Fig. 3



Barth can now answer the question, ‘What is nothingness?’⁹⁸ Christian faith answers this question both looking back to the resurrection and forward to Christ’s return. Barth writes,

Nothingness 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.⁹⁹

In Jesus Christ, both God and creature have acted and defeated nothingness. All that remains is Creator and creature in covenant; the ‘third factor’ has been eliminated. Barth acknowledges the ‘audacious’ nature of these claims apart from Christ: ‘The aspect of creaturely activity both as a whole and in detail, our consciousness both of

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 363.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

the world and of self, certainly do not bear them out.’¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, faith looks to the cross and sees the objective reality that Creator and creature exist in covenantal relationship free of this ‘third factor.’¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Barth’s §50 neither solves the problem of evil nor attempts to do so. Instead, it speaks to the reality of chaos which threatens humanity and the God who has overcome it. Barth clearly distances himself from the tradition in a variety of ways: the ontology of evil, the peculiar reality of Satan and demons, the ‘existence’ of nothingness before creation, etc. In doing so, he is able to logically explicate the provisional reality of nothingness while denying charges that God is the ‘author of sin’. As in Macmurray’s intention of God, Barth’s election secures creatures’ salvation while simultaneously heightening history as eternally significant in shaping the persons who are saved. Barth’s doctrine of providence and nothingness thus call humans to obediently follow the command of God regardless of consequences in the creaturely nexus. As co-belligerents with God, they align themselves with God *for* creation and *against* the nothingness which threatens it. Barth’s argument affirms the importance of world history and God’s redemptive power in Christian suffering (while never affirming the injustice which brings it into being). These claims merit far more attention than this project allows, nevertheless, they arise from and relate to Barth’s personalist providence.

Barth’s nothingness does not answer the problem of evil, but it does call the Christian to action. It gives theological support for seemingly irrational courage in the face of overwhelming opposition. Like Stephen in the face of his executioners, Christians look not to the stones flying at them, but to their heavenly Father who commands and sustains God’s children.¹⁰² Christians have no better answer to the Holocaust, 9/11 or the Virginia Tech massacre than the non-Christian. But Barth’s theology does not allow for Christians to fight Nazi devils, Islamic demons or satanic psychopaths. Instead, Christians actively oppose chaos of all kinds while praying with Christ, ‘Forgive them—the Nazi, terrorist and the mass murderer—for they know not what they do.’

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Acts 7:55ff.

Barth's discontinuities with 'older theology' reflect the development of his providence in light of election. Understanding nothingness in its larger context of providence allows for many of the debates and critiques to be reframed. Informed by the conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer, we see Barth's moves reflect not a philosophy *per se*, but a willingness to use personalist tools of his day to articulate a more coherent and persuasive christological theology. Barth takes this approach even further as he turns to angels and heaven in §51.

CHAPTER IX

§51 THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN, THE AMBASSADORS OF GOD AND THEIR OPPONENTS

Both §50 and §51 add to Barth's portrayal of human persons under God's providence by describing the explicitly non-human. Barth addresses the impersonal nothingness opposing God and creation in §50. Nothingness accentuates Barth's affirmation of creation's goodness as well as the Christian faith in providence despite evil, injustice and sin. The peculiar ontology of *das Nichtige* and God's lordship over it bring the actualistic ontology of the creature in relation to the personal God into sharper focus. Barth describes 'The Kingdom of Heaven' and angelology in §51. Both §50 and §51, while differing tremendously, clarify God's providence and human agency by describing God's lordship over two different creaturely spheres (*Geschöpfungsbereiche*).¹ Barth re-emphasizes the reality of Heaven as the upper sphere of creation and sees it as essential to his christological providence.² Further, Barth's discussion of angelology takes his ordering of theology and philosophy to the most extreme levels.³ While Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer share the philosophical concerns addressed in §51, they would almost certainly reject Barth's requirement of belief in angels to address these concerns.

Many identify §51 as the most extensive and systematic discussion of angels since Thomas Aquinas.⁴ In over 150 pages of material, Barth describes heaven,

¹ *KD* III.3, 492.

² Barth introduced the subject in regard to the signs of providence in §49; see III.3, 236-238. Barth claims, 'Strictly speaking, every angelological statement can only be an auxiliary or additional statement, an explanation and elucidation of what is not to be said properly and essentially of angels but...of the divine action in Jesus Christ and therefore of the divine lordship in the creaturely world.' III.3, 371.

³ The argument throughout this thesis posits the relative coherence of Barth's doctrine of providence from a philosophical perspective. It is precisely in his adherence to his theological enterprise—as opposed to 'seeking *rationes probabiles*' in philosophy—that Barth gains the foundation for this coherence. Barth seems concerned for both disciplines in his warnings, '...philosophy has been corrupted by theology, not to speak of the corruption of theology by philosophy.' III.3, 410.

⁴ For example, Weber writes, 'Barth's doctrine of the angels is the first large-scale project of this kind in a very long time.' Weber, *Barth's*, 195. Whitehouse remarks, 'Schleiermacher wrote a notable appendix *Of the Angels*...which dismissed the topic from Protestant theology for 150 years, but now it has come back in a treatise which will surely rank with the other two great monuments of angelology, the *Celestial Hierarchy* of Pseudo-Dionysius, and the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas (I. 50-64, 106-114)...' Whitehouse, *Authority*, 47.

angels and demons using much, *but not all*, of the biblical materials.⁵ The reader expecting a literary equivalent of Raphael's angels, however, immediately encounters what looks much more like architectural blueprints. Even a cursory reading demonstrates that Barth comes far closer to violating his prohibitions against philosophy than he does to describing heaven as a 'Clouduckootown' or angels as ethereal superheroes.⁶ Breaking from Calvin's understanding of heaven as the place of eternal life where Christians focus their hope in the midst of earthly suffering, Barth sees heaven as 'the place of God' in current cosmic-occurrence.⁷ Barth's central concern greatly resembles the personalist questions addressed by Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer above:

Where and when is the problem not raised which we have now seen to be the problem of angelology, i.e., the problem of the presence and speech and action of God in our sphere...the problem of heaven on earth, and therefore the problem of the purposeful proximity and distance, distance and proximity, without which God would not encounter earthly creation either in majesty or intimacy, in holiness or grace, and therefore genuinely as God?⁸

In effect, §51 utilizes subject matter commonly accepted as pre-modern to support a post-Enlightenment providence.⁹ Barth's discussion emphasizes the functional role of both heaven and angels as a means of explicating God's personal agency in the created realm. In so doing, Barth buttresses providence with greater philosophical coherence. Heaven and angels can therefore be understood as another example of his

⁵ III.3, 369-531; *KD* III.3, 426-623.

⁶ Barth's displeasure with pietistic views of heaven is seen throughout this section as well as his other writings. Barth uses the term, 'Clouduckootown' (*Wolkenkuckusheim*) elsewhere. See II.1, 475 (535). Krötke helpfully notes that Barth distances eschatological hope from 'the possible structures of eternity.' Krötke, *Sin*, 104. Barth's continual insistence on the gift of 'eternal life' to the creature need not involve 'heaven' as its locale. Barth's heaven constitutes a present reality both as a part of the single, yet twofold creation and as the 'place of God.' In the context of III.3, it is noteworthy that Barth discusses 'eternal life' under 'the Divine Preserving' and not 'the Kingdom of Heaven'. III.3, 87-90.

⁷ See Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix. 'Let the aim of believers in judging mortal life, then, be that while they understand it to be of itself nothing but misery, they may with greater eagerness and dispatch betake themselves wholly to meditate upon that eternal life to come. When it comes to a comparison with the life to come, the present life can not only be safely neglected but, compared with the former, must be utterly despised and loathed. For, if heaven is our homeland, what else is earth but our place of exile.' Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ix.4. Calvin's basic framework is the contrast between the tribulations of this life and the rewards of the future life. Thus the promise of heavenly pleasure and rewards relativizes the otherwise inexplicable pain and suffering of earthly life. This view seems to be what Barth distances himself from in his dismissing heaven as a 'Clouduckootown.'

⁸ III.3, 516.

⁹ Barth's counterintuitive use of pre-modern material partially explains why so little has been written about §51. The secondary literature that does exist seldom does more than paraphrase Barth. Jenson is a notable exception in his engagement and alteration of Barth's theological (and philosophical) material. Robert Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. II (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 119-127.

navigation between both modern and pre-modern thought. As McCormack argues, Barth's philosophical epistemology shares far more with Kant than it does with Calvin. Barth's angelology supports McCormack's claim, 'All of his efforts in theology may be considered, from one point of view, as an attempt to overcome Kant by means of Kant; not retreating behind him and seeking to go around him, but going through him.'¹⁰ This chapter outlines the ways in which §51 contributes to Barth's construction of a personalist providence.

Unlike much of his other writings, Barth's §51 has prompted relatively little secondary literature.¹¹ Its seemingly fantastical subject matter, its dramatic break from tradition, and Barth's failure to address the theme in any sustained fashion earlier or later in *CD* each add to the difficulty and peculiarity of this section. My claim is that §51 constitutes a necessary component of Barth's personalist providence. Distancing himself from older theologians, he necessarily addresses issues related to cosmology which play such a crucial role in historic understandings.¹² While neither philosophy nor cosmology *per se*, §51 deals with many of the questions of philosophers and critics arising from §48, 49 and 50. Only through a careful reading of §51 can these earlier sections be seen with clarity, intelligibility, and coherence. This discussion focuses on three basic points: Barth's rejection of dualism, the suggestion of heaven as a 'causal joint', and Barth's understanding of human agency.

i) No Dualism

A central claim in Chapter IV was that Barth consciously strove to overcome dualistic patterns entrenched in the Western tradition. In one of his only specific

¹⁰ McCormack, *Critically*, 465-466. Johnson helpfully traces the line from Kant through Schleiermacher to Barth, 'For Kant we can "think the world but we cannot "know" it as such in immediate experience. Similarly, Schleiermacher...found it necessary to shift the focus of modern theology away from creation, which is inaccessible in the past, and toward providence...which is experienced here and now. Barth himself went yet another step beyond Schleiermacher by questioning whether there is any "immediate" consciousness of God at all...Barth argued, one would still need to hear afresh the dynamic Word of the Creator's "yes".' Johnson, *Mystery*, 72. Heaven, in all its inaccessibility, serves the communication of that 'yes' of election. Thus Barth's emphasis on election and his retrieval of heaven from pre-modern theology play a role in 'going through' Kant rather than ignoring the very real challenges he raised.

¹¹ While decidedly an informal survey, I have asked several influential Barth scholars for recommendations on secondary literature on §51. In each case, they expressed their belief that there was nothing significant written on the subject.

¹² Schreiner claims, 'Calvin's angelology focused on the providential mission of angels. Not surprisingly, therefore, his discussions about angels reflect those themes central to his doctrine of providence.' Schreiner, *Theater*, 52.

references to Barth, Macmurray claimed that Barth's theology manifests the 'characteristic dualism in our reflective tradition' with its distinction between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural'.¹³ Chapter IV indicated Barth's awareness of dualism and his explicit attempt to excise it from his theology. Barth furthers these efforts in §51 and opens the way for a coherent understanding of Creator and creature in covenant.¹⁴ Thus it is precisely in Barth's detailed discussion of the *imperceptible* sphere of heaven that he attempts to purge his providence of dualistic thinking.¹⁵

According to Barth, heaven and earth form 'the created world in its totality' (*in ihrer Ganzheit*).¹⁶ This unity of the one creation acknowledges distinction without positing an antithesis between supernatural and natural: '...although [heaven] is a supraterrrestrial it is not a supracosmic but a cosmic kingdom.'¹⁷ Under God's lordship, the whole creation 'corresponds to that for which it was created; to the encounter, history and fellowship between God and man.'¹⁸ Barth's concern centers on the *possibility* of the covenant encounter between God and humanity. As seen in conversation with Macmurray, many of Barth's other 'twofold' forms such as heaven and earth coexist in a strict and asymmetrical order. Theology requires revelation due to this asymmetry: '...of the hierarchy in the relationship of heaven and earth; of the superiority of the former to the latter; of the characterization of heaven as the upper and earth as the lower cosmos.'¹⁹ While this ordering entails heaven's humanly 'incomprehensible' nature, it nevertheless holds heaven firmly in the unity of creation (without dualism).²⁰ As in Farrer, Barth affirms both mystery

¹³ John Macmurray, *Religion, Art, and Science: A Study of the Reflective Activities in Man* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961), 48ff. According to Fergusson, 'This supernatural style of religion, which Macmurray believed to be the essence of Karl Barth's theology, will fall prey to the Marxist critique of religion.' David Fergusson, *John Macmurray in a Nutshell* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1992), 8.

¹⁴ This section argues the precise opposite view of that given by Kaufman: 'Karl Barth, who supposes himself not to be engaged in metaphysical or cosmological "speculations," nevertheless makes a considerable point of the essential duality of the world in the Christian view.' Gordon D. Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), n.3, 42. Kaufman cites III.1, 17-22 and §51 in support of his view.

¹⁵ Shultz helpfully explains, 'Barth recognized the need to avoid a naïve metaphysical dualism between God and the world; we should not imagine heaven and earth as two spheres side by side that can be spanned by human language or thought.' F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming the Doctrine of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 110.

¹⁶ III.3, 421.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 434.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 421.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 426. Barth finds significance in the 'biblical patterns' which 'always speak of heaven and earth rather than earth and heaven.' III.3, 428.

²⁰ III.3, 425. Barth emphasizes, 'It is not merely God who is incomprehensible; the same can also be said of heaven within the creaturely world.'

and the inaccessible in the cosmos without either sacrificing philosophical coherence or violating the causal nexus. Acting *from* heaven *to* earth, the divine Person uses the infrastructure of the created cosmos without violating its integrity.

Barth makes various dogmatic claims about heaven while simultaneously confessing an agnosticism on the subject. Scripture does not afford information regarding many questions arising from human experience. Barth cautions,

Reserve is demanded because, although heaven as the place of God is known as a place, as another created place, as a higher cosmic sphere confronting our own, beyond these delimiting definitions *it is unknown and inconceivable, and therefore a mystery*. Even the revelation of God does not give us any further information.²¹

Barth attempts to navigate between the Scylla of saying too much and the Charybdis of saying too little on the subject.²² Heaven must not be abstracted from creation or the action of God in covenant history. Heaven is the created ‘place of God’.²³ Barth’s insistence on God’s spatiality, as well as temporality, contrasts with Reformed orthodoxy and classical philosophy. While the lengthy discussions of time and space of God in II.1 lay the foundations, Barth’s discussion of heaven shows the seriousness of his portrayal of God as a personal agent *in time and space*.²⁴ Here again, Barth’s theological values keep him close to the Reformers while his awareness of philosophical development since Kant allows him to articulate these values in more coherent ways. Barth decisively rejects ‘the old error of God’s non-spatiality’.²⁵ Instead, it is precisely God’s triune space that constitutes the possibility of space for that which is outside of God:

...if [God’s omnipresence] is reduced to being His presence in and with all kinds of other things, and if no space exists that belongs only to God and to nothing else, God Himself is again spaceless, and therefore lifeless and loveless... The space everything else possesses is the space which is given it out of the fulness of God.²⁶

This passage raises the philosophical concerns regarding transcendence and spatiality. Like Farrer’s exposition on transcendence, Barth revises traditional claims in order to put philosophy in the service of theology.²⁷ God’s triune spatiality *ad*

²¹ Ibid., 442; italics mine.

²² Ibid., 369.

²³ Cf. Ibid., 432, 437, 442.

²⁴ II.1; II.2. Kirkpatrick offers an excellent description of the classical view of God as nontemporal in his metaphysical description of divine agency. Kirkpatrick, *Together*, 112-114. Barth’s non-metaphysical approach nevertheless shares strong similarities with Kirkpatrick’s break from the classical view.

²⁵ II.1, 486.

²⁶ Ibid., 474.

²⁷ Barth’s claims here echo Kirkpatrick’s minimal requirements in understanding action: ‘Any act ‘takes time’ to enact and as long as the agent must ‘be there’ throughout the act (deploying, wielding,

intra constitutes the potential for creaturely space *ad extra*. Creating the cosmos, God makes both heaven and earth in their ordered relation for the realisation of election.

Returning to Macmurray's critique of Barth for positing a supernatural-natural dualism, the significance of heaven's place in the natural cosmos becomes clearer. Barth is actually continuing his elimination of dualism from his theology in §51 and attempting to place it in his personalist providence. Thus Macmurray's own description of God and nature helps in interpreting Barth. Macmurray argues,

For the Other must be personal—since he is one term in a personal relationship: He must be infinite and eternal—because he must be the same for all persons at all times—the same yesterday, today and for ever; and since the ordinary experience of personal relation is necessarily a unity in co-operation, directed towards nature and upon nature, he must unify the natural with the personal.²⁸

According to Barth, the personal God unites the twofold cosmos in bringing about God's singular intention of election. In Barth, election serves as the internal basis for the creation of the twofold cosmos in its unity and distinction. I am not suggesting that Macmurray would agree with Barth, but rather that he would be offended by a different aspect of Barth's argument.

Personal action requires time and space. Barth therefore claims that God is both, but not merely, spatial and temporal. This allows him to speak of God as a personal agent. All of these claims cast doubt on Macmurray's critique. While professing ignorance regarding the particulars of heaven and angels, Barth nevertheless asserts the faith claim that the creation includes a real, mysterious 'place of God.'

Seen in the light of the covenant, heaven plays an important role. Barth emphasizes,

We are now at the end and goal and climax of the whole doctrine of creation, and here if anywhere it ought to be evident that the first article of the creed can be understood and explained only in the light of the second....²⁹

The 'great movement of God' predestined from before creation and actualized in the incarnation 'bears the name of Jesus Christ.'³⁰ He must guide and interpret our

overarching it), the agent must endure throughout the course of the act....' Kirkpatrick, *Together*, 113.

²⁸ Macmurray, *Religion*, 59.

²⁹ III.3, 428.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

understanding of God the Father Almighty.³¹ Heaven and earth, however, constitute a whole, 'in their differentiation, their relation and their obviously irreversible order'.³² Jesus Christ presents a movement and history whereby 'we can know this whole sphere [of creation] theologically.'³³ Clearly Barth sees a connection between the twofold form of creation and Christology that is not readily apparent to others.

Having established these theological guidelines, Barth moves from the particularity of Christ to the larger picture of creation. The asymmetrical ordering of heaven and earth sets God as the *terminus a quo* and the creature as the *terminus ad quem*. God acts from heaven and, as such, 'God Himself is the Subject.'³⁴ In this divine movement, God initiates action from above by turning to the creature. While this asymmetry remains throughout, the movement is not monistic:

Nor is the movement only in one direction. As God turns to the creature, there is also a turning of the creature to Him, not in its own strength, but in virtue of what God does in and with and to it. Thus when it reaches its goal, the divine movement returns to its origin.³⁵

Barth refers back to §49 in describing this return: 'The faith, obedience and prayer of the Church and of Christians follow the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.'³⁶ As discussed in conversation with Farrer, this knowledge is only accessible through fellowship with God.

How can the Wholly Other God act as 'Subject and Author' of this movement 'within the creaturely world'?³⁷ In answering this question Barth calls on the resources of trinitarian theology. As Subject of 'the movement of intra-divine life', God acts and this *opera Dei ad intra* constitutes the 'basis and model' for an '*opus Dei ad extra*.'³⁸ God remains 'alive and active' in Himself, but 'as the One He is and will be to all eternity, He enters space and time, and the structure and conditions, and even the perceptibility and conceptuality of the created cosmos distinct from Himself.'³⁹ Here, Barth asserts a basic logical agreement with modern thought

³¹ Barth identifies a short-coming in the creedal formulation, demonstrating the depth of his christological reform: '...rather strangely there is no reference to him [Jesus Christ] in the first article of the creed.' *Ibid.*, 429.

³² *Ibid.* Barth continues to include angels 'in and with heaven' in this ordering of the whole of creation.

³³ *Ibid.* Here again, Barth warns against falling into either philosophy or mythology.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 430. While asymmetrically ordered, Barth's view is not that of sole causality.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.* Webster discusses the related topic of divine aseity in Barth's thought. Unlike like older Reformed theologians, Barth defends aseity as 'the wholly original character of the relations which are God's [trinitarian] life'. As Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God's aseity is not properly seen in

patterns, contra historical claims of theology based on older philosophical models.⁴⁰ According to Barth, the attributes of God do not preclude God from entering time, space and even the limitations of creation. The reality of God's covenant can only be actualized for humanity *in the created sphere*. Barth explains,

If [the divine movement] is a reality for us, then irrespective of the fact that God is its Subject and Author it really takes place where we really are, and therefore in our world, in the world created by God. It is here that it has its origin and goal.⁴¹

Barth concedes the logic of post-Enlightenment philosophy regarding the claim that the observable world of science cannot accommodate an understanding of a transcendent God with agency *in the creation*. The agent must, in some way, contact the sphere of action. In this sense, a *merely* 'Wholly Other' God would be impotent to influence events within the creaturely nexus.⁴²

Barth refuses to move from a general knowledge of the world, heaven or any other cosmic sphere before first seeing: '...the divine history of the covenant and salvation, the event of Christ, and this as God's action in and with and to us, and therefore as His dealings in our creaturely world...'⁴³ Speaking of heaven and earth *before* clearly understanding the facts given in this revelation forfeits the one standpoint for understanding cosmology. Barth writes,

...therefore as His dealings in our creaturely world, with many other things we also see how the two great cosmic spheres of heaven and earth emerge distinctly and confront one another and then come together again in a genuine hierarchical order.⁴⁴

Seen christologically, the twofold reality of the cosmos comes into view with a clarity unachievable outside this revelation. Abstracted from election, earth loses its

abstract categories such as independence, infinite or absolute, but as '*...life: God's life from and therefore in himself*. This life is the relations of Father, Son and Spirit.' John Webster, *Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God's Aseity* (Edinburgh: Rutherford Dogmatics Conference, 2005), 12. Webster draws on Barth's discussion of the topic in II.1, 302ff.

⁴⁰ Rohls describes the logic and content of confessional attributes: 'Thus the definition of God as a simple spiritual essence entails that God is invisible, incorporeal, indivisible (*impartibilis*), immutable, incomprehensible, and ineffable. Rohls, *Reformed*, 46.

⁴¹ III.3, 430.

⁴² Barth's discussion of angels and the incarnation points to his understanding of the need for the Wholly Other to somehow share in creaturely-occurrence. Kirkpatrick is especially helpful in his discussion of God as 'the Supreme Historical Agent'. Kirkpatrick, *Together*, 80-102. While differing from Barth in some details due to his commitment to metaphysics, Kirkpatrick nevertheless provides insights into Barth's understanding of God in covenant with creation. Interestingly, Lowe notes that Barth drops 'infinite' from Kierkegaard's famous quotation in the *Römerbrief*. After fully citing the quotation in his preface, Barth *alters* the language to 'the qualitative distinction,' dropping the important word 'infinite' (*unendlichen*). Lowe correctly argues for Barth's early awareness of the dangers of dualism in spite of his failure at the time to overcome it. See Lowe, 'Barth,' 382ff.

⁴³ III.3, 431.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

essence as ‘first and last the *terminus ad quem* of the divine action.’⁴⁵ Barth’s insistence on the hierarchical relationship of heaven over earth increases rather than decreases the goodness and dignity of the human sphere. In the context of election, ‘...there can be nothing derogatory or disgraceful in the fact that earth is below.’⁴⁶ It receives its dignity in its identity as ‘the goal of the free grace of God and therefore below.’⁴⁷

Heaven, too, derives its dignity not from abstract superiority, but rather from its place in the movement of election. Barth defines heaven as ‘the place in the world from which God acts to and for and with man.’⁴⁸ Barth explains,

Without this special place of God, and the distance therewith posited between Himself and man in his own place, *there could obviously be no genuine intercourse between them*. There could be no dialogue, but only a monologue on the part of God (or perhaps of man). There could be no drama, but either God or man could only live in isolation with no relationships to others or significance for them. If this is not the case; if the theme of Christian witness is neither the life of an isolated God nor isolated man, but the history enacted between them of isolation, estrangement, reconciliation and fellowship; and if this history is really enacted in our world, then this means that *God as well as man has a distinctive sphere in this real world of ours*.⁴⁹

This passage gives an indication of Barth’s ambivalence toward modern philosophy such as that seen in Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer. In one sense, Barth refuses modern views which dismiss *a priori* the reality of an imperceptible ‘heaven’ as philosophically untenable and naïvely pre-modern. Barth’s affirmation of heaven and angels remains decidedly anti-modern. In another sense, Barth’s exposition acknowledges the strength of modern philosophical arguments against the contradiction of a Wholly Other God *interacting within* the created nexus. Barth’s reasoning—moving from election in Jesus Christ—describes a cosmology which proclaims God’s transcendence while asserting divine activity in the creation. In this way, Barth’s explanation of heaven has little to do with humanity’s future home and much to do with the field of the personal.

All creation, both heaven and earth, was created by God for election. It is created as the ‘external basis of the covenant.’⁵⁰ As such, Barth affirms Calvin’s

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid. Again, limits and dependence are positively accentuated, not denigrated, in Barth’s theology.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 432.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 432; italics mine.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 7. Barth addresses the relation between creation and covenant in detail throughout §41. III.1, 42-329. The claim that ‘creation is the external basis of the covenant’ establishes the possibility of ‘the history of God’s covenant with man which has its beginning, its centre and its culmination in Jesus Christ.’ III.1, 42.

description of creation as '*theatrum gloriae Dei*.'⁵¹ The covenant of grace affected in Jesus requires 'one indispensable presupposition', which is the creature which exists 'alongside and outside Him.'⁵² In its unified, asymmetrical structure, twofold creation allows for this encounter and history without dualism.

ii) *Heaven and Angels as a 'Causal Joint'*

The discussion has highlighted the ways in which Barth uses §51 to avoid the pitfalls of dualism. But what are the gains made? Barth's biblical methodology demands that he address unpopular topics of Scripture such as heaven, angels and demons. Does Barth's discussion of heaven and angels actually shed light on providence and 'the problem of the presence and speech and action of God in our sphere and therefore in the lower cosmos'?'⁵³

Our discussion of Farrer introduced the idea of the 'causal joint.' The term refers to the way in which a transcendent God can and does participate as an agent in the created world. While Farrer concludes that little can be said of it, his double-agency demands a 'causal joint.' Thus Farrer's view necessarily includes a causal joint 'as it were' but simultaneously pleads an agnosticism regarding it.⁵⁴ Maintaining a level of mystery, Barth uses Biblical materials to push his conclusions beyond those of Farrer. Whitehouse correctly notes Barth's innovation,

Such a doctrine of angels, which is significantly different from anything formulated before and wholly Biblical, fills a gap in our account of God's dealings with men which, in default of it, may be filled by exaggerated accounts of Scripture or of Bishops to the undoing of the Church's integrity.⁵⁵

Dismissing the possibility of angelology in abstraction, Barth nevertheless claims that angels have 'a genuinely necessary function as dynamic factors in that occurrence between God and man...'⁵⁶ Barth's use of 'necessary' (*notwendige*) runs throughout §51. Heaven and its inhabitants *necessarily* function in God's lordship in the created realm. Barth writes,

Even in the Bible account has to be taken of the created heaven between God and man, and the problem of angels is that of the participation of this sphere of creation in the history of the covenant and salvation as it concerns man, and in this context of the divine governance of the world in general.⁵⁷

⁵¹ III.3, 47.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 516.

⁵⁴ Farrer, *Faith*, 78.

⁵⁵ Whitehouse, *Authority*, 48.

⁵⁶ III.3, 389.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Note that Barth's understanding of angels connects directly with the history of the covenant, salvation and providence. Thus it is the issue of God's interaction with creation and the divine capacity for saving the world which constitutes Barth's interest in angelology.

Seen as guided by these theological/philosophical concerns, angelology becomes more related to *kerygma* than otherwise assumed. Far from Schleiermacher's indifference to the topic, Barth equates the belief in angels to Christian belief in God.⁵⁸ The identity of God in Jesus Christ brings the role of angels into providence more essentially than the general claims of philosophy. Barth contrasts,

In faith in a God of theory or ethics or aesthetics we may well deny the angels, because in the company of this kind of God it makes no odds whether there are angels or not. But in faith in the heavenly Father of Jesus Christ, whose majesty is operative and revealed in His mercy, in faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the case is very different. *To deny the angels is to deny God Himself.*⁵⁹

Barth's equation of the denial of angels with the denial of God runs contrary to contemporary thought, but it is no mere return to traditional supernaturalism. Rather, Barth understands angels and the heavenly realm as God's intentional, creative design whereby the divine Agent interacts with creation without subsuming it or becoming a part of it. Barth stresses their importance in relation to God's work and revelation: 'Without the angels God Himself would not be revealed and perceptible...But by means of his holy angels He sees to it that this dimension is always open and perceptible.'⁶⁰ God mediates action through heaven and its angels: 'Where the God who acts and speaks in His grace is present, it is in this mediation.'⁶¹ Here, then, is Barth's causal joint.

Barth uses 'mediation' as a means of articulating the logic of divine action in creation. Being divine, God cannot interact with the creaturely without creaturely form.⁶² As Subject, God does in fact mediate Himself through the creaturely infrastructure created for this purpose. Barth explains,

⁵⁸ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 156-159. In contrast with Barth's assertion 'To deny the angels is to deny God Himself', Schleiermacher suggests, 'Christ and the Apostles might have said all these things [about angels] without having had any real conviction of the existence of such beings or any desire to communicate it....' Schleiermacher, *Christian*, 158.

⁵⁹ III.3, 486; italics mine.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 485.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁶² Barth's rhetorical question is illuminating, 'What would we earthly creatures be before Him, and how could we be before Him and with Him, if He were to visit and encounter us only in divine and

We may state at once that it is primarily, substantially and centrally a divine happening, and only secondarily, accidentally and peripherally a heavenly...The fact that it is both divine and heavenly means rather that the one divine happening has also as such the character, the (self-evidently) creaturely form and vesture, of a heavenly...Where God is—the God who acts and reveals Himself in the world created by Him—heaven and angels are also present.⁶³

No 'pie-in-the-sky' conception of future paradise, heaven serves as the 'joint' between the divine and creaturely. The significance of heaven and angels parallels aspects of the divine and the human in Barth's Christology:

It means the presence and operation of God Himself in the heavenly-creaturely form which, because it is heavenly, is appropriate to God and able to represent and attest Him, and, because it is creaturely, appropriate to man and the earthly creation generally and able to make God accessible and His representation and attestation apprehensible.⁶⁴

Here, Barth explains the creaturely means in which God self-mediate to the creature.

The exception that proves the theory of the angelic causal joint is the incarnation. Barth finds it notable that the role of angels diminishes tremendously during Jesus' life. This is because the humanity of Jesus functions as a causal joint similar to angels' function before and after. Barth addresses the angelic appearances in the Gospels and develops the claim that 'angelology must be understood as an annexe to Christology.'⁶⁵ Barth notes: 'In none of the four accounts is there any reference to the appearance, speech or action of angels in the centre of the evangelical record of Jesus.'⁶⁶ This too sheds light on angels, 'Their ministry consists in making visible and audible on earth this whole happening whose subject and author is God Himself. As the heavenly creation, they are the medium in which this is possible.'⁶⁷ During the incarnation, however, God acts in Jesus of Nazareth. Thus angelic mediation is unnecessary. Barth writes, 'But at this point where for a time they stand above Jesus Christ we must think of them as pushed back into purely passive witness, into the function of privileged spectators. Here if anywhere they had simply to look on and watch and learn.'⁶⁸

Barth's living God never slumbers or sleeps, but continually acts as a personal Agent in history as mediated through the creaturely forms of Jesus'

not also in creaturely form, in the heavenly vesture which as such is the representation of His mystery and deity, and therefore in angelic mode?' Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., 477.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 478.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 500.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 500-501.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 506.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 501.

humanity and angels. Significantly, Barth explains that Jesus Christ's return with the angels will lead to the 'complete suspension of their function.'⁶⁹ Angels serve in the history of the covenant as the creaturely mediators of divine action, but Barth's understanding of the incarnation and the return of Christ demonstrate their importance only in relation to the electing movement of God in history. In the eschaton, angels are no longer necessary in an active capacity.

Barth's use of angels in the place of what Farrer calls the 'causal joint', indicates a deeper philosophical sophistication than is generally attributed to him. While the discussion above shows Barth to be aware of philosophical personalism, I believe they raise broader challenges to his providence. Jensen finds this close connection between angels and the incarnation problematic to the extreme since it 'seems to betray a disaster in his Christology also. Many passages in his discussion seem to put the angels where the humanity of Christ should be.'⁷⁰ I cannot see how Barth could answer this critique sufficiently. Moreover, angels seem to function in a way that further distances the Holy Spirit from Barth's doctrine of providence after the resurrection. While III.3 contains numerous references to the Trinity and some discussion of the Holy Spirit, Barth's discussion of angels continues to suggest an underdeveloped pneumatology in his providence.

iii) Angels accentuating Human Agency, Autonomy and Freedom

Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted Barth's departure from Calvin and older theologians. The conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer have shown that Barth shares many of the central concerns addressed in contemporary philosophical theology, such as human agency, divine causality, personality, etc. Throughout §51, Barth continues to focus on these issues, but from a different viewpoint. Barth's angels effectively work as a foil demonstrating what humans are not, particularly in regard to personal agency.

According to Barth, the freedom of angels 'consists in their obedience.'⁷¹ Unlike humans, angels and Jesus Christ cannot sin.⁷² As their name indicates, angels are wholly and entirely 'God's witnesses.'⁷³ Their actions perfectly coincide with

⁶⁹ Ibid., 511.

⁷⁰ Jensen, *Systematic*, 124-125.

⁷¹ III.3, 498.

⁷² See I.2, 155-159. Barth writes, 'Of course, the meaning of the New Testament is that Jesus cannot sin....' I.2, 158.

⁷³ III.3, 497. Barth affirms the name 'angels' precisely on the grounds of ἄγγελος and messenger. III.3, 511ff.

God's intention. Of themselves, 'they have no option but to be perfect witnesses of God.'⁷⁴ As indicated in our discussions with philosophical theologians, an agent acts with an intention. Angels lack this capacity and Barth denies angelic agency, writing,

There are no contiguous spheres in which they have to mediate various things in the sense that these things are even momentarily committed to them and are thus to be expected from them; in the sense, then, that they are agents or middle-men to whom independent attention, gratitude and obligation must be granted as such.⁷⁵

In effect, angels come close to the definition which the Synod of Dordt rejected for humans: 'as if they were blocks and stones.'⁷⁶ Angels, even more than grass or other unconscious creatures, glorify God simply in their being.⁷⁷ To use Brümmer's language, angels lack the capacity to say Yes or No to God. By contrast, Barth highlights aspects of human personhood in its particular spheres of independent attention, gratitude and obligation.

Angels' necessary obedience signifies both their advantage and disadvantage 'in relation to earthly creation.'⁷⁸ Barth's comparison highlights various aspects of creaturely existence under providence. Barth writes,

[Angels'] high advantage in relation to the earthly creation is also their disadvantage. They have no definable being in relation to it. They do not exist and act independently or autonomously. They have no history or aims or achievements of their own. They have no profile or character, no mind or will of their own. They have all these things, yet not as their own possession, but wholly and exclusively as God is so rich in relation to them. They are themselves only a possession, His possession. The lowliest creature of earth has an advantage over even the highest of angels to the extent that while it belongs to God it may also belong to itself. But conversely even the least of the heavenly hosts is more than the most perfect of earthly creatures to the extent that it belongs so fully to God and in no sense to itself.⁷⁹

Humans certainly belong to God, but unlike angels, they may also belong to themselves. In this sense, the games described in conversation with Brümmer illustrate crucial differences between angels and humanity. While Game 3 depicts

⁷⁴ III.3, 498.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 495. Barth's awareness of the contemporary philosophical debates regarding agency can be seen in this denial.

⁷⁶ 'Dort,' 587. While Barth would likely be displeased with this claim, his thinking leads in this direction and accentuates the genuine, limited autonomy of humans by contrast.

⁷⁷ Barth writes, 'They are simply servants. In their own way they are wholly what the most modest blade of grass waving on the earth by the will of God is in its very different way.' III.3, 494. Berkouwer seems uncomfortable with Barth's claim that angels need not have *ontic* individuality. Berkouwer, *Triumph*, n.45, 379. See III.3, 455.

⁷⁸ III.3, 480.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

human life under providence, Game 2's Outcome E portrays the philosophical framework for Barth's angels. Angels 'lack the autonomy of earthly creatures.'⁸⁰

The title 'pure witness' connects and distinguishes angels from humanity.⁸¹ As seen in Chapter IV, real humans willingly—if impurely—witness to God's election (while sinning humans do so involuntarily and miserably).⁸² Human witness, however, depends on angelic witness. Barth explains, God's 'great visitation...does not take place without cosmic form.'⁸³ Transcendent from creation, God uses heavenly creatures to enable human witness. Barth writes,

[The angels'] proper office is to be as it were the atmosphere in which there can be a witness of men and earthly creatures, their seeing and hearing and therefore their proclamation of God. That is why there is so much about angels in the Bible.⁸⁴

Serving without autonomy, angels perfectly witness to God's action in creation. Unlike humanity, they can do nothing else, 'they have no room for a deviation or reserve...they have no option but to be perfect witnesses of God.'⁸⁵ Having described angels in this fashion, Barth makes a significant alteration in traditional angelologies claiming that neither Satan nor demons were ever angels.

Unlike 'older theology,' Barth refuses to classify angels and demons under a unified genus 'angels.'⁸⁶ Barth writes,

Just as the word "nonsense" does not denote a particular species of sense, but that which is negated and excluded by sense, so *angeli mali* are not a particular species of angels, but the reality which is condemned, negated and excluded...⁸⁷

Barth explains that 'the origin and nature of the devil and demons' can only 'lie in nothingness' and cannot be understood to have been a part of God's good creation.⁸⁸ Their 'peculiar existence'—precisely like nothingness itself—'is what God never willed, and never does nor will.'⁸⁹

Here Barth draws fire from numerous critics for swiftly dismissing traditional views arising from two key biblical allusions, Jude 6 and 2 Peter 2:4.⁹⁰ Some

⁸⁰ Ibid., 484.

⁸¹ Ibid., 483-484.

⁸² See IV.3.2, 554-614.

⁸³ III.3, 499.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 498.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 520.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 522.

⁸⁹ Barth explains the precise connection between demons and Nothingness saying, 'They [demons] are not different from the latter [nothingness].' Ibid., 523.

⁹⁰ Barth's brief fine-print section (totalling less than a full page) is uncharacteristically dismissive of both the Biblical text and the theological tradition. The strength of his language in this cursory explanation reveals that Barth understands what is at stake theologically if he were to concede this

suggest that Barth's breach of his own methodology is inexplicable because little is gained by the move.⁹¹ These complaints fail to see the importance of this higher created realm within the personal emphasis of providence and human agency. If Barth successfully secures a coherent structure whereby the Wholly Other reveals the divine intent to rational creatures and ontologically excludes nothingness from the creation, the benefit seems to far outweigh the cost of glossing two verses.⁹²

Barth introduces the topic of demons claiming that it only merits 'a quick, sharp glance.'⁹³ The brevity of the discussion, however, should not detract from its importance. Barth writes that in speaking of this sphere as

...very different from that of angels...This brings us right up against a materially decisive point. Indeed it brings us right up against *the* decisive point, against the whole problem and its legitimate solution.⁹⁴

While Barth does not specify the topic to which this is '*the* decisive point,' I believe that the scope is as wide as providence itself. God's election in Jesus Christ determines all things; this is the one intention of God. In other words, Barth's claim to a complete antithesis between angels and demons directly connects with his particular understanding of every aspect of life under providence. Angels belong to the good creation; demons belong instead to the perverse reality of nothingness. The former derives its existence from the positive relation given by God in election. The

point or open it to debate: 'And literally all the insights which we have gained concerning the being and ministry of angels, and developed at least concerning the character and activity of demons, are necessarily false if this doctrine is correct.' *Ibid.*, 531. Barth's claim here, which could be expanded to include §50 as well as much of §48 and 49, demonstrates the unity and coherence of his thinking on providence. By classifying demons as one-time 'good creatures of God', Barth would undermine God's ability to create and to sovereignly rule that creation. It would also plunge his theology into the quagmire and contradictions of dualism. Interestingly, as Berkouwer points out, this is almost precisely the last line of defense in Barth's argument against human immortality in III.2: 'If we really had to come to that conclusion, we should find it necessary to revise everything that we said about the fact that man's time is limited.' III.2, 627. Though Berkouwer rightfully warns against 'the danger of *dogmatic exegesis*' here, Barth correctly understands the implications of the seemingly innocuous claim on the whole of his theology. Berkouwer, *Triumph*, 335. While never ceasing to be a theologian rather than a philosopher, Barth clearly understood the logical and philosophical pitfalls of such a decision.

⁹¹ Bromiley writes, 'Unfortunately he does not back up the objection with any direct biblical material...Nor would it seem that Barth's understanding is totally compromised if this be their meaning. Yet he takes a firm stand on the issue...it is a pity that the whole discussion should end with so questionable a thesis and procedure.' Bromiley, *Introduction*, 155. Berkouwer writes, 'The words of II Peter and Jude are ignored, although they plainly speak of angels that sinned and that did not keep their won position but left their proper dwelling.' Berkouwer, *Triumph*, 240. Most recent commentaries on Barth have little interest in his discussion of angels and demons.

⁹² Obviously, the interpretation of §50 in Chapter VIII would not hold if demons 'fell' from the right hand portion of Fig. 1 to the left.

⁹³ III.3, 519.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 519; italics translator's.

latter 'is' only in God's rejection and has no connection with God's positive will. Barth explains,

Angels and demons are related as creation and chaos, as the free grace of God and nothingness, as good and evil, as life and death, as the light of revelation and the darkness which will not receive it, as redemption and perdition, as *kerygma* and myth. Perhaps the last analysis is best adapted to bring out the matter most sharply. At any rate, we cannot exaggerate the sharpness of the antithesis. No concern lest we fall into dualism (*Dualismus*) and the consequent intolerance, no need for synthesis, must prevent us from insisting on the unconditional antithesis of the two spheres.⁹⁵

Note the ways in which Barth connects the question of angelic 'free will' to the great themes of providence, creation and election in Jesus Christ.

The discussion above further emphasizes Barth's awareness of philosophical concerns related to the personal. I have suggested that Brümmer's Game 2 Outcome E both depicts the general portrayal of angels in §51 as well as Barth's rejection of the model for human persons. The juxtaposition of angels with human persons highlights the relative autonomy humans have to 'say Yes or No to God' throughout the course of their lives. While my Game 3 modifies Brümmer's framework and eschatological implications, it emphasizes the opportunity humans are given in contrast with angels. Thus Barth's discussion of angels further accentuates his personalist providence over humanity.

Conclusion

Aware of the complex issues of agency within the created world, Barth outlines a providence throughout III.3 that proves surprisingly coherent from both a biblical and philosophical standpoint. Barth's gloss regarding the two verses in the New Testament indicates an awareness of the counterbalancing gains he has made against dualism and for human agency within the singular will of God. Similarly, the discussions of the 'causal joint' and human autonomy in contrast with angels reveal Barth's awareness of the concerns and logic of personalist philosophy. An *a priori* dismissal of Barth's angelology based on the assumption of pre-modern content or Barth's supposed rejection of philosophy simply misreads (or fails to read) §51. Nevertheless, the material remains theology that uses philosophical tools, and not philosophy. While the discussions show Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer occasionally making similar claims to the Swiss theologian, Barth's theological methodology leads him to subject-matter and reasoning that the philosophers would

⁹⁵ Ibid., 520 (610).

almost certainly find offensive. Barth's equation of the denial of angels with the denial of God, while shocking to readers, exemplifies Barth's ordering of philosophy in the service of theology at its most extreme.

While the conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer help to clarify Barth's concerns and achievements in §51, they also raise further questions. I believe that Barth's gloss of the verses in Jude and 2 Peter clearly violates his theological methodology. Seen in relation to his personalist providence developed throughout III.3, however, this violation can be understood in its importance. The connection of §51 to §49 and §50 calls for further attention from Barth scholars. More significantly, as I have suggested in connection with Jenson's critique, Barth's angelology seems to further diminish the role of the Holy Spirit in providence.

While important questions remain, Barth's use of angelology in the larger context of his providence is far more creative and coherent than previous interpretations have acknowledged. Barth's explicit attempts to remove dualism, posit something of a 'causal joint', and accentuate the limited nature of human autonomy under providence each makes a significant contribution to what Barth deemed the 'radical correction' of Reformed Theology before him.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Ibid., xii.

CHAPTER X:

CONCLUSION

The central argument of this thesis is that Barth's doctrine of providence is thoroughly personal. By setting him in conversation with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer, I have drawn on the tools of philosophical theology to argue for the coherence of III.3 both in its parts and as a whole. These personalist tools reveal the profundity of Barth's revision of Reformed orthodoxy.

Some scholars may reject the possibility of a fruitful discussion between Barth and philosophical theologians based on his polemics against natural theology and abstract philosophy. I believe the insights of this thesis strongly challenge this extreme view. While the conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer have each shown disagreement on areas related to revelation and Barth's christocentrism, these differences must not obscure the genuine benefits gained. *CD* III.3 is theology and not philosophy. Nevertheless, Barth's theology cannot be understood without philosophical tools. Each of the four sections of III.3 gain significant clarification through the conversations with philosophical theology.

The formal continuities revealed between Barth and the philosophical theologians show many shared values, such as the rejection of divine sole causality, the affirmation of human responsibility, and the importance of the personal in reference to both the human and divine agents. None of this is particularly surprising considering the commonality of their European, mid-twentieth century context. Brümmer's relational frameworks, Macmurray's non-dualistic form of the personal, and Farrer's double-agency each provide philosophical tools which accentuate Barth's attempts to transcend the problems of Reformed orthodoxy while affirming many of its values. Returning to the materials introduced in Chapter II, I will now assess Barth's revision of 'older theology' before re-visiting the critiques against III.3.

i) Barth's 'Radical Correction' of Reformed Orthodoxy

Turning back to Chapter II's summary of Reformed providence and the critiques against Barth, I now review III.3's divergences in light of the conversations with philosophical theology. First, Barth's use of personalist tools allows him to set

aside Aristotelian substantialist ontology and replace it with an actualistic ontology of persons. As seen in discussion with Brümmer and Macmurray, the human person lives her life *coram Deo* with *the* Person, whether aware of it or not. This relation defines being for Barth's doctrine of providence and contrasts strongly with the ontology of 'older theology'.

Second, ordering election ahead of providence in contrast with Reformed orthodoxy, Barth successfully articulates the single, twofold will of God determining all world-occurrence. Macmurray's efforts to overcome dualism, with the resulting claims related to the singular 'intention of God', proved particularly helpful here. While double-predestination remains foundational for Barth, its asymmetrical ordering in Jesus Christ removes the necessity of dualism and its two histories of salvation and damnation. The importance of the reordering of election and providence appears throughout III.3. Significantly, Barth places election in God's life *ad intra*. This allows him to speak of the self-determinate God and sets the stage for his distinctive eschatology.

Third, Barth's emphatic rejection of the traditional view of Satan and demons as fallen angels gains significance in a personalist reading of providence. Self-determining to be the God of election before the foundations of the world, God carries out His singular, twofold will, one way or another. As with Macmurray's intention of God, election encompasses both creaturely cooperation and rebellion. Even Judas witnesses to God's salvation, though unwillingly and by God's left hand. Like all creatures, Judas, all humans, and all angels are unchangeably created in positive relation with the electing God. While personal creatures shape their identities in positive and negative relation to God, Barth's theology precludes the change in ontology which the traditional view of fallen angels demands.

Fourth, Barth's emphasis on faith's knowledge of providence leads him away from the traditional formulation of *providentia ordinaria* and *providentia extraordinaria*. Historically, this distinction has served to explain both the regularity of creaturely existence and the miraculous workings of God directly in history. Like Farrer, Barth rejects the latter and therefore precludes Humean miracles and the divine interruptions they imply. Double-agency grounded in God's singular intention brings a unity to *providentia* which makes this historic split unnecessary and even dangerous. Nevertheless, the Bible's depiction of miracles in salvation history require further elaboration. I have argued that §51 offers a creative and coherent answer to this philosophical challenge. Rather than either bringing God

into the causal nexus or allowing God to violate it, Barth simply expands it. The creaturely nexus now includes heaven as the imperceptible, created place of God and angels as God's perfect witnesses. Throughout, Barth's emphasis remains on the unity of God's personal providence leading all creatures to their divinely appointed goal.

The final trend I identified in traditional Reformed providence was the philosophical description of God. In contrast to the philosophical tradition, Barth strives to describe God in christological and trinitarian terms from first to last. Thus God's omnipotence, immutability, timelessness and non-spatiality are all radically recast. Following the logic of personalist philosophy even further than philosophers, Barth points to the Trinity as grounding human personhood. A standard monotheism cannot coherently speak of a *personal* God. As Macmurray argues, 'Any [personal] agent is necessarily in relation to the Other. Apart from this essential relation he does not exist...Persons...are constituted by their mutual relation to one another.'¹ Barth's theology allows this logic to be applied to the personal God in triune relation *ad intra*. Further, the logic of the personal demands a strong doctrine of revelation. In full accord with Macmurray's statement, 'knowledge of persons is by revelation', Barth rejects impersonal means of discovering the personal God.² In this sense, Barth's seemingly traditional adherence to trinity and revelation find philosophical legitimacy in personalist philosophical logic. At a minimum, Barth's doctrine of providence breaks firmly from Reformed orthodoxy in its christologically defined 'perfections of God' as opposed to the philosophical attributes of the God of the philosophers.

ii) Response to Critiques of Barth's doctrine of providence

I have argued for a reading of III.3 which shows, on the one hand, Barth's departure from the Reformed tradition and stands against, on the other hand, the critical readings of Barth's doctrine of providence outlined in Chapter II. The irony of these critiques against Barth's doctrine of providence is that he seems to share the philosophical and theological values underlying the criticism. My exposition of Barth's personalist providence certainly does not leave Barth immune to criticism, but it does challenge the content of the most common claims against him. Turning now to these critiques, I suggest the aspects of III.3 which relate to each of them.

¹ Macmurray, *Persons*, 24.

² *Ibid.*, 169.

First, Duthie and others argue that Barth's christocentric focus loses the human person. The whole of this thesis portrays the opposite view. While primordial election eliminates creaturely involvement in the objective work of salvation, Barth's doctrine of providence stresses the constitutive contribution of human history in shaping the person *coram Deo* for that person's participation in the eternal life of God. Thus, while no moment or decision proves decisive in humans' salvation or damnation, Barth's theology gives eternal consequences to *every moment* of human life as a Yes or No to the personal God. Using the logic from both Brümmer and Macmurray, I interpreted Barth's understanding of God's determinative, right and left hands to construct Game 3. Since humans exhaust their time and space of self-determination during their earthly lifetimes, history and this world take on tremendous importance. Thus it is no mistake and no small matter that III.4's discussion of special ethics follows seamlessly from III.3's articulation of providence. Barth's personalist providence stresses human personhood throughout, though in a different way than Duthie or Brümmer presuppose.

Second, critics accuse Barth of irrationality in his providence. As seen in discussion with Farrer's 'Domains' of truth, Barth's rationality demands faith to access its particular type of knowledge. In light of personalist philosophy, Barth's view holds greater coherence and rationality than previously acknowledged. If Brümmer is correct in arguing that philosophical theology 'asks semantic and hermeneutical questions about the meaning and interpretation of faith', then Barth's knowledge of faith merits further consideration.

Third, critics claim Barth's doctrine of providence lacks pastoral strength. While undoubtedly complicated and therefore inaccessible to many, Barth's personalist providence calls the Christian to active courage and peace in the midst of chaos. As seen in Chapter VIII, providence calls and strengthens Christians to love what God loves and oppose what God opposes, regardless of earthly outcomes. Knowing the truth that their salvation is certain in Christ, Christians can say Yes to God in the face of injustice and suffering. Like Farrer's two aspects of religious truth, Barth's emphasis on Christian faith allows the human to participate in providence from within. Believing life is lived *coram Deo*, Christians bravely obey and oppose nothingness as 'co-belligerents' at God's side. Moreover, Christians know that this lived life determines who they will be eternally. Every moment of their lives in action or complacency, obedience or disobedience will be preserved forever to the shame and glory of the person. Trusting in the personal God, they

know that nothing can separate them from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Lived in this way, Barth's doctrine of providence offers significant pastoral strength in any circumstances.

Fourth, critics accuse Barth of a monism that precludes relationality. Throughout *CD* Barth argues forcefully for the reality of the living God in Jesus Christ. As seen throughout this thesis, this election grounds and guards creaturely individuality. While no individual contributes to their salvation any more than they contributed to their creation, every particular person shapes their identity in the time and space of history. This person, distinct from but in relation to God, is saved in Christ and will participate in God's eternal life. Brümmer and Macmurray have proven helpful in depicting this determination of the individual by God. Such a view presents God and humans in essentially personal terms which preclude monism in the time and space of creaturely life.

Fifth, Schröder and others lament that Barth merely repeats the outdated doctrine of the tradition. The first portion of this conclusion has already argued against this charge. Using the tools of philosophical theology, Barth's personalist providence not only demonstrates a 'radical correction' of providence, but a reformulation of many other doctrines as well.

Sixth, Barth's doctrine of providence is accused of incompatibility with science. This charge seems to be rooted in the twofold error of misreading Barth and misunderstanding the structural limits of science itself. First, Barth's explicit rejection of miracles as interruptions of ontic laws of creation and his reformulation of *providentia extraordinaria* seem a direct response to science. Farrer's own engagement with science offers tools in reassessing the relation of science and theology in Barth.³ Second, Barth grants empirical science everything which scientific method demands. As seen in conversation with Farrer, science uses limits in order to achieve a measurability unachievable without abstracting an aspect from the whole. Thus allowing science to become a world-view overextends science and foolishly excludes the providential God. In contrast, Barth's personalist providence asserts the totality of God's lordship over all things while acknowledging a necessary agnosticism from the human perspective. The providential God's personal constancy encourages, rather than precludes, the provisional investigations of science, while affirming God's double-agency in all world-occurrence.

³ See Farrer, *God*, Chapters I and II; Farrer, *Faith*.

Finally, there is the charge of Barth's doctrine of providence leading to Christian arrogance. Barth's continual reminder of abiding agnosticism renders this criticism baseless. Moreover, Barth's stress on the personal response to the personal command of God opens possibilities for dialogue and cooperation with non-Christians which would be impossible in other forms of the doctrine. As seen in the discussion above about the pastoral strength of providence, Christian confidence remains high. Significantly, however, the focus of this confidence is on the person of God rather than the Christians' understanding of history. Looking for God's work in world-occurrence, the Christian cannot be arrogant. Barth writes,

On the contrary, he will be the one man who knows that there is no value in any of the master-keys which man has thought to discover and possess. He is the one man who will always be the most surprised, the most affected, the most apprehensive and the most joyful in the face of events.⁴

Thus Barth's doctrine of providence, like Farrer's, remains cautious and even agnostic as a philosophy of history, while confidently professing faith in the personal God.

If Hebblethwaite is correct and philosophical theology is increasingly taking the road trod by Farrer nearly half a century ago, then I believe that Barth's voice should be listened to much more carefully than is customary in philosophical theology.⁵ While Barth's inflammatory polemic against philosophy understandably raises ire among philosophers (as it did for Barth's own brother), they lose an important and pioneering conversation partner in not reading Barth sympathetically and patiently. Though the conversations in this thesis have largely strengthened Barth's position, I address some of the challenges they have raised now.

iii) Continuing Critiques of Barth

The discussions above undoubtedly reflect my admiration for Barth's theology. Nevertheless, significant problems remain. The conversation with Brümmer and my discussion of the causal concept in *concursum* have already indicated my objections to Barth's defense of causal language. I question Barth's strange decision to 'accept' the concept while re-defining it beyond all recognition. Barth's doctrine of providence would likely be given more attention and be better understood without this odd acceptance.

⁴ III.3, 242-243.

⁵ See Hebblethwaite, *Philosophical*, 3ff. Just pages after praising Farrer's approach, Hebblethwaite laments the influence of Barth and Torrance *vis-à-vis* philosophy.

Second, Barth's depiction of eternal life needs further development. I have argued for an understanding of Barth's 'eternalising' as preserving the person-in-their-actions in God's eternal life. This involves a salvation which includes both mercy and judgment, glory and shame. While 'eternal life' involves a mysterious combination of continuity and discontinuity with earthly life, Barth's 'eternalising' requires significant revision of creedal affirmations, such as 'the resurrection of the dead' and 'the life everlasting'. A great deal of the pastoral effect of Barth's doctrine of providence depends on these underdeveloped implications.

Further, while Barth's christocentrism and trinitarian theology function in essential ways throughout his providence, the Holy Spirit is conspicuously secondary. This is particularly noticeable in §51 where the function of angels is discussed in regard to revelation. While Barth mentions the Holy Spirit with sufficient frequency throughout III.3 (particularly in trinitarian formulas) to avoid charges of its absence, his pneumatology remains underdeveloped in providence. Barth's personalist providence leaves the impression that the third Person of the Trinity provides an important formal role, but lacks material content. Without further development, Barth's doctrine of providence largely presents a *Spiritus absconditus*.

While this thesis leaves many questions for future research, I believe that the *ad hoc* use of personalist philosophy grants a coherence and logic to III.3 which is inaccessible otherwise. Barth successfully articulates a post-Enlightenment providence which presents new paradigms for discussing God's sovereignty, election, human autonomy, and a number of other crucial issues. Conversations with Brümmer, Macmurray, and Farrer assist in re-appraising Barth's significant contribution to the doctrine of providence. Barth's achievement here has largely been overlooked and offers a great deal of potential in deciphering aspects of his theology located in more well-researched volumes of *CD*. My hope is that this thesis has been a step in this direction.

APPENDIX A

Macmurray's Description of Positive and Negative Aspects

Positive	Negative
Action	Thought ¹
Agent	Subject ²
Movement	Knowledge ³
Agency	Causality ⁴
Emotional Mode	Intellectual Mode ⁵
Intention of Action	Motive of Action ⁶
Determinate	Indeterminate ⁷
Real	Unreal ⁸
Love	Fear ⁹
Community	Society ¹⁰
Personal Relations with the Other	Knowledge of the Other ¹¹
Aesthetic	Scientific ¹²
The Other	My own existence in dependence on the Other ¹³

¹ ‘‘Acting’ and ‘thinking’ then, are, in abstract conception, exclusive contraries. In actuality they are ideal limits of personal experience; and ‘acting’ is the positive while ‘thinking’ is the negative limit.’ Macmurray, *Self*, 87.

² ‘The Self, then, is not the thinker but the doer. In its positive doing it is agent; in its negative doing it is subject.’ *Ibid.*, 90. Cf. Macmurray, *Self*, 170.

³ ‘Knowledge is the negative which constitutes action by its inclusion in movement—which is the positive dimension.’ Macmurray, *Self*, 129.

⁴ ‘If now we call this a causal process, we realize in another way that causality is the negative aspect of agency, and falls within action.’ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

⁸ ‘Now if this form is given a metaphysical use, it will enable us to think the determinate as necessarily including its negative, the indeterminate; or, more generally, to think Reality as constituted by the inclusion of the unreal in its own being. Such a concept would then enable us to think the unity of the world without falling into dualism and antinomy.’ *Ibid.*, 218.

⁹ ‘Thus both love and fear fall within the personal relation; both refer to this relation; and fear, as the negative, presupposes love and is subordinate to it.’ Macmurray, *Persons*, 70.

¹⁰ ‘This led to a suggestion that we should use the term ‘society’ to refer to those forms of human association in which the bond of unity is negative or impersonal; and to reserve for the contrasted forms of association which have a positive personal relation as their bond, the term ‘community.’ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹¹ ‘Knowledge of other people is simply the negative or reflective aspect of our personal relations with them.’ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹² ‘Of the two aspects, the aesthetic is the positive and primary, since it is valuational, and refers to the intention of action; the scientific is secondary and negative, since the means presupposes the end.’ *Ibid.*, 174.

Transcendence	Immanence ¹⁴
Personal Relation	Impersonal Relation ¹⁵
Religious Apperception	Scientific Apperception ¹⁶

¹³ ‘...primarily and positively the existence of the Other; and negatively and derivatively, my own existence in dependence upon the Other and limited by the Other.’ Ibid., 209.

¹⁴ Ibid., 223.

¹⁵ ‘Impersonality is the negative aspect of the personal; since only a person can behave impersonally, just as only a subject can think objectively.’ Ibid., 28.

¹⁶ ‘Formally, therefore, religion necessarily includes and is constituted by science; while science appears to be in conflict with religion only through limitation of attention to the negative aspect of our relation to the world.’ Ibid., 217.

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