

The Concept of History in the Theology of Karl Barth

Kuo-An Wu

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
University of Edinburgh
2011

I, Kuo-An Wu, 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.

吳國安
Kuo-An Wu

Abstract

This thesis provides a complete, chronological view of Barth's concept of history throughout his theological career. The purpose of undertaking this hitherto unattempted task is to demonstrate that, ever since his full engagement with dogmatics in the mid-1920s, Barth has unequivocally affirmed the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is. Though he continues to insist upon the transcendence of revelation, he does so by way of an increasingly christocentric theology, so that both divine sovereignty and human dignity are firmly upheld. This is especially evident in his later theology, with his concentration on the history of Jesus Christ on the basis of the doctrine of election. This thesis thus rejects both the charge that Barth's theology is ahistorical or anti-historical on the one hand, and the charge that it is excessively historical on the other.

Contents

Acknowledgement	i
Abbreviations.....	ii
Introduction	1

Part One: Pre-Dogmatic Period (1905-1924)

1 God Present through History: Self, and the World (1905-1914)	21
Introduction	21
1A History as a View of Reality	21
1B From the Self to the World: Pre-War Writings.....	37
1C Concluding Remarks.....	48
2 God's Revelation Overwhelming History: The <i>Römerbrief</i> Period (1914-1924).....	49
Introduction	49
2A The Significance of History Diminishing: on the Way to the <i>Römerbrief</i> (1914-1918)	49
2B This World Connected to That World: <i>Römerbrief</i> (1919).....	52
2C This World Overwhelmed by That World: <i>Römerbrief</i> (1922)	64
2D Continuation and Moderation of the <i>Römerbrief</i> Principles: Early Lectures in Göttingen.....	78
2E Concluding Remarks.....	92

Part Two: Early Dogmatic Period (1924-1940)

3 Speaking God Revealed in History (I): Two Dogmatic Enterprises (1924-1930).....	94
Introduction	94
3A Christological View of Revelation and the Three Forms of the Word of God: Dogmatic Lectures in Göttingen (1924)	95
3B Subject-Predicate Relation Announced: 'Church and Theology' (1925).....	110
3C Revelation as <i>Urgeschichte: Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf</i> (1927)	113
3D Concluding Remarks	119
4 Speaking God Revealed in History (II): <i>Church Dogmatics</i> I (1932-1938).....	121
Introduction	121
4A The Dialectic of Veiling and Unveiling of God's Word in History	123

4B ‘Historicisation’ in the Doctrine of Revelation	131
4C Revelatory Concentration of History: The Time of Revelation	143
4D Concluding Remarks	152
5 Knowledge of God in History, and Eternal God in Time: <i>Church Dogmatics II/1 (1940)</i>.....	153
Introduction	153
5A The Dialectic of Veiling and Unveiling in the Knowledge of God	154
5B The Reality of God	169
5C Concluding Remarks.....	187
Part Three: Mature Dogmatic Period (1940-)	
6 Electing God Determining History: <i>Church Dogmatics II/2 (1942)</i>	190
Introduction	190
6A Christocentric Grounding of Election: Jesus Christ Electing and Elected	191
6B Ontological Consequences of Election	203
6C Historical Understanding of Election and Elective Understanding of History	212
6D Concluding Remarks	228
7 Creator God Ruling History: <i>Church Dogmatics III (1945-1951)</i>.....	230
Introduction	230
7A The Beginning of History in Creation.....	231
7B The Proceeding of History under the Providence of the Lord of History	236
7C The Being of Humanity as History after Jesus as the Lord of Time	246
7D Concluding Remarks	252
8 Reconciling God ‘Historicised’ and ‘Ontologising’ History: <i>Church Dogmatics IV (1953-)</i>.....	254
Introduction	254
8A The Being of Jesus Christ as His History	257
8B ‘Historicisation’ of the Divine Being in the Being of Jesus Christ	265
8C ‘Ontologisation’ of Human History in the History of Jesus Christ	276
8D Election and the Trinity: an Excursus	289
8E Concluding Remarks.....	292
Conclusion.....	294
Bibliography	300

Acknowledgement

This thesis would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study.

First, I would like to express my utmost gratitude to my supervisor at New College, Dr. Paul Nimmo, whose detailed instruction has widened my perspective, and whose constant encouragement has enabled me to press ahead when things looked impossible. I would like to thank Professor John McDowell and Professor David Fergusson, whose initial supervision was consequential in setting my research on firm ground. Gracious thanks must be extended also to Dr. Susan Hardman Moore and Dr. Donald Wood, whose comments given in my viva are helpful and insightful.

I am grateful to my fellow postgraduate students at New College, especially to those who share the 'upper room' in Ramsay Lane Wing, where we spent numerous hours day and night. In addition, I would like to extend sincere thanks to all my Chinese colleagues at New College who have been involved in the fellowship of THECE (Theological Hopeful Ethnic Chinese in Edinburgh). The warm friendship and inspiring conversation which they share with me in the past few years have been invaluable. A word of special thanks must be given to the Peng's and the Chan's, who have kindly treated me as a family member.

Finally, I am indebted to my parents, Hong-Min Wu and Li-Wei Lang, whose warm care and unceasing prayer for me will never be forgotten. Above all, I would like to thank my dear wife, Chia-Ling Wang, without whose unwavering support and unselfish sacrifice this work would not be possible. To her I dedicate this work with love and gratitude.

Abbreviations

- R1* *Der Römerbrief*: Erste Fassung, 1919 (Zürich: TVZ, 1985)
- R2* *Der Römerbrief* 1922 (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1940)
- R2E* *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, from the sixth edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1968)
-
- Unt1* *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*: Teil 1: Prolegomena, 1924 (Zürich: TVZ, 1985)
- Unt2* *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*: Teil 2: Die Lehre von Gott / Die Lehre vom Menschen, 1924/25 (Zürich: TVZ, 1990)
- Unt3* *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*: Teil 3: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung / Die Lehre von der Erlösung 1925/26 (Zürich: TVZ, 2003)
- GD* *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. by Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991)
-
- ChD* *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*: 1. Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik, 1927, ed. by Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1982)
-
- KD* *Die kirchliche Dogmatik*, 4 vols in 13 pts (Zürich: TVZ, 1980)
- I/1* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975, 2nd edn)
- I/2* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. I, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)
- II/1* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957)
- II/2* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. II, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957)
- III/1* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958)
- III/2* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960)
- III/3* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961)
- III/4* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, part 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961)
- IV/1* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956)
- IV/2* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1958)
- IV/3* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 3: first half (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1961) and vol. IV, part 3: second half (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1962)
- IV/4* *Church Dogmatics*, vol. IV, part 4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1969)

Introduction

This thesis has as its immediate concern the concept of history in the theology of Karl Barth. This concept is prominent in Barth's theology, and has been a source of debates both old and new about his work. Such debates have investigated Barth's approach to the modern 'problem of history' in theology, and have explored the place and role of history in several of his individual doctrines. However, the concept of history has never received the sustained and exhaustive treatment which its importance in Barth's theology merits. This thesis performs this task in two complementary ways. First, it will trace the development of the concept of history in Barth's entire career from the 1910s to the 1960s. Second, in doing so, it will demonstrate that his christological understanding of revelation in the mid-1920s led to an unequivocal affirmation of the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is, and that in his mature theology the christocentric concentration on the history of Jesus Christ led to a further affirmation of the entirety of history in a way that both divine sovereignty and human dignity are upheld.

This introductory chapter will first give a broad account of the problem of history in late nineteenth-century theology, and of the relation and distinction of the concepts of *Geschichte* and *Historie*. It will then provide a critical evaluation of interpretations of Barth's concept of history in the existing scholarly literature, demonstrating how they have contributed to an understanding of different aspects of his theology but have failed thus far to offer a complete picture of the concept itself. It will close with a concise outline of the chapters that lie ahead.

A. The Problem of History in Late Nineteenth-Century Theology

The intellectual developments of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment period brought Christian theology into a close and sometimes controversial relation with history.¹ With its pursuit of Natural Laws and its confidence in human reason, the Enlightenment exerted a powerful influence over many academic disciplines, including the discipline of history [*Geschichtswissenschaft*]. Historical investigation began to approach the past in a scientific, positivistic way, thus acquiring the status of an independent discipline. Alongside its critical method, the discipline of history furthermore formed a specific view of the past and the present, according to which present reality could not be understood unless accessed from its own unique historical development. The critical research method and the belief in process, development and individuality, broadly described as historicism,² to a very large extent reshaped the method, form and content of Christian theology. Scholars such as Reimarus (1694-1768) and Lessing (1729-1781) began to explore the relationship between the Christian faith and history in the eighteenth century. By

¹ For what follows I am indebted to A. J. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1988), 28ff.; John D. Godsey, 'Christian Faith's Partnership with History', *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer*, ed. by John T. Carroll, Charles H. Cosgrove and E. Elizabeth Johnson (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990), 262-278 (265-270); Laurence W. Wood, *God and History: The Dialectical Tension of Faith and History in Modern Thought* (Lexington, Ky.: Emeth Publisher, 2004); Ch. 1 'The Problem of History' in Terrence W. Tilley, *History, Theology, and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 9-18; 'Introduction' to Nathan R. Kerr, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 1-22 (2-6). For a brief introduction to the debate about faith and theology in the twentieth century, see Ch. 1 'Setting the Scene' in Michael Gilbertson, *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1-19. For the historicisation of theology see 'Introduction' to Thomas A. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-22.

² Georg G. Iggers, 'Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), 129-152. For an account of the relationship between historicism and German idealism see *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historicism*, ed. by Peter Koslowski (Berlin: Springer, 2005).

virtue of the endeavours of Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Hegel (1770-1831) and Strauss (1808-1874), the problem of history continued to be one of the most important topics in late nineteenth-century theology, especially in the liberal school of theology in which Barth was educated.³

The most important features of Barth's contemporary liberal theology, in his own view, were religious individualism and historical relativism.⁴ What is termed the 'historical principle of individuality'⁵ was an issue at stake particularly among two major theological camps within liberal Protestantism in late nineteenth century: the Ritschlian school, and the History of Religions School [*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*] represented by Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923).⁶

The two camps had various and often contradicting views on what it means to be historical in theology. Broadly speaking, Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) held that being historical means sharing the collective experience inspired by Jesus within a Christian group. It is thus not necessary to pay too much attention to what the man Jesus of Nazareth actually said and did. By contrast, Troeltsch criticised his former teacher Ritschl for being heavily biased in favour of the dogmatic tradition of Protestantism, and, therefore, for not being sufficiently historicised. For Troeltsch, being historical means that religions ought to be considered and approached as any other general historical events. An event cannot be legitimately claimed to be

³ For detail see footnote 1 and section 1A.4 in Chapter One.

⁴ Karl Barth, 'Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit' (1909), idem, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1905-1909*, ed. by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: TVZ, 1992), 342f.

⁵ B. A. Gerrish, *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 35.

⁶ For what follows I am indebted to Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 81-83, 95; Simon Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism?: Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 146-153; Gary J. Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 15-32.

historical unless it has been examined through the historical-critical method by an objective on-looker who is not involved in any given tradition. Troeltsch argued that a discontinuity existed between modern theology, the theology of the Reformation, and all the theologies of different periods of the past, and accordingly he denied any legitimacy to Ritschl's appeal to the dogmatic tradition of Protestantism. With the rise of the historical-critical method, Troeltsch discredited and discarded a dogmatic or supernaturalistic understanding of the essence of Christianity. In response, Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) endeavoured to defend Ritschl by defining history in terms of the influence of Jesus' inner life on Christians in the past and in the present. Revelation in history means for Herrmann not a historical event in the past, but 'a religious experience in the transcendent dimension of an individual's contemporary life'.⁷ This debate over history between the theological camps may be broadly summarised by saying that after Ritschl's *moderate historical theology* had been surpassed by Troeltsch's *radical historical theology*, Herrmann emerged with his *ahistorical theology*.

It is beyond doubt that both Ritschl and Troeltsch placed strong emphasis on the category of history in their theologies. Even Herrmann, known for being ahistorical, could not simply ignore history but had to redefine it in order to keep engaging with it. Two things need to be noticed here. First, despite their various standpoints, none of the three theologians could manage to speak of theology without also speaking of history. Second, as we shall see in Chapter One, it was Herrmann's ahistorical view that exerted a formative influence on Barth's earliest theology.

⁷ Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism?*, 152.

B. *Geschichte* and *Historie* for Barth

In the foregoing section, two broad ways of understanding the term ‘history’ were sketched: history as a research method, and history as a certain perspective on human reality. They broadly correspond to the distinction between history as objective facts and history as subjective significance.⁸ This distinction is related to the important German distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie*.⁹

Efforts have been made in the English-speaking world to describe the relation and distinction between these two words, together with their respective derivatives.¹⁰ In general, the word *Geschichte* has a more ancient origin in the German language, whilst *Historie* did not appear until the beginning of the nineteenth century when history became a professional academic discipline [*Geschichtswissenschaft*]. *Geschichte*, understood as reports, stories or tales, is often taken to mean what might have really happened in the past; in contrast *Historie* is employed to signify historical facts validated according to the standard of the academic discipline of history, and therefore what really happened in the past.

In Barth’s view, however, *Geschichte* is what really happened in the past, and those events which are ‘historically’ verified to have happened in the past are *Historie*. Geoffrey Bromiley is right in positing that *Geschichte* means for Barth

⁸ Godsey, ‘Christian Faith’s Partnership with History’, in *Faith and History*, 262f. Cf. Conyers’ distinction between theology of history and philosophy of history, and his further distinction between critical philosophy of history and speculative philosophy of history. Conyers, *God, Hope, and History*, 22.

⁹ For what follows I am indebted to McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, 76f.; Neil B. MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World Within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000), 140n11; Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principals [sic] of the Römerbrief Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 105n31.

¹⁰ McGrath suggests either using objective-historical for *historisch*, and existential-historical for *geschichtlich*, or using historical for *historisch*, and historic for *geschichtlich*. The first set illuminates the distinction between ‘objective historical fact’ and ‘history which is important to individuals,’ whilst the second set stresses the contrast between ‘event in history’ and ‘event making history’.

history as event and *Historie* history as record.¹¹ The two are not mutually exclusive; instead, *Geschichte* includes *Historie*, and therefore not all *Geschichte* can be verified as *Historie*. In a discussion with English speaking students in the mid-1950s, Barth said:

‘*Historie*’ is something that can be proved by general historical science, whereas ‘*Geschichte*’ is something that really takes place in time and space, but may or may not be proved. The creation story has to do with ‘*Geschichte*’, for instance. It has to do with something that happened and therefore something historical, but something that is not open to historiographical investigation.¹²

It is crucial for a study of Barth’s concept of history to recognise his definition of *Geschichte* as ‘something historical ... that is not open to historiographical investigation’, for it is one of his life-long commitments to argue for the legitimacy of *unhistorische Geschichte*, in order to argue for the *unhistorische Geschichtlichkeit* of certain Christian truth-claims.¹³

C. Accounts of Barth’s Concept of History

When it comes to Barth’s concept of *Geschichte*, three phenomena are observed. First, the concept surfaces at almost all important junctures in Barth’s theology. Several forms of *Geschichte* can be detected within different theological contexts, including: 1) the earthly realm in which fallen human beings reside, 2) the locus of the revelation of Jesus Christ, 3) the general relation of God to the world and His

¹¹ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), 112.

¹² Karl Barth, *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, ed. by John D. Godsey (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 45.

¹³ Neil MacDonald terms this as a ‘*sui generis* historicity’, which pertain to Barth’s views of creation, and resurrection. See MacDonald, *Karl Barth and the Strange New World within the Bible*, 107-112, 136ff., 193ff.

particular relation to the human Jesus and His people, and 4) the life in which the God-human Jesus Christ is and acts. And in each of these connections ‘history’ plays no small part. Second, for the immense theological weight it carries, ‘history’ is a concept which demands consideration in almost all the important dimensions of Barth’s theology. It is prominent in research concerning his doctrines of revelation,¹⁴ creation,¹⁵ the resurrection,¹⁶ election, reconciliation, the Trinity, and Christology,¹⁷ as well as in studies of his theological exegesis,¹⁸ the connection between his notion of revelation and the Holocaust,¹⁹ his teaching of Israel,²⁰ of historical theology and church history,²¹ and of mission and church.²² But unfortunately—this is the third point of observation—despite the concept’s importance in Barth’s theology and therefore in Barth scholarship, existing studies have not yet offered, or attempted to offer, a complete account of it. Many fragmentary images have been provided; a complete picture remains largely missing.

A brief overview of the existing literature in this connection will locate this thesis and its aims amidst the current scholarship on this matter. The literature will

¹⁴ See discussion in sections C.1 and C.2 in this Introductory chapter.

¹⁵ E.g. Robert Sherman, *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 54-61.

¹⁶ E.g. R. Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 55-63.

¹⁷ See section C.3 and footnotes 55 and 58 in this Introductory chapter. See also Paul D. Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics* (London: Continuum, 2008), 188ff. for the concept of *Geschichte* in Barth’s mature Christology.

¹⁸ E.g. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 100-110.

¹⁹ E.g. Mark R. Lindsay, ‘History, Holocaust, and Revelation: Beyond the Barthian Limits’, *Theology Today*, 61 (2005), 455-470 (460ff.).

²⁰ E.g. Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s “Doctrine of Israel”* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) 153, 174.

²¹ E.g., John B. Webster, “‘There is no past in the Church, so there is no past in theology’: Barth on the History of Modern Protestant Theology”, idem, *Barth’s Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 91-117.

²² E.g. John G. Flett, *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 47, 56ff., 225f..

be divided into three groups in the following discussion.

C.1 Infinite Qualitative Distinction between Eternity and Time

An overarching concern in some of the literature is that Barth denies or at best avoids the reality of history. In his study of Barth's doctrine of time, Richard Roberts roots Barth in the tradition of German idealism, traces the development of the concepts of eternity and of time in Barth's theology, and argues that despite a shift from the 'eternal Now' (of the *Römerbrief*) to the 'contingent contemporaneity' (in the *CD*), Barth never really departed from a Platonic tendency which upholds an eternal, antecedent 'reality' over against temporal, subsequent 'realities'.²³ This persistent one-sided emphasis on the eternal antecedents of temporal consequences makes Barth derive all that which is temporally 'real' from the eternal 'real', thus creating a series of difficulties and confusion of categories at each juncture of his thought.²⁴ As a result, although Barth manages to avoid the Platonic dissolution of time in eternity, in that he derives what is 'real' in time from the eternal, antecedent 'real', the alleged temporal 'real' can still in no way 'relate to that existence experienced by the human subject',²⁵ but is rather removed from 'the world of experience and the cosmos [and from the] shared time of human and cosmic existence',²⁶ contained in a self-enclosed circle. In the final analysis, on Roberts' account, Barth's theology is characterised by a 'monopoly', 'totalitarian demands', and a 'profound ontological

²³ Richard Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time: its Nature and Implications', in Richard H. Roberts, *A Theology on Its Way?: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 1-58 (17-20).

²⁴ That is, in his teachings of revelation (*ibid.*, 15ff.), of eternity as God's time (*ibid.*, 21ff.), of the primacy of election (*ibid.*, 30ff.), and of the incarnation and Christology (*ibid.*, 34ff.).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26.

exclusiveness'.²⁷

This characterisation of Barth's concept of time as being dominated by a tendency to eternalisation has exerted a strong influence on the interpretation not only of the Barth of the *Römerbrief*,²⁸ but also and especially of his doctrine of revelation in the *CD*. Corresponding to this is the criticism that, for Barth, *despite its occurrence in history, revelation has been antecedently determined in eternity by God*. This claim can be elaborated along the following lines.

First, it is held that revelation for Barth did happen in *history*, but that history is nothing more than the form which revelation assumes. For instance, Thomas Ogletree claims that in contrast to Ernst Troeltsch's focus on the form of general history, Barth's thought is primarily controlled by material considerations. For Barth it is impermissible to talk about 'history in general ... regardless of its particular central, determinative content', i.e., Jesus Christ. The material significance of this particular history is such that 'no formal analysis of the nature of [general] history ... can be accepted as valid.'²⁹ What really matters, then, is the specific content to be manifest by the general form rather than the general form which contains the specific content.

Corresponding to this 'formal' understanding of history is the observation that revelation for Barth is *predetermined* by God, and therefore its historical occurrence is merely a recapitulation of what has already happened in eternity. A strong sense of unease is felt concerning the one-sided emphasis laid on God and on

²⁷ Ibid., 57.

²⁸ For instance, John Godsey remarks on the dialectical theologians in the 1920s that they employed 'whatever conceptual means they could find to emphasize what Kierkegaard had termed "the infinite qualitative distinction between eternity and time"', Godsey, 'Christian Faith's Partnership with History' in *Faith and History*, 273.

²⁹ Thomas W. Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 223.

eternity. For example, Alister McGrath notices in Barth a free and sovereign God whose subjectivity ‘precludes any ... anthropological intrusions into ... theological territory’.³⁰ Meanwhile Mike Higton posits that, due to his rejection of relationalism, Barth asserts that the divine sovereignty and freedom must be protected at all cost.³¹ Consequently, ‘[r]evelation and history are linked ..., but in what appears to be a wholly negative way: revelation shows what history is not, it evacuates history of its pretensions.’³²

This orientation towards the sovereign God is seen to be reinforced by—and in turn reinforces—an orientation towards pre-temporal *eternity*. Herbert Hartwell writes:

The pure eternal being of God as the being of the Triune God already presents us with a ‘history’; in the dynamics of His inner life as Father, Son and Holy Spirit God is the basic type and ground of all history. ... [To this specific] history as *Heilsgeschichte* and thus as the history of the people of God, ... all other history, so to speak, is but a temporary appendage³³

This ‘eternalisation’ is seen by McGrath as a ‘deliberate refusal to engage in dialogue with the ... questions raised by the historicization of reality’.³⁴ He writes of Barth’s

³⁰ McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, 110.

³¹ Mike Higton points out that Barth’s dominant concern is the sovereignty of God; everything else is subordinate. There is for him no organic and immediate unity between humanity and God. Mike Higton, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei’s Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 43f.

³² *Ibid.*, 45. On Higton’s account, Barth’s attack on relationalism ‘gets dangerously close to setting up a competition between God and mankind, with God’s freedom only being asserted by means of denials about human faith’, *ibid.*, 46f. In this regard Rowan Williams observes that for Barth God’s Word and its form in the world cannot be identified; ‘[t]o say that God’s Word becomes fully identified with the ambiguous circumstances in which it is spoken is to prejudice the *sovereign freedom* of the Speaker.’ Rowan Williams, ‘Barth on the Triune God’, in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, ed. by Stephen Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 147-193 (155).

³³ Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1964), 30f.

³⁴ McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, 112.

Christology that:

The history of Jesus Christ can therefore only recapitulate in time what has already happened antecedently in eternity. ... Barth's reluctance to engage with historical questions, evident in the *Romerbrief* [sic], can be shown to have culminated in the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, with the result that a Christology is constructed with only the most superficial contacts with human history. ... Barth's concept of divine freedom in revelation necessitates that the ensuing revelation merely recapitulates its eternal antecedents. ... Barth thus *denies the historical nature of revelation*.³⁵

On this line of interpretation, then, Barth's 'eternalisation' of revelation results from his notion of the dominance of eternity over time, and it in turn results in the dominance of the divine-eternal over the human-historical,³⁶ that of revelation's eternal antecedent over its historical occurrence,³⁷ and that of Christ's deity over Jesus' humanity.³⁸ The conclusion is drawn that '[a]t the heart of Barth's theological program, and of those who followed him, lay a deep antipathy towards the role of history in Christian faith', and the 'conviction that revelation does not occur in human experience'.³⁹ Because of Barth's attempt 'to preserve Christian

³⁵ Ibid., 110, emphasis original.

³⁶ Disregarding 'how the multiplicity of religions and viewpoints in world history fits into the workings of God', Barth leaves unanswered 'questions regarding the relation of the multiplicity of viewpoints in human history to the action of God in Jesus Christ'. Ogletree, *Christian Faith and History*, 227f.

³⁷ 'The "eternalization" of revelation ... inevitably means that the emphasis is actually shifted from that revelation itself to man's recognition and appropriation of that revelation—and hence from God's activity to man's insights and knowledge.' McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, 112. When Christ's universal lordship is thus construed as abstract, confined and relative, revelation ends up functioning merely as an 'inner citadel' into which to retreat. Raymond Plant, *Politics, Theology, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 86.

³⁸ Higton, *Christ, Providence and History*, 55f.: '... so great is [the] absolute concentration upon an account of the hypostatic union in Jesus Christ that little room is left for the contingent and irregular details of Jesus' human life. ... too little attention to the details of Christ's humanity, too little attention to the contingent course of wider history.'

³⁹ Scott Shauf, *Theology As History, History As Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005), 14.

theology from the indifference and hostility of a secular world',⁴⁰ McGrath insists that:

Barth *must* be regarded as deliberately disengaging himself from what is widely regarded as one of the most crucial questions facing contemporary Christology in the post-Enlightenment period: the relation between faith and history.⁴¹

This first line of interpretation presents a Barth whose theology on the whole, and whose doctrine of revelation in particular, are ahistorical and even anti-historical. On this account, human history in general cannot be conceived as possessing any reality vis-à-vis the reality of revelation, and the particular history of the human Jesus has little to contribute to Christology.⁴²

C.2 Revelation There and Then

A further portion of the literature offers a more positive account of Barth's concept of history, especially regarding his doctrine of revelation. For example, Bruce McCormack convincingly demonstrates that in Göttingen Barth's strong commitment to the reality of *Deus dixit* prompted him to shift from an eschatological to a christological grounding of theology.⁴³ Firmly adhering to the belief that God did speak there and then in Jesus Christ and only thereafter here and now to us, McCormack argues, Barth claimed that the Subject of *Deus dixit* is not outside but in history, thereby bringing revelation, previously construed as a mathematical point in

⁴⁰ Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', *A Theology on Its Way?*, 57.

⁴¹ McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology*, 114f., emphasis mine.

⁴² As H. R. Mackintosh points out, some critics go so far as to claim that Barth is so opposed to anything related to human history that 'it would make no vital difference to his faith were it proved that Jesus never really lived.' H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: Collins, 1964), 291.

⁴³ Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 327f. Hereafter *Dialectical Theology*.

the *Römerbrief*, fully and completely into history.⁴⁴

Hans Urs von Balthasar observes that with his christological understanding of revelation as being fully in history, Barth is able to construe the ‘truth’ not as ‘the idea, the general, the transhistorical ... , with history being only the unfolding of the Idea and its exemplification’, but as ‘that aboriginal history that was set by God in the revelation of his Word into the midst of history in the event of Christ.’⁴⁵ In the same vein, Eberhard Busch notes the ‘unconditional priority to the specific over the general’ which places decisive emphasis on the historical ‘there and then’ as the objective basis of the subjective ‘here and now’. This means for Barth, Busch contends, that ‘[t]he knowledge of God is inseparably attached to the “there and then” of Jesus Christ.’⁴⁶

In addition to the recognition of Barth’s affirmation of the historical reality and concreteness of revelation, further observations have indicated what it is that Barth actually rejects. Gary Dorrien, tracing the influence of Wilhelm Herrmann on the early Barth, clearly identifies Barth’s insistence that Christian faith, although independent from the canons of historical criticism, still belongs to history.⁴⁷ He also posits that Barth promotes God’s transcendence over the world and not His absence from it, and that he opposes ‘Immanentism’ and not ‘Immanence’,⁴⁸ historicism and not history as such.⁴⁹ Such distinctions make clear that Barth is

⁴⁴ Ibid., 340, 367.

⁴⁵ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), 205.

⁴⁶ Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth’s Theology*, ed. by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 69.

⁴⁷ Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology*, 175.

⁴⁸ Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, 287.

⁴⁹ Bruce L. McCormack, ‘Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth’s Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition’, in idem, *Orthodox*

objecting to the modern, positivistic understanding of and monopoly on 'history'. In John Colwell's words, Barth is convinced that the arbitrary presupposition that 'all events must be verifiable by modern historicist method if they are to be accepted as "historical" ... excludes the possibility of a unique occurrence',⁵⁰ and that this lack of open-mindedness to the possibility of specific actuality in the positivistic epistemology can itself be neither rational nor moral. Therefore, Barth does not deny history itself; what he rejects is the positivistic presupposition that only *Historie* can be qualified as *Geschichte*.

These subtle yet important distinctions also help to clarify Barth's conception of the relationship between revelation and history. It is true that Barth strongly advocates God's transcendence, refusing to allow the autonomy of human history, the authority of critical historical method, and the philosophical presuppositions of historicism to lay claim on it.⁵¹ But he does not therefore believe in a God who is absent from the real human world and its history. As Trevor Hart puts it, although '[a]s such "revelation" can and could never be apprehended or laid hold of at the level of nature or history', yet 'it is certainly apprehended from within nature and history.'⁵² Therefore, revelation itself should also be viewed as *in* history but not *of* history.⁵³

and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 21-39 (37f.).

⁵⁰ John Colwell, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1989), 88f.

⁵¹ Or, as John Webster articulates it, what Barth refuses to allow is 'that "history" is a more comprehensive and well-founded reality than "revelation".' John B. Webster, 'Introducing Barth', *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. by John B. Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1-16 (10-11).

⁵² Trevor Hart, 'Was God in Christ?: Revelation, History and the Humanity of God', in idem, *Regarding Karl Barth: Essays Toward a Reading of His Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999), 1-27 (26).

⁵³ Trevor A. Hart, 'Revelation', in Webster, *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 37-56 (44). Also 45: 'If we identify "revelation" ... with a set of texts, a particular human person, a series of

In summary, according to this line of interpretation, due to the special relation between revelation and history, revelation for Barth cannot simply be unhistorical. Rather, it is not only historical but also supra-historical or trans-historical: historical, because it does not stay outside, hover over, or merely touch upon history, but enters fully into it; supra-historical or trans-historical, because it is not purely or simply historical but more than historical.⁵⁴

C.3 The Divine Being-in-act Determined in the Election of Jesus Christ

A further view on Barth's concept of history highlights his doctrine of election, and constitutes one of the most hotly debated topics in the field. The debate revolves around what can be called the actualistic-ontological character of Barth's later theology, focusing on whether Barth's understanding of election as God's self-determination carries ontological consequences for the being of the Word and the triune essence of God, and whether, correspondingly, the category of 'history' might thus take on additional significance in Barth's later theology.

In this regard, Bruce McCormack identifies in Barth's doctrine of election a 'historicisation' of the eternal Logos with the historical existence of Jesus Christ, and argues that this tendency demands a revised understanding of God's triune essence.⁵⁵

historical facts, a body of ethical and spiritual teaching or with some other phenomenon, we locate it firmly within the sphere of that which is *of* history as well as *in* it.'

⁵⁴ In German terms, this could be described as *geschichtlich* but not *historisch*.

⁵⁵ McCormack's contribution to this line of interpretation in the last decade has been weighty. Relative articles which are collected in McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern* include 'Grace and Being: The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Ontological Theology' (2000), 183-200; 'Karl Barth's Historicized Christology: Just How "Chalcedonian" Is It?' (2002), 201-233; 'Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question' (2004), 235-260; 'See God Where He May Be Found: A Response to Edwin Chr. Van Driel' (2007), 261-277. Other literature includes Bruce L. McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8 (2006), 243-251; Bruce L. McCormack, 'The Actuality of God: Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism', *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. by Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 185-242; Bruce L. McCormack, 'God *Is* His Decision: The Jüngel-Gollwitzer "Debate" Revisited', *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue*

He is convinced that Barth, in making Jesus Christ the Subject of election in *CD II/2*, pushes the historical existence of Jesus back into eternity where election took place, thereby rejecting the notion of a Logos *asarkos* which is not already *incarnandus*. This historicising tendency then culminates in *CD IV* in Barth's 'replacing the category of "nature" with the category of "history" and ... then integrating "history" into his concept of "person".'⁵⁶ Hence McCormack proposes that if Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Trinity, then it is required that 'we see the triunity of God, logically, as a function of divine election'.⁵⁷ With McCormack, we are presented with a Barth who historicises both Christology and the doctrine of the Trinity in strict adherence to his christocentrism.

Other scholars have disagreed with McCormack's interpretation of the issue.⁵⁸ They posit that McCormack's scheme dangerously rejects the precedence of the eternal Logos *asarkos* over the historical Logos *ensarkos*, thereby risking the deity of Christ and collapsing the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity, which

in Historical and Contemporary Theology, ed. by Bruce L. McCormack and Kimlyn J. Bender (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 48-66; Bruce L. McCormack, 'Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 63 (2010), 203-214. The debate between him and other scholars will be discussed in more detail in Chapters Six and Eight of this thesis. For scholars who broadly agree on the proposed line of 'historicisation' but differ in detail, see Kevin W. Hector, 'God's Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7 (2005), 246-261; Jeffrey Hensley, 'Trinity and Freedom: A Response to Molnar', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 61 (2008), 83-95.

⁵⁶ McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Historicized Christology', *Orthodox and Modern*, 222.

⁵⁷ McCormack, 'Grace and Being', *ibid.*, 194.

⁵⁸ See for instance Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002); Paul D. Molnar, 'The Trinity and the Freedom of God', *Journal for Christian Theological Research*, 8 (2003), 59-66; Paul D. Molnar, 'The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin W. Hector', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8 (2006), 294-306; Paul D. Molnar, 'Can the Electing God be God without us? Some Implications of Bruce McCormack's Understanding of Barth's Doctrine of Election for the Doctrine of the Trinity', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 49 (2007), 199-222; Edwin Chr. van Driel, 'Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60 (2007), 45-61; George Hunsinger, 'Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008), 179-198; Paul D. Molnar, 'Can Jesus' Divinity be Recognized as 'Definitive, Authentic and Essential' if it is Grounded in Election? Just how far did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?', *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie*, 52 (2010), 40-81.

correspondingly undermines God's sovereignty and freedom by making Him dependent on the human-historical. To their minds, the Barth presented by McCormack is 'too historical' and even redolent of Hegelianism.

These brief sketches show that the existing studies of Barth's concept of history, for all their worth, are highly diverse and sharply in tension, presenting obscure and confusing images of Barth where his concept of history is concerned. Clarification on this issue seems urgently needed.

D. Reconstruction of Barth's Concept of History

This thesis, then, proposes to seek clarification of Barth's concept of history by way of providing not only a thorough, chronological survey of his works but also a clear and consistent line of argumentation. It will demonstrate, first, that since his full engagement with dogmatics in the mid-1920s Barth has in his doctrine of revelation unequivocally affirmed the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is, and, second, that by the time his mature Christology is fully brought out he is able to further affirm the reality of the whole of human history in a way that both divine sovereignty and human dignity are upheld.

This thesis comprises eight chapters, divided into three parts.⁵⁹ The first part covers what I term the pre-dogmatic period in Barth's career, ranging from 1905 to 1924, from the beginning of Barth's academic publications to his first complete attempt at dogmatic investigation.⁶⁰ Materials covered in this part include Barth's earliest publications and sermons from before the 'break' in his theology (ch. 1),

⁵⁹ It should be noted that this chronological sectioning is more formal than material, although it does correspond loosely to some important shifts in the development of Barth's theology.

⁶⁰ This period embraces Barth's 'break' with the theological liberalism between 1915 and 1916, which formed the starting-point of his dialectical theology. For more detail see McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 129ff.

material from the War period, the two editions of the *Römerbrief*, and some early lectures in Göttingen (ch. 2). It will be shown that what characterises Barth the liberal theologian, as far as his concept of history is concerned, is his replacement of the pastness of history with the contemporaneousness of religious experience. This theologically liberal idea of history does undergo a steady development to relate to the outer and wider world due to his religious socialist concerns in the pre-war period, and then to embrace a rather pessimistic conception during the War, both before and after his theological breakthrough. However, a more radical change is found in the eschatological overwhelming of this world by that world posited in the 1922 *Römerbrief*.

The second part covers what I term Barth's early dogmatic period, ranging from 1924 to 1940, from the beginning of his dogmatic lectures in Göttingen to the publication of *Church Dogmatics* II/1. Primary materials covered in this part include *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion* and *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (ch. 3), and *Church Dogmatics* I/1, I/2 (ch. 4), and II/1 (ch. 5). Despite their subtle differences, these materials have as their doctrinal focus the Word of God and the doctrine of God, highlighting questions concerning the actuality and possibility of revelation at both objective and subjective levels. How it comes about that God reveals Himself whilst remaining Himself and how history is commandeered by God as the medium in which revelation took place without undermining His freedom and sovereignty will be the main focus treated in this section.

The third part covers what I term Barth's mature dogmatic period, beginning from 1940 when he began lecturing on the doctrine of election. Primary materials covered in this part range from *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (ch. 6) through III (ch. 7) to

IV (ch. 8). This period sees Barth's material revisions concerning his understanding of the doctrine of election, and his implementation of these revisions in his doctrines of creation and of reconciliation. For the broad range of doctrines treated in this period, the central statement around which his concept of history revolves is unmistakable: that in Jesus Christ's self-election from all eternity to be incarnate in time, His history as a part of human history is anticipated and therefore integrated in the eternal being of God.

Part One
Pre-Dogmatic Period (1905-1924)

Chapter One

God Present through History: Self, and the World (1905-1914)

Introduction

Chapter One of this thesis deals with how Barth construed history in the beginning of his theological career, ranging from his earliest theological publication in 1905 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. With special attention to his work ‘Christian Faith and History’ and his sermons in this period, we will discuss how Barth understood history as a view of reality first as a theological liberal and then also as a religious socialist.¹

1A History as a View of Reality

1A.1 Preliminary Observations

Whilst the young Barth was not unaware of the problem of history as a research method,² what most interests us is how he construes history as a view of reality. Around 1910 Barth did not yet seem to have a coherent view on this matter. Sometimes he highlighted the fact of human being’s ‘dull dependence’ on history as the former’s fates and characters are conditioned and determined by the latter just

¹ For more detail see McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 31-125; also Timothy Gorrige, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 24ff; Karl Barth, ‘The Principles of Dogmatics according to Wilhelm Herrmann’, idem, *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928*, trans. by Louise P. Smith (London: SCM Press, 1962), 238-271 (238f.); Karl Barth, ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher’, translated by George Hunsinger from ‘Nachwort’ in *Schleiermacher—Auswahl*, ed. By Heinz Bolli (Munich and Hamburg, 1968), in Karl Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24*, ed. by Dietrich Ritschl, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 261-279 (263).

² See for instance Barth, ‘Die Stigmata des Franz von Assisi’ (1905), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1905-1909*, 24, 37; ‘Rezension von G. Mix, zur Reform des theologischen Studiums’ (1909), *ibid.*, 319f.; ‘Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit’ (1909), *ibid.*, 341ff.; Barth, ‘Rezension der Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie, 51. Jahrgang, 1. und 2. Heft’ (1909), *ibid.*, 368ff.

like water is shaped in a stream.³ Human history only leads to the knowledge that what was once so has always been so; it never demonstrates what truly is or what should be.⁴ On other occasions, he noticed that it is also in history that human beings can learn and be educated through the inner life of great individuals in the past.⁵ The greatest among them is undoubtedly Christ Himself. And the only way of recognising Him is to recognise His effects on history and on us in the present.

Three observations can be made about this claim, although they are not necessarily coherent. First, for the young Barth, historical certainty [*historische Sicherheit*] about past events is less important than their historical effectiveness [*geschichtliche Wirksamkeit*] upon the present believers,⁶ because the life of God which inhabits present believers is effected and effective only in their connection with history.⁷ Second, despite the dominant importance of His historical effectiveness, Christ's historical certainty still matters in the sense that, as far as He stands in the chain of history, His objective existence prevents religious individualism from deteriorating into mystical subjectivism.⁸ Thirdly, it is Christ's ontic supremacy over history which differentiates Him ultimately from all others: standing 'in the chain of history', He is also the only human being who in time lived in eternity, and thus 'the most certain leader through the history before and after Him'.⁹

³ Karl Barth, 'Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion' (1910/1911), Karl Barth, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, ed. by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: TVZ, 1993), 72.

⁴ Barth, 'Menschenrecht und Bürgerpflicht' (1911), *ibid.*, 363.

⁵ Barth, 'Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion', *ibid.*, 73.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 117. Cf. Barth, 'Religion und Wissenschaft' (1912), *ibid.*, 437.

⁷ Barth, 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott' (1913), *ibid.*, 548.

⁸ Barth, 'Gerhard Tersteegen [Vortrag]' (1910), *ibid.*, 251f.

⁹ Barth, 'Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion', *ibid.*, 81.

1A.2 'Christian Faith and History' (1910)

Nowhere did the young Barth provide a more comprehensive survey of the problem of the relation of faith to history than in an essay entitled 'Christian Faith and History'.¹⁰ At its outset, Barth acknowledges the faith-history problem as '*the* problem of the Protestant theology of the present' and '*the* problem of Christian theology in general'.¹¹ He then expresses his discontent with both Ritschl and Troeltsch in terms of their accounts of the problem. On Barth's account, Ritschl arbitrarily chose a very limited number of thoughts from the New Testament period and the Reformation, despite his intention to regard the 'historical revelation' as the Christ presented by the Christian communities in history. And Troeltsch, following in a more radical fashion Ritschl's turn to history, held a scientific, positivistic philosophy of history so as to exclude supernatural events such as miracles, revelation and even God from history.¹² In Barth's view, the urgent task concerning the problem of faith and history is:

to verify the specifically religious and thus theological method by virtue of which an absolute relation to absolute history exists, [and] by virtue of which faith and revelation exist; such is a method of the factual origin and existence of Christian experience of God in history. I stress: what follows involves the appropriate depiction of an *actual state of affairs*, [namely] the relation of faith to history as it is present in actual Christian consciousness.¹³

Clearly stated here is Barth's twofold conviction that there does exist a

¹⁰ Barth, 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte' (1910), *ibid.*, 155-212. Originally a lecture given in 1910, it was revised and published in 1912 in *Schweizerische theologische Zeitschrift* (1912), 1-18, 49-72. For a detailed treatment of this article, see Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism*, 216ff.; Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis*, 176ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹² *Ibid.*, 157-159.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 160.

relation between Christian faith and history in terms of both the origin and the continual existence of the faith, and that this relation, considered as an ‘actual state of affairs’ [*Tatbestand*], is to be sought after in ‘actual Christian consciousness’, namely, in the ‘Christian experience of God in history’. That is why Barth begins his investigation from the psychological aspect of the problem, and then moves further to the historical, critical, *religionsphilosophisch*, and dogmatic levels.

1A.2.1 Psychological Level

Barth starts addressing the problem of faith and history by pondering the essence of Christian faith. He understands faith on a psychological level as the experience of God, i.e. an immediate consciousness of the living efficacy present to believers.¹⁴ This experience is not formed on an individual basis, but is rather mediated by faith effected within the Christian communities and therefore embedded in history.¹⁵ According to this understanding ‘[f]aith and the historicity of culture become synonymous.’¹⁶ This does not mean for Barth that history in general constitutes the mediation of faith; rather, it is the special time of Jesus’ personality that makes experience of God ‘*somehow* historically [*historisch*] caused and determined ... within human society’.¹⁷ Because Jesus ‘is the same yesterday and today and forever’ (Hebrews 13:8), history is understood as contemporaneity in relation to Christian experience of God rather than something which is in the past.

¹⁴ Ibid., 161.

¹⁵ Ibid., 162: ‘faith understands itself as chained backward and forward in society and in history’.

¹⁶ Ibid., 163.

¹⁷ Ibid., 164.

1A.2.2 Historical Level

The question then arises as to how exactly believers can find Jesus in order to have faith mediated to them through history. In the second section of 'Christian Faith and History', Barth carries an investigation into the historical development of the notion of authority and the notion of faith from Paul through the Catholic Church to Luther and Calvin. His conclusion is that, on the basis of the canon and of the rational agreement with the rational Word of God, faith can be mediated through history.¹⁸ In this way, faith and history are presented as positively connected.

1A.2.3 Critical Level

But the authority of the canon and confidence in human reason were severely challenged by the rise of the Enlightenment. In Barth's view, the conception of faith as rational or intellectual assent only leads to intellectual dishonesty and self-deception. Moreover, modern scientific and especially philosophical criticism has made the turn from the object of knowledge to the knowing subject. With legitimacy and indeed autonomy ascribed to the knowing subject's consciousness, theological authority is rendered questionable. In short, Barth is against the confusion of justifying and saving Christian faith with mere intellectual agreement, and he recognises the fact that the naïve conception of an innate authority in theology is bitterly challenged and undermined by the autonomous self-knowing consciousness of modernity. The relationship between faith and history, previously reckoned as united, now has to be formulated otherwise.¹⁹

¹⁸ Ibid., 164-174.

¹⁹ Ibid., 174-180.

1A.2.4 Religionsphilosophisch Level

The young Barth finds a solution to the problem stated above in Schleiermacher. As Barth sees it, Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion overcame the opposition between the objective reason and the subject consciousness of individuals by means of 'the phenomenon which was already psychologically characterised as "reality-relation" [*Realitätsbeziehung*]'.²⁰ Similarly, Barth believes that the 'difference between the immediate consciousness and the reflection on it, between faith and thoughts of faith'²¹ can be overcome in the light of this reality-relation. Two factors play crucial roles in this connection. One is the absorption [*Aufnehmen*] of efficacy [*Wirksamkeit*] into consciousness (termed by Schleiermacher as 'intuition' [*Anschauung*]); the other is that which is effected [*Gewirkte*] in consciousness (termed by Schleiermacher as 'feeling' [*Gefühl*]). On Barth's account, in intuition:

The Finite in nature and history is surrendered to our reason, or namely to our objective consciousness ... But *in the* Finite there is a universe which is eternal and absolute. And this Infinite in the Finite is ... revealed to our immediate self-consciousness every moment.²²

In contrast, the religious feeling is:

the *effected* in the self-consciousness, the embracedness [*Ergriffensein*] which comes into being in the intuition from the eternal world which is taken to be true in the Finite.²³

²⁰ Ibid., 181. In this context '*Realitätsbeziehung*' is taken to mean an immediate experience of the relation to reality which breaks in the consciousness (cf. Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism?*, 224ff., 259ff., 272ff.). It is 'both individual and trans-individual, both self-consciousness and God-consciousness'; it is "neither a knowledge nor an action", not a thought nor a decision, but the immediate, unanalysable, irrational, personally-individual liveliness.' Ibid., 182.

²¹ Ibid., 182.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 183.

When intuition and feeling coincide in human consciousness, the individual comes to life [*individuelle Lebendigwerden*]. Thus these two factors can be divided only conceptually; in actual effect they cooperate together.

At this point Barth takes a turn, equating the Reformation ideas of faith and justification with the Romantic ideas of intuition and feeling. According to Barth's interpretation of the Reformers, '[t]he object of faith *is* in the act of faith; it does not need to become produced here firstly *per fidem*.'²⁴ Over against the conceptual and logical precedence of the conceiving intuition over the effected feeling, priority is now given to the side of justification. God's sovereign endowment of justification to humanity 'does not need first to become effective through human faith... ; rather, *because and as it is effective, the human being believes*.'²⁵ Faith and justification, as the subjective and the objective aspect of the same efficacy, are here conceived as in an inseparable unity. Thus:

The relation between the subject and the object in the reality-relation of the individual's coming to life will be described from the perspective of the Schleiermacherian religion-philosophy and the Reformers' presentation of the problem: *In intuition, in seeing God's efficacy, in faith, and in moral obedience, the feeling, [namely] that which is effected by God—justification and election—becomes a fact.*²⁶

1A.2.5 Dogmatic Level

Finally, based on a reconstruction of Schleiermacher's philosophy of religion, Barth advances his own dogmatic reformulation of the relation between Christian faith and history, thereby declaring: 'The religious viewing of Christ, i.e. the seeing of God's

²⁴ Ibid., 184.

²⁵ Ibid., 184f.

²⁶ Ibid., 185f.

efficacy, *is* the justification ...; hence this and only this intuition is the Christian faith.’²⁷

Two major problems are involved in this equation. The first consists of three theses:

The methodology of the Christian faith knows only one Christ outside us. It knows no Christ in Himself. It knows only one Christ in us.²⁸

The first and the third theses seem contradictory. According to Barth, the Christ known to the Christian faith is the Christ outside us, because faith is understood as a subjective intuition, and an intuition requires something outside us. But through the subjective intuition, the objective Christ has become present to us and effective upon us. The result is that there is no objective Christ who is not already in the believers’ subjective consciousness. The so-called ‘historical’ [*historisch*] Christ is simply irrelevant.²⁹ After all, the notion of an ‘objective’ Christ is from the very beginning construed in subjectively effective faith. From Calvin through Melancthon to Schleiermacher, it has been affirmed that the efficacy of Christ inside us is no different than what is true and also outwardly objective.³⁰ Thus Barth is convinced that the problem of faith and history is not solved [*lösen*] but rather dissolved [*auflösen*] in the following formulation:

Everything about the trueness of feeling, of *justificatio* and of life, depends on Him being outside us; and everything about the trueness of intuition, of *fides* and of experience, depends on Him being in us.

²⁷ Ibid., 188.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 190.

³⁰ Ibid., 192f.

The Christ outside us is the Christ in us. The effective history is the effected faith.³¹

Combining the first equation with the second, Barth presents his second problem: In what way is the effecting Christ (i.e. the effective history) the source and content of the effected Christian faith? He discusses this problem regarding the objective side (of history and of Christ) and the subjective side (of faith). On the objective side, Barth claims that the historical [*historisch*] knowledge of the life of Christ belongs primarily to the objective consciousness, and therefore is subject to ‘every possible form of the uncertainty, relativity and un-efficacy of everything that is merely historical [*historisch*].’³² But what actualises justification is faith in the inner life or self-consciousness of Jesus. Jesus’ obedience becomes the *fons gratiae* for us; this effectuation exists ‘loftily over every criticism and indifferently against historical [*historisch*] affirmation or negation.’³³ Therefore, Christ as the objective fact of salvation is indeed the source and content of the Christian faith. But this fact ‘does not and cannot exist [as the historical (*historisch*) knowledge of Christ’s outward life] for the objective consciousness and for science.’³⁴ Rather, through the historical process of the efficacy of Christian faith, Jesus’ inner life is intuited and becomes actually effective in our inner life. What is objectively factual has become subjectively and individually actual in us.

On the other hand, viewed from the subjective side of faith, Barth posits that faith is justification in that God is effective in human beings,³⁵ and that the

³¹ Ibid., 193. See also 197.

³² Ibid., 194.

³³ Ibid., 195.

³⁴ Ibid., 198.

³⁵ Ibid.

proclamation of justice [*Gerechtersprechung*] is justification as such [*Gerechtersmachung*] in that that proclamation is effective.³⁶ This effectuation of faith, therefore, does not just take place suddenly. Rather, 'it is presented as a process of becoming in the life of the individual'.³⁷ This is why Barth can ascribe historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] to faith by declaring that:

Faith does not stand opposed to history [*Geschichte*], but it is simply the extension or the *apprehensio* of history [*Geschichte*] in the life of the individual.³⁸

Just as the Christ outside us is the Christ in us, in the same way, history *is* faith.

1A.2.6 Concluding Section

In the concluding section, Barth once again contends that faith and history are not two 'historical-objective [*historisch*] and therefore ... *two separate phenomena*'.³⁹ Rather, when one manages to live in the subject matter [*Sache*] and only then to speak about it accordingly, he or she can clearly see how faith is psychologically mediated to us in and through history [*Geschichte*]. That is why '[t]he historical [*historisch*] Jesus becomes the risen, living Christ in Christ's community.'⁴⁰

Summing up his detailed exposition, Barth reiterates the simple fact *that* the effective history becomes the effected Christian faith. But when it comes to *how* this actualisation takes place, Barth offers no further analysis, because for him 'faith itself is the origin, the origin of the actuality of life, and the actualising of the

³⁶ Ibid., 200.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 201.

³⁹ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 203.

consciousness-possibilities which are given in an *a priori* function.’⁴¹ For the young Barth, then, the relation between the effective history and the effected faith is undoubtedly actualised, but it is so in a mysterious and untold way. It belongs to the category of self-evident and self-authenticating truth which does not require any further validation.⁴²

1A.3 Orientation from the Historical towards the Contemporary

The preceding analysis has demonstrated that history, understood as a view of reality, was construed by the young Barth primarily as an effective medium of faith. For him, what is effected through this effective medium is not the objective certainty of this or that event in the past, but the faith brought about as religious experience in the individual’s contemporary life and consciousness.

Crucial to this distinctive conception of ‘history’ is a strong orientation towards contemporaneity. As Fisher correctly notes, ‘history for the early Barth had more to do with actualization, with which it is almost equivalent, than with temporality. History is the overwhelming presence of reality in the infinite depths of personal experience’.⁴³ If ‘[d]ivine-human relatedness is ... a reality available to humankind at any time’,⁴⁴ then the ‘history’ between God and humanity is in effect that which bridges the historical distance.

A corollary of this orientation towards contemporaneity is a certain disregard of the objective aspect of our salvation, i.e. Jesus’ deeds in history. There is little mention of them in this article, because for the young Barth the foundation of

⁴¹ Ibid., 211.

⁴² Ibid., 212.

⁴³ Fisher, *Revelatory Positivism?*, 219.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 219f.

our salvation today is not the history of past events but the ‘effective history’ itself, namely the reality of human history which functions as the medium through which the salvific effect ‘flows through’ biblical authors and Christian communities in the past and becomes conceived in the consciousness of contemporary believers.

One might summarise the young Barth’s conception of history in relation to faith by making two points. First, the ‘effective history’ is necessary but insufficient for the ‘effected faith’: *necessary*, because only by way of it is the efficacy of Christ’s righteousness carried through the temporal distance to contemporary believers; *insufficient*, because the connection between the present faith and the past salvation-fact effectuated through ‘history’ does not take place automatically. Second, the effectuation of faith in *God* definitely cannot be secured by any *human* manipulation, whether it be the objective scientific verification of past events or the subjective conceiving and appropriating of them. After all, the effectuation of faith, i.e. of religious experience of contemporary Christians, is dependent only on God’s sovereign will, which is hidden from us.

1A.4 Intricate Liberal Heritage of the Young Barth

It would be here useful to locate the young Barth’s location within late nineteenth-century theology regarding the problem of history. Four observations can be made in this regard.

First, the young Barth’s concept of history shows him to be a theological liberal in a generally *Schleiermacherian* manner. If Gerrish’s categorisation of the important theological groups in Europe and North America at the turn of the

nineteenth and the twentieth centuries holds true,⁴⁵ the young Barth was clearly aligned with the liberals. Most liberals at that time shared a common connection to Schleiermacher, who was acknowledged as the pioneer in the historicising of theology. The young Barth's general appeal to the Romantic Schleiermacher is well documented.⁴⁶ Von Balthasar rightly remarks that Barth's 'Christian Faith and History' is 'an attempt to infuse all the rigor of the old Reformers into Schleiermacher's methodology without deviating even an inch from him.'⁴⁷

Second, within the general Schleiermacherian tradition, the young Barth was associated specifically with *Ritschl's* classical liberalism. Apart from their common heritage of Schleiermacher, the liberals' conceptions of the nature of faith, of history, and the relation between them varied widely. Classical liberals, such as Ritschl, were more open to the scholarship of historical criticism than the conservatives were. What really mattered to one's salvation and faith, according to them, was not the

⁴⁵ The four groups identified by Gerrish are the conservatives, the liberals, the radical rationalists, and the 'left wing' of liberalism. B. A. Gerrish, 'Jesus, Myth, and History: Troeltsch's Stand in the "Christ-Myth" Debate', *The Journal of Religion*, 55 (1975), 13-35.

⁴⁶ In his own account of his relationship to Schleiermacher, Barth admitted that it was through Schleiermacher that he had found 'The Immediate', and that he had become and was still 'a bit of a romantic'. Barth, 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher', *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 262. It is worth noting that here Barth suggests that he himself deemed the *Speeches* the most significant post-canonical texts in the Christian tradition, and that he held this view in spite of Herrmann's oppositional opinion (Barth, *ibid.*: 'That those *Speeches* were the most important and correct writings to appear since the closing of the New Testament canon was a fact from which I did not allow my great Marburg teacher [Herrmann] to detract'). However, in a conversation with some students at the *Kirchlichen Hochschule* in Wuppertal, the 'most important' claim was put in Herrmann's mouth, and Barth says that he did not accept Herrmann's evaluation (see Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1964-1968*, ed. by Eberhard Busch [Zürich: TVZ, 1996], 475: 'die vier ersten «Reden» waren für Wilhelm Herrmann so wichtig, daß er uns im Seminar gesagt hat, die «Reden über die Religion» von Schleiermacher, das sei die wichtigste Schrift, die seit dem Abschluß des Kanons des Neuen Testaments an der Öffentlichkeit erschienen sei. Das habe ich ihm nicht ohne weiteres abgenommen'). The seemingly direct contradiction between these two accounts is resolved when one reads the German original of the 'Postscript'. According to it, Barth did not state that the 'most important' claim was 'a fact from which I did not allow my great Marburg teacher [Herrmann] to detract'; instead, this claim was Herrmann's and Barth himself rejected it (see Karl Barth, 'Nachwort', in Heinz Bolli, *Schleiermacher-Auswahl* [Hamburg & München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968], 290-312 [291]: 'Daß jene «Reden» geradezu das Wichtigste und Richtigste seien, was seit dem Abschluß des neutestamentlichen Kanons auf dem Feld christlichen Erkennens und Bekennens ans Licht getreten sei, nahm ich zwar meinem großen Marburger Lehrer nicht ab').

⁴⁷ Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 211.

‘petty details’ or the judgement of facts, but the ‘essence of Jesus’ or the judgement of value. The young Barth was sympathetic to the classical liberals here. He might not have paid as much attention to the objective, historically given fact of the Jesus of Nazareth as Ritschl had; he might have found unsatisfactory Ritschl’s insufficient emphasis on the individual’s consciousness and deemed his selection of the New Testament and Reformation materials biased by his Lutheran Confessionalism.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, as Barth recognised, it was Ritschl’s dogmatic restoration of Schleiermacher’s theology of religious experience and his christocentric justification of it that made it possible for religious individualism to gain an independent relation to history, and it was this position of Ritschl to which ‘the typically modern theological historians are oriented completely dogmatically’.⁴⁹ To this extent, the shaping of the young Barth’s historical consciousness can be broadly attributed to his critical and reflective acceptance of Ritschl’s classical liberalism.

Third, the young Barth kept his distance from the form of radical liberalism found in *Troeltsch’s* teaching. Also derived from the liberal tradition of Schleiermacher, Troeltsch emerged in a more radical fashion than the classical liberals. Unlike the conservatives, Troeltsch was prepared to accept and utilise historical research as a method free of preconditions, in order for faith to become completely conformed to ‘modernity’. Distinguishing himself from the classical liberals, Troeltsch insisted that every bit of our knowledge of religion be directly acquired from strictly historical sources so that no norm at all was operative in this

⁴⁸ Barth, ‘Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 158f.

⁴⁹ Barth, ‘Rezension der Zeitschrift für Wissenschaftliche Theologie, 51. Jahrgang, 1. und 2. Heft’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1905-1909*, 371.

process. The young Barth not only kept a greater distance from Troeltsch than from the classical liberals, but used almost every means to overcome Troeltsch's historicism. It seemed to him that Troeltsch's obsession with a 'purely scientific' theology had prevented theology from manifesting anything other than what was relative; that which was absolute, i.e. God and revelation, was excluded from this scientifically described and defined history which existed only for the sake of itself.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Troeltsch's ascription of unconditional legitimacy to scientific historical method was based on certain metaphysical presuppositions. In Barth's judgement, this led to the confusion of 'objective' knowledge of the past (i.e. what Troeltsch took to be 'history') with the 'subjective' appropriation of the conception of the past (what Barth supposed to be 'faith').⁵¹

Finally, in addition to his critical acceptance of Ritschl and obvious dissent from Troeltsch, the immediate influence of *Herrmann* on the young Barth is unmistakable. Barth fully embraced Herrmann, who was considered an important figure by what might be called the liberal 'left wing'.⁵² Barth might have seldom argued with Troeltsch directly,⁵³ but his acquaintance with the longstanding debate

⁵⁰ Barth, 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 159.

⁵¹ Nonetheless, it is also important to notice that the early Barth shared Troeltsch's conception of the reality of history as 'a lively, continuous flow and an enduring contemporaneity from generation to generation' which carries salvation to people through the Christian community. Ernst Troeltsch, *Glaubenslehre: Nach Heidelberger Vorlesungen aus den Jahren 1911 und 1912* (München und Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1925), 360f. Cited in B. A. Gerrish, 'The Possibility of a Historical Theology', B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 225f. See also Barth, 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 162, 203.

⁵² Gerrish, 'Jesus, Myth, and History', 33ff. According to Gerrish, Herrmann, Georg Wobbermin (1869-1943) and the lesser known Wilhelm Fresenius belong to this camp. Herrmann is categorised as 'on the left' of liberalism in the sense that 'he was less tied than some to the grounding of theology in historically verifiable features of Jesus' ministry.' *Ibid.*, 33n92.

⁵³ Derk N. Stegeman, 'Ethics or Dogmatics? The Case "Rendtorff vs. Barth"', in *Religious Polemics in Context: Paper Presented to the Second International Conference of the Leiden Institute for the Study of Religions*, ed. by Theo L. Hettema and Arie van der Kooij (Assen: Royal Van Gorcum, 2004), 415-430 (416n8).

between Troeltsch and Herrmann is seen in his inheritance of Herrmannian views of religion, science, history and modernity.⁵⁴ One particular instance is his understanding of the nature of scientific knowledge and historical knowledge. For Barth, ‘knowledge’ [*Erkenntnis*] is not merely scientific verification but also ‘knowing’ [*erkennen*] and ‘thought’ [*Gedanken*] made possible by the ‘thinking’ subject. In this epistemological light, Barth is able to maintain that the construction of history does not lie in the scientific verification of the objective events in the past, but in the conception and appropriation which emerge only from the relation of history-viewers to history.⁵⁵ This closely resembles Herrmann’s criticism of Troeltsch’s failure to recognise the fact that ‘historical knowledge shares with science generally the epistemological operation of knowing [*Erkennen*] which succeeds precisely to the extent that it situates a given phenomenon in a temporal-spatial context and thereby relativizes it.’⁵⁶ Furthermore, following the recognition that scientific and historical ‘knowledge’ is the human subject’s construction rather than purely objective facts, Herrmann also distinguishes external facts which can be guaranteed by historical investigation from inner facts which can be grasped only in the individual’s consciousness and experience. It is the inner facts, then, that are said to provide the assurance of faith.⁵⁷ Thus, ‘[w]hatever the findings of historical scholarship, the personal life of Jesus can at least become a fact

⁵⁴ Brent W. Sockness, *Against False Apologetics: Wilhelm Herrmann and Ernst Troeltsch in Conflict* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 206ff.

⁵⁵ Barth, ‘Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 160, fn c.

⁵⁶ Sockness, *Against False Apologetics*, 201.

⁵⁷ According to Herrmann, the inner life of Jesus is ‘never in any sense a minimum of the historically demonstrable’. Wilhelm Herrmann, *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, ed. by F. W. Schmidt (Tübingen: 1923), 189. Cited in Barth, ‘The Principles of Dogmatics according to Wilhelm Herrmann’, *Theology and Church*, 250.

experienced by us [*eine von uns erlebte Tatsache*]' .⁵⁸ Thus comes the left wingers' claim: The experience of God *is* the existence of God (in one's experience); the history-viewers' experience of history *is* the truth of history (for the history-viewers themselves). In Barth's own words: 'The Christ outside us is the Christ in us. The effective history is the effected faith.'⁵⁹

1B From the Self to the World: Pre-War Writings

With his move from Geneva to Safenwil in 1911 to begin a ten-year career as a pastor, new elements began to be infused into Barth's theology. Besides his theological liberal heritage, religious socialism with its acute sense of community played a significant role in the first half of the 1910s. This section seeks to demonstrate that in the first half of the decade, Barth's conception of history was broadened first horizontally and then vertically by his theological reception of religious socialism.

Barth's social-political concern, which might be traced back to 1906,⁶⁰ began to grow following his encounter with real problems of everyday life in the industrial village of Safenwil.⁶¹ There he attempted to direct believers' attention away from political history to economic history and class conflict⁶² by asserting a close

⁵⁸ Gerrish, 'Jesus, Myth, and History', 33.

⁵⁹ Barth, 'Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 193, 197. Also 200: 'Christ's righteousness becomes my righteousness; Christ's piety becomes my piety. He becomes I.'

⁶⁰ Barth, 'Zofingia und die soziale Frage' (1906), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1905-1909*, 61-103. Here Barth is shown to be 'keenly aware of political realities, and especially sensitive to the question of class.' Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 30.

⁶¹ Barth, 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher', *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 262ff. Karl Barth, 'Autobiographical Sketches' (1927), idem, *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966*, ed. by Bernd Jaspert, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 154.

⁶² Barth, 'Menschenrecht und Bürgerpflicht' (1911), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 366.

identification of Jesus with the social movement: ‘The two are one and the same: Jesus is the social movement and the social movement is Jesus in the present.’⁶³ Barth considered the socialist claims an important way of putting the gospel into practice, though he also recognised that the socialist ideals will not be realised without the gospel:⁶⁴ ‘proper’ Christians and socialists are to delight in each other’s teachings.⁶⁵ In the same vein, having joined the Social Democratic Party of Switzerland on 26 January 1915, the ‘comrade pastor’ in Safenwil gave his first lecture as a new party member on ‘War, Socialism and Christianity’ on 14 February, insisting on the need for both Christianity and socialism to be reformed in the light of each other.⁶⁶ At least before the disclosure of the scandalous involvement of some confirmation candidates with a manufacturer in 1916,⁶⁷ which led him to focus more on the incompatibility of God’s righteousness with any existing ‘cultural, moral, and patriotic duties, [and] all efforts in “applied religion”’,⁶⁸ Barth remained rather optimistic about religious socialism.

This section will examine Barth’s view of history in a period in which both theological liberalism and religious socialism operated in his theology. We seek to

⁶³ Barth, ‘Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung’ (1911), *ibid.*, 386ff. English translation: Karl Barth, ‘Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice’, *idem, Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. by Clifford Green (London: Collins, 1989), 98-114.

⁶⁴ Barth, ‘Evangelium und Sozialismus’ (1914), *ibid.*, 731.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 729.

⁶⁶ Cited in Busch, *The Great Passion*, 83. Barth’s zeal for religious socialism is clearly suggested in many lectures that he gave during this period: ‘Christ and Social Democracy’, ‘The Future of Social Democracy in Switzerland’, ‘What does it Mean to be a Socialist’ and so on. *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ On Monday 10 January Barth wrote to Thurneysen: ‘Our factory owner Hochuli arranged a big binge to celebrate the marriage of his daughter for 500 employees and workers, who, including my male and female confirmands, got senselessly drunk in swarms and behaved wickedly in every way. So our people are fooled with a carrot and a stick’. Karl Barth, *Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band I: 1913-1921*, ed. by Eduard Thurneysen (Zürich: TVZ, 1973), 123ff. Also Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1976), 88f.

⁶⁸ Karl Barth, ‘The Righteousness of God’ (1916), *idem, The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. by Douglas Horton (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928), 9-27 (23f.).

show that, with his increasing awareness of vital problems in the social, economic and political realities, his individualistic understanding of religious experience gave way to the real experiences of a broader horizontal dimension, and that his strong idealist tendency to focus only on the specifically defined 'contemporaneity' of historical moment is to some extent supplemented by a sense of the vertical dimension of historical process.

1B.1 Vertical Compression and Horizontal Extension: 'Jesus and the Social Movement' (1911)

The broadening of Barth's understanding of the horizontal dimension of history can be clearly observed in a lecture widely considered to be revelatory of his earliest socialism. Here, Barth asserts a close connection between Jesus and the social movement of his day, addressing the latter as 'the most powerful Word of God to the present' and as 'the direct continuation of the ... spiritual power which entered with Jesus into history [*Geschichte*] and life'.⁶⁹ As McCormack remarks, this belief in the life-giving power entering history with Jesus comes from Barth's liberal background (especially Herrmann). The superstructure established upon this foundation, however, is no longer 'the concentration on the existential problem of the self which had preoccupied Herrmann during Barth's student years', but rather the concrete political and economic problems.⁷⁰

Objections come from both sides. On one hand, the Christians contend that the eternal Jesus Christ has nothing to do with what is temporal and accidental. Barth's response is that what matters in the social movement is not its deeds but

⁶⁹ Barth, 'Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 386f.

⁷⁰ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 86.

rather its intention. Whereas deeds of the individuals are specific and particular to the present-day context, their intention, i.e. the general, eternal and permanent subject matter of the social movement, is qualified to be placed on the same par as Jesus.⁷¹ On the other hand, an objection rises also from the socialists, who are doubtful about the Christian Church and its worldview. Barth replies by differentiating the existing Christian Church from its origin in Jesus, in an attempt to persuade the socialists to shift their focus from the church to Jesus, and into understanding that what Jesus has to offer to the modern people is a concrete way of life which can be practiced and followed.⁷²

Then Barth moves on to establish the connection between Jesus and the social movement. First, he maintains that socialism, like Jesus Himself, is a movement from below to above. Through Jesus' works among the lower class, the Kingdom of God has come to the poor and the dependent.⁷³ Regarding the essence of this Kingdom, moreover, there is a presupposed contradiction between the 'spiritual' church and the 'material' world. Indeed, Barth admits, the existing Church was inactive in its praxis. But if we come to Jesus, he argues, there will be no such separation between the Spirit and matter. Therefore, the Kingdom *of God* is also the Kingdom of God *in the world*. Barth makes it clear that the citizens in this Kingdom are to bear fruit which is 'nothing but social help in material terms'. Indeed, 'the spirit that has worth before God is the *social* spirit. And the social help is *the* way to eternal life.'⁷⁴ In order to eliminate social misery, Barth continues, it

⁷¹ Barth, 'Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 387-389.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 389-391.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 391-393.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 397.

is essential to fight against capitalism, since the foundation of capitalism is private property, which is a sin based on self-seeking motives.⁷⁵ Not merely talking about its ideas and ideals, socialism also takes action to bring them into realisation by means of *organisation* and *solidarity*. In this connection, Barth explicitly blames German Lutheranism for the rift between religion (Jesus' call to repentance) and social consciousness (the socialist call to solidarity), and evokes the Swiss Reformers (Zwingli and Calvin) to support not merely the correlation but also indeed the *unity* of the two.⁷⁶ In Social Democracy, Barth believes that he finds the idea of organisation most clearly and purely 'in the way in which it must be worked out in *our time*'.⁷⁷

Two observations can now be made about Barth's concept of history. First, in dealing with these objections, Barth ascribes higher priority to the alleged general and eternal subject matter of socialism over the specific deeds of individuals in time. He also appeals to the Jesus who lived centuries ago as the origin of the current Church. In doing so, the vertical dimension of history—the temporal distance between 'now' and 'then'—is in effect compressed or even dismissed. What is imperfect about the deeds of socialists and Christian Church today, Barth argues, may and should be ignored, because these deeds may and should be reduced to their respective eternal prototypes. It would be interesting to ask, however, whether this strategy is compatible with the liberal idea of the life-giving power which is believed to have entered history with Jesus. If this power did enter history, the historical process could not simply be ignored and dismissed. On the contrary, if one is

⁷⁵ Ibid., 398-402.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 403-405.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 407.

allowed to ignore the actual deeds in history and simply to evoke their eternal prototypes when there is criticism of imperfect present-day situations, can the life-giving power be said to have actually entered history? It then appears that, whilst idealist optimism about the life-giving power entering into and penetrating through history is still maintained, Barth's dissatisfaction with his current era might have led him to a scepticism of history, which is supposed to be responsible for the imperfect present.

Second, if the way in which Barth manages to overcome the objections indicates his tendency to *compress* the vertical dimension of historical process, his explication of the subject matter of socialism might be taken to show his determination to *extend* the horizontal dimension of historical reality—that is, from 'me' to 'us'. Whilst the significance and validity of concrete historical process are implicitly subdued to what is general and eternal, critical importance is explicitly attached to the concrete historical contexts. His liberal individualistic notion of religious experience is now enlarged in extent and breadth. In his insistence in extending our concerns from the spiritual to the material, from inner experience to outward connections, and from individual cares to cooperative and social responsibilities, Barth displays a keen awareness of the vital problems present in the concrete historical reality. The self has now turned towards the world. A certain tension might be observed, as with the 'vertical compression' the concreteness of history is admittedly remarkably reduced in its temporal distance, whereas with the 'horizontal extension' the concreteness of history is significantly broadened in scope. This tension might suggest a lack of serious attention to history. But what is certain is that, in view of the fact the horizontal dimension of historical reality in its contemporary context can be understood as 'history' only in the broadest sense of the

term, the concreteness of history as a whole is arguably neglected by Barth.

1B.2 Concession with Reservation: Sermon on Acts 17:26-28 (1913)

As McCormack rightly suggests, the year 1913 finds Barth occupied with the themes of divine judgement, criticism of religion, the wholly otherness of God, and the Kingdom of God and its relation to the history of the world, all of which prefigure what was later to emerge in his *Römerbrief*.⁷⁸ In this section, we will discuss Barth's vacillation between the negative and positive sides of history in terms of its contribution to the knowledge of God.

This vacillation is shown in a sermon on Acts 7:26-28 in which Barth explicitly discusses the role that history can play in the acquisition of human knowledge of God. Barth begins the sermon by engaging with Paul's announcement to the Greeks that God is not far from us.⁷⁹ Contemplation upon God in the Greek manner, according to Barth, will not take us any further towards the true knowledge of God, because the Greeks did nothing more than talking about 'perplexed notions and observations' about God which 'had no meaning or effect on their life'.⁸⁰ Due to the Greeks' indifference to life, the question about God degenerates into 'useless talkative scholarship' which resulted in 'a fruitless way to contemplate and to talk about God'. But the lack of real relation to God, and the assumed separation between God and humanity, are mistakes made by modern people, too. Since God is an unknown being over there, 'letting our thoughts fly away' is the only way to reach the world beyond:

⁷⁸ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 92-104.

⁷⁹ Barth, sermon, 13 April, 1913, Karl Barth, *Predigten 1913*, ed. by Nelly Barth and Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1976), 156-160.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 160.

I am here in my small house with my little understanding, and God is over there in the eternal mystery—and in order to know Him, I must attempt to enter into the mystery over there.⁸¹

This approach to a God far away is mistaken, according to Barth.⁸² In order really to know God, the idea of separation must be discarded. A God who is ‘the mysterious thing on the other side of the ditch to which our thoughts had to flutter over in some way’ cannot be the power which preserves us and on which we depend. Disputing the notion of separation, Barth highlights the importance of balance between God’s lordship over us and His effect on us. With the juxtaposition of God’s otherness from and connectedness with the world, God’s distinction from the world is here considered in terms with His inseparable relation to the world. The object of human knowledge of God, therefore, is not a God over there, not the world in itself, nor we ourselves, but what *happens* to us, i.e. God’s deeds to us in the world.⁸³

At this point, Barth distinctly brings human history into the arena:

I must abide by the experiences which humankind made in the hundreds of years of their existence, and seek to know: what is that which reveals itself to us in the thousand-year-long experiences, what is the outcome, the result of this history [*Geschichte*] to which we ourselves also belong? We must discern what *happens* here, what happens to ourselves, in our life, in the world here around us, in human history [*Geschichte*].⁸⁴

It is crucial to note that what is proposed here is *what happens to us* as revealed ‘in this thousand-year-long experiences’ and ‘in the world here around us’. The

⁸¹ Ibid., 161.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 163.

individual experience remains necessary, as Barth still believes that ‘we must look into our heart and conscience’ in order to see God,⁸⁵ but it alone is not sufficient in the light of the religious socialist ideal of human solidarity. Barth suggests looking beyond oneself for wider experiences of the past history and the present world. Barth believes that the God depicted by Paul to the Greeks ‘lives in us, in our world, in our human history, [and] in everything that is in us and around us and is happening to us’,⁸⁶ therefore that we are ‘completely encompassed by His deeds’ and ‘entirely immersed in clear effects of God’. If God’s effect on us happens at all times and in all places, we get to see Him, not from afar or beyond, nor merely from my personal experience, but from our living experiences in history and in the world. Insofar as we do not shut ourselves to the broadened range of experiences so construed, Barth assures us, ‘every opportunity of knowledge of God’ will be brought to us.⁸⁷

Given the young Barth’s rooted liberal background, it is unsurprising to see his appeal to human experience as the medium to the knowledge of God. What now distinguishes him from his liberal teachers, especially Herrmann, is the construal of experiences in human history as a qualifier of the individual experience. Indeed Barth still maintains in a good liberal manner that our experience of the dependence on God can lead to the recognition of the living God’s effect on us, and that, in turn, from God’s effect on us we can recognise the God who initiates the effect. However:

still more powerfully we experience everything as *beings* [*Wesen*] which belong to *human history* [*Geschichte*]. We do not stand alone or on our own; rather, we are within the great nexus [*Zusammenhang*]

⁸⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 163.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 164.

of human life, a nexus which lasts from the first day of humankind to the present day.⁸⁸

The sense of togetherness is shown to be in close relation to the awareness of history as the great nexus [*Zusammenhang*] in which human experiences take place and to which they belong. As Barth's understanding of experience is stretching from the liberal's individual stance to the socialist's cooperative disposition, he seems to be adding something to the notion of contemporaneousness shown in the 1910 lecture on faith and history. A new kind of historical awareness is emerging, and the vertical dimension of history is no longer compressed but starts to assume significance. In the 1910 lecture 'Christian Faith and History', history was viewed as the medium through which the effect of Jesus' life upon us was experienced by individuals. Now not only the life of God is experienced in history,⁸⁹ but our own beings are also determined in it, and God Himself is known in it. In this sense, this passage indicates a significant concession that the young Barth made to human history in his earliest theology.

It should be noticed, however, that the concession to history is not granted unreservedly. Immediately after giving history credit for being the locus of God's effect on humanity, Barth warns against the temptation to boast that human history would be a portrayal of God's benevolence.⁹⁰ It is true that '[h]istory is filled with the calling after truth and justice'. But the real climax of history lies in that:

⁸⁸ Ibid., 167.

⁸⁹ '[O]nly the reflection on a fact which is created in us, can be the idea of God of religion. This fact is the life from God which is given to us through our connection with history. This our inner conditionality on history is the religious experience.' Barth, 'Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 548.

⁹⁰ Barth, sermon, 13 April, 1913, *Predigten 1913*, 167.

at one point in history [*an einer Stelle der Geschichte*], something marvellous has now really occurred: God's benevolence has become manifest not only as word, but as act, as pure act. It took place in the life and death of Jesus. There God displayed Himself as He is ... There it became true in the highest way that God does not want to be far from us ... For as the entire human history [*Geschichte*] belongs to us, so does Jesus belong to us in our life⁹¹

It is therefore only in this sense that 'human history is a great, or rather the greatest revelation of God'.⁹² Apart from the higher event hidden in history, all the 'progress' that is believed to have been brought to us in history is trivial and relative.⁹³

To conclude, during the transitional period in the first half of the 1910s when the socialist ideal of human solidarity was being blended into theological liberalism, Barth's conception of history began to extend, firstly horizontally (from 'me' to 'us') and then vertically (from 'now' to 'then'). Insofar as the individual self, now no longer conceived as limited to his or her own present religious experience, is

⁹¹ Ibid., 168. As an advance notice, this significant notion of God's revelation as situated 'at one point in history', as 'a definite moment of history', will reappear in *R1*, 85, 87, 91, 106; in Karl Barth, *Erklärung des Johannesevangeliums: Vorlesung Münster, Wintersemester 1925/1926, wiederholt in Bonn, Sommersemester 1930*, ed. by Walther Fürst (Zürich: TVZ, 1999), 59; in §36 'Die Gegenwart Jesu Christi', *Unt3*, 450; and then in §11 'Gott der Vater' and §15 'Weissagung und Erfüllung', *ChD*, 233, 320. The occurrences of this notion tell us that the 'historicity' of revelation was affirmed by Barth first in 1913 and then in *R1* in 1919. After the (temporary) radical opposition of eternity and time presented in *R2* (1922), it was re-affirmed in a number of occasions in the two dogmatic enterprises in the mid-1920s. The critical political situation in Germany in the early 1930s somewhat prevented Barth from mentioning again revelation as a point of history, but this means simply a shift in tone according to the context and not a denial of the historicity of revelation. The references aforementioned will be treated in due course in sections 2B.1.2, 3B and 3C.

⁹² Barth, sermon, 13 April, 1913, *Predigten 1913*, 168. In relation to Barth's concept of history in this transitional period, McCormack remarks that 'Barth was still thoroughly "liberal" in his basic theological orientation. Revelation was still understood in Herrmannian fashion. The primary subjective locus of revelation for Barth was still the conscience of the individual. On its objective side, revelation was closely identified with history.' McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 103.

⁹³ Barth admits that the accumulation of knowledge, and the progress in technology and skills, have in truth come into existence over the last two centuries. But these so-called accomplishments in history are, in his view, based on self-interest and superficiality, and lead to nothing but uncertainty in terms of the most important things. Providing no help at all towards the inner situation of humankind, the 'accomplishments' in history can claim no merit but have to be condemned as 'dead works', which are supposed to be 'cleansed' by the blood of Christ (Heb. 9:14). Barth, sermon, 21 Mar. 1913, *Predigten 1913*, 125.

confronted with the collective experience of life in the 'thousand-year-long experiences' of the world, significant concession is allowed to history. Such concession is cautiously qualified, however, in the sense that the highest privilege in history is reserved solely to God's gracious act in Jesus upon humankind. Elements of theological liberalism were still present in that both history and God are reckoned to belong to us.

1C Concluding Remarks

This chapter has examined the formation of the concept of history in the earliest theology of Karl Barth. It has been observed that as a theological liberal the young Barth viewed history primarily as that which effectuates faith in the consciousness of contemporary believers, in an unmistakably Herrmannian fashion. 'History' in this sense was understood in terms of contemporaneousness and not pastness. It has also demonstrated that as a religious socialist Barth came to understand humankind more collectively than individually, thereby broadening his understanding of history first horizontally and then vertically. In this scheme human history primarily serves the purpose of providing not only individual religious experience but also collective experience of people's social and economic life as the source of knowledge of God.

Chapter Two

God's Revelation Overwhelming History: The *Römerbrief* Period (1914-1924)

Introduction

The decade starting from 1914 was full of significant events which shaped and altered Barth's theological path (including the turn from theological liberalism and religious socialism in 1915 and 1916), and brackets the writing and rewriting of his *Römerbrief*, the first edition of which led to his move from Safenwil to Göttingen in October 1921, the beginning of some forty years of teaching theology as a dogmatician.

For our purposes, the main thrust of this period—what I term the *Römerbrief* period—is Barth's conception of history as being overwhelmed by God. This chapter seeks to demonstrate: 1) that with the outbreak of the First World War Barth began to construe human history in increasingly negative terms; 2) that this tendency was reinforced in the 1919 *Römerbrief*; 3) that this tendency culminated in the 1922 *Römerbrief* where history was viewed as in total disjunction from God; and 4) that whilst the strong sense of priority given to eternity over time was still very much dominant during the first years of Barth's stay in Göttingen, some development may still be found.

2A The Significance of History Diminishing: on the Way to the *Römerbrief* (1914-1918)

Prior to the emergence of a radically different view of history as revealed in the

Römerbrief, there had been occasions and new elements which paved the way for that change. Before the outbreak of the First World War, Barth could still speak of history as a place in which ‘there are such particular times of grace where God speaks with us and works on us particularly powerfully’.¹ Less than two months into the war, however, history came to be viewed as ‘merely a changing history of victories and defeats’² where ‘many bloody battlefields [and] countless ravages’ are displayed to us,³ despite the fact that God still guides and leads history in His supremacy over history.⁴ From the classes Barth gave to his confirmands from 1915 to 1919, it is clear that he took human history as where God’s gifts to humanity (e.g. technology, morality or conscience, and outstanding heroes) are manifest as God’s love. However, all too often is technology misused, conscience misguided, and heroes eventually realise their own weaknesses. Ultimately, these gifts cannot in themselves be the true meaning of history. In the darkness of history, there is hardly any glory to be claimed.⁵ If there had ever been any slight confidence in history in Barth, it was now shattered by the war. History now demonstrated only negativity. All human endeavour is in vain; only the intervention of God in Jesus can serve as the turning point of time by putting an end to the old era.⁶

¹ Karl Barth, sermon, 21 June, 1914, idem, *Predigten 1914*, ed. by Ursula Fähler and Jochen Fähler (Zürich: TVZ, 1999), 334.

² Barth, sermon, 6 Sept, 1914, *ibid.*, 467.

³ Barth, sermon, 13 Sept., 1914, *ibid.*, 471.

⁴ Barth, sermon, 29 Nov., 1914, *ibid.*, 599f.

⁵ Karl Barth, ‘1915/16’, ‘Unterweisungsjahr 1916/17’, ‘Präparandenunterricht 1917/18’, ‘Präparandenunterricht 1918/19’, in idem, *Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921*, ed. by Jürgen Fangmeier (Zürich: TVZ, 1987), 121ff., 152ff., 225ff., 265ff. Moreover, McCormack interprets Barth’s direct identification of the war with God’s judgement as Barth’s confidence in his own ability to ‘read the ways of God directly off the face of history’. And this, concludes McCormack, is the evidence that the old liberal assumption was still in operation at the outset of the war. McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 116f.

⁶ In several sermons in 1915 Barth mentioned that ‘in the disastrous course [the old era] has come up to the point where it must be destroyed in dismay and dread’. The end of time, nevertheless, also means the turning-point. And Jesus Christ is that turning-point of times and of history. See Karl

In this seemingly desperate situation, the five-day meeting with Christoph Blumhardt in April 1915 came as a light of hope. Enlightened by Blumhardt's firm conviction of the Christian hope in the coming of God in the last things,⁷ Barth was able to grasp the revolutionary and active essence of waiting. The notion of waiting is seen not only on the side of the human, whereby clearer distinction between the Kingdom of God and the socialist ideals can be made, but also on the side of God. The Word of God, hidden as it might be, was depicted as waiting powerfully in us and in history.⁸ Hope in the last things seems to have helped restore some hope in history, as Jesus is taken as the actuality and power of God which decisively occurred in human history,⁹ and the vibrant advance of God's will is the only purpose and meaning of the world and of history.¹⁰

In addition to the dismay brought about by the war and the new-found hope in waiting, the newly emerged categorical principle, 'God is God', in contrast to the liberal presupposition of 'God in us' is crucial. Barth came to the realisation of the centrality of the objectively self-existing God, who was now taken as the new

Barth, sermon, 10 Jan. and 24 Jan., 1915, Karl Barth, *Predigten 1915*, ed. by Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1996), 12, 13, 24. By setting 'such emphasis Sunday by Sunday upon the last things', Barth wanted to demonstrate that 'faith in the Greatest does not exclude but rather includes within it work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect.' Letter dated on 5 Feb. 1915, in Karl Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans. by James Smart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 28.

⁷ Karl Barth, 'Afterword' (1916), in Christoph Blumhardt, *Action in Waiting*, New edn (Farmington, Pa.: Plough Publishing, 1998), 217-222. Also Barth, 'Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher', *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 263; Barth, 'Autobiographical Sketches', *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966*, 154.

⁸ '[T]his living Word of God is now waiting in the Bible, waiting in the history of men into which it stepped as the most hidden and yet the most immense power, waiting in illuminated men who live inconspicuously under the others and yet are actually nothing different than its his witnesses and prophets', Barth, sermon, 25 Apr., 1915, *Predigten 1915*, 163. Cf. Barth, sermon, 2 May, 1915, *ibid.*, 173.

⁹ Barth, sermon, 26 Sept., 1915 and sermon, 10 Oct., 1915, *ibid.*, 404, 425.

¹⁰ Barth, sermon, 23 May, 1915, *ibid.*, 210.

starting-point [*Ansatz*] and the true subject matter of theology.¹¹ From this new starting-point he attempted to construct a widened, deepened, and wholly-other theological foundation.¹² The consequent concentration on the Bible led Barth to the discovery of a new world of God where ‘history ceases to be ... something wholly different and new begins—a history with its own distinct grounds, possibilities, and hypotheses’.¹³ With the dominant principle ‘God is God’, history is allowed to serve only as the locus where human possibilities (religion, morality etc.), rather than the divine reality, take place.¹⁴

2B This World Connected to That World: *Römerbrief* (1919)

All of this appears in Barth’s first edition of *Römerbrief*, the fruit of two years of painstaking writing completed in August 1918.¹⁵ Although unfortunately marginalised in the English-speaking world due to the lack of an English translation, this commentary bears significance in its own right.¹⁶

With its central motif, ‘the revolution of God’, and saturated with organic

¹¹ Barth to Thurneysen, 6. August 1915, *Karl Barth—Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel Band I 1913-1921*, 69. According to McCormack’s citing of Ingrid Spieckermann, ‘this letter to Thurneysen [is] the first clear signal of the emergence of Barth’s new theology’. McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 125n118.

¹² Barth, ‘Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher’, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 264; Barth, ‘Autobiographical Sketches’, *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966*, 154f.; Barth to Thurneysen, 26 June 1916, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 37; Busch, *The Great Passion*, 97ff.

¹³ Barth, ‘The Strange New World within the Bible’ (1916), *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 28-50 (37).

¹⁴ As Colin Gunton puts it, the acute sense of judgement brought about by the War leads Barth to the pessimistic conviction that ‘history wasn’t just going on calmly towards better and better civilization—history was the place of this chaos’, Colin E. Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, ed. by Paul H. Brazier (London: T&T Clark, 2007), 24.

¹⁵ This first edition was completed on 16 August, 1918 when Barth wrote in his diary ‘Romans finished’. Having already been printed in December, the book has 1919 as the date of publication. Busch, *Karl Barth*, 105f.

¹⁶ Cf. Paul Brazier, ‘Barth’s First Commentary on Romans (1919): an Exercise in Apophatic Theology?’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 6 (2004), 387-403.

notions such as origin, growth, immediacy and continuity,¹⁷ the 1919 *Römerbrief* contributes to our study of Barth's concept of history in two ways. First, a prominent dialectic in this commentary is that of 'this world' [*Diesseits*] and 'that world' [*Jenseits*], with which Barth seeks to build the relationship between the world and God whilst upholding the utter difference between them. A special form of the dialectic is that of the 'so-called history' [*sogenannte Geschichte*] and the 'real history' [*eigentliche Geschichte*]. Barth's accounts of these two kinds of history will be examined in section 2B.1. Section 2B.2 will explore the standard which Barth employs to distinguish the misuse and the proper use of history.

2B.1 The 'So-Called History' and the 'Real History'

What is characteristic of Barth's concept of history in the 1919 *Römerbrief* is the discrimination between the distinctive but not mutually exclusive 'so-called history' and 'real history'. These terms appear first in a paragraph in chapter two where Barth discloses that human attempts at self-establishment in the 'so-called history' can only be futile, because humanity is ignorant of the progress of the hidden 'real history' of God.¹⁸ In chapter three the distinction between the two histories is fully expounded when he establishes the righteousness of God by upholding God's faithfulness over against human merits, and the divine revelation over against human history. He views the 'so-called history' as the up-to-now 'history',¹⁹ which is

¹⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, 'Barth's Theological Beginnings', idem, *Karl Barth: a Theological Legacy*, trans. by Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 53-104 (96-101). For the general characteristics of the 1919 *Römerbrief*, also see von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 64-68; McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 135ff.; Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 37-48.

¹⁸ *RI*, 46: 'And because the progress of the *real* history makes no alarm to them, they feel all the more certain in their religious-moral exceptional status inside the *so-called* history. They forget how relative this status is.'

¹⁹ Barth's use of the quotation mark with this 'history' indicates that the 'so-called history' is a specifically defined concept which is termed as history merely in human terms. Likewise, when he speaks of 'reality', he means in fact the unreal reality which is 'real' only to the human but not to God.

constituted primarily by human morality and religiosity, i.e. the various ups and downs of human righteousness. In addition to the ‘so-called history’ there is the ‘real history’, which is opened in Christ by God according to His faithfulness as the absolutely new history.

2B.1.1 Paradox: Termination and Transformation of the ‘So-Called History’

The two histories, although distinctive, are still construed by Barth as connected in a paradoxical relation. This can be explained in four aspects. First, in God’s original creation ‘history had to be a single great movement of good will in the plan of God’.²⁰ No antithesis was supposed to have existed in this one history. Second, the distinction between the two histories is the tragic result of the Fall. After the flesh took control of humanity, the ‘so-called history’ was separated from God’s original plan. As a result, ‘the real history does not take place’,²¹ and the so-called history is merely able to ‘eternally remain a history of rudiments and possibilities’ as ‘a “reality” which is shut from the truth’.²² Third, separated from the divine truth of God, the ‘so-called history’ attempts to establish the ‘righteousness’ of humanity but only in vain. As no human ‘righteousness’ in history can stand before the faithfulness of God, the ‘so-called history’ has to be rendered old, and abolished by the new ‘real history’. Fourth, the ‘real history’ is to terminate and transform the ‘so-called history’, but not as a second phase following the first one in a temporal succession, but as something completely new. For if the ‘so-called history’ were able to make way for the ‘real history’, the possibility of human ‘righteousness’ would survive, continuing to have something to boast of, and the ‘real history’ would

²⁰ *RI*, 80.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² *Ibid.*, 81.

become a mere continuation of the ‘so-called’ history, and therefore would not be absolutely new.²³

It is essential to note that, although the old ‘so-called history’ has to be terminated, it is not to be done by way of a total rejection of the old by the new. A total nullification of the ‘so-called history’ would mean for Barth the rendering of God’s faithfulness groundless. Barth compares the relationship between the two histories with that between the Law and the righteousness of God. Like the Law, the ‘so-called history’ is inadequate and insufficient, because it is ‘always a postulation and a promise [but] never a statement and a creation of a life from and with God’.²⁴ But also like the Law, it is inevitable in that it may create a fruitful situation which exposes the old world and prepares for the new world. In other words, the ‘so-called history’ confronts human beings with a choice:

Either the up-to-now historical and spiritual connection of the world grounded in nature [i.e. the flesh] and therefore the judgement of God, or the end of the up-to-now world history and history of the spirit and the constitution of a new world through an alteration of the metaphysical presupposition and therefore salvation.²⁵

In a word, the ‘so-called history’ is insufficient, so it needs to be terminated; it is also inevitable, so it cannot be terminated in a straightforward manner. This is what Barth terms the ‘whole paradox of the relationship of God to the so-called history’.²⁶ This paradox consists in the fact that God’s ultimate goal is not the destruction of the old but the renewal of it, not the abolition of the human pole of the

²³ Ibid., 66f.

²⁴ Ibid., 78.

²⁵ Ibid., 83.

²⁶ Ibid., 80.

gulf but the restoration of unity. In order to perceive this paradox and to realise the possibility of termination by transformation, a new standpoint is needed.

2B.1.2 New Standpoint: Revelation as the Beginning of the 'Real History'

The new standpoint which terminates and transforms the 'so-called history' emerges as the event of God's revelation, according to Barth. In that it terminates and transforms the old aeon, it is also the beginning of the new, of the 'real history'.

Several dimensions are worth noting concerning the event of revelation as the turn from old to new. First, it is a change that took place not in 'this world' [*Diesseits*] but in 'that world' [*Jenseits*]. It took place on the other side of the human world, as 'an inner movement in God' which is not historically accessible.²⁷

Second, this event did not stay in heaven but rather entered the earthly realm, proceeding in history. Barth emphasises that revelation took place 'at *one* point in history [*an einem Punkt der Geschichte*]',²⁸ that is, in the old, 'so-called history', thus initiating the 'real history'. Moreover, as a consequence, the 'real history' proceeds in the 'so-called history', so that '[i]n the stream of the so-called history, the new counter-element of the real history becomes visible.'²⁹ Also:

the disclosure of the mystery must take its process in time, until the decision has come onto the whole line and has come to be shown inside all the depths of the world-connection.³⁰

This obligation reveals Barth's conviction that the 'real history' cannot take place, so

²⁷ Ibid., 161; cf. 117f.

²⁸ Ibid., 85, see also 87, 91, 106. See footnote 91 in Chapter One for the occurrences and significance of the conception of revelation as a point in history or a moment of history.

²⁹ *RI*, 85. McCormack rightly notes that for the Barth of *RI* 'the new world is not a second world ... [it] is this world, but this world made new', McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 143.

³⁰ Ibid., 88.

to speak, unless it does not simply happen in the same historical course with the ‘so-called history’, but is also applied on the full width of it, rooted in the maximum depth of it. It is in this sense that the ‘so-called history’ is terminated by being transformed.

Third, the event of revelation begins the ‘real history’ and unfolds it not simply as the termination but also as the fulfilment of the ‘so-called history’. It fulfils or restores the true meaning of the ‘so-called history’ in the sense

that the most profound content of the Old rediscovers itself in the New, i.e. comes just to its full outcome and unfolding in the New; that the red thread of the up-to-now world history does not break off, but in contrast reaches its goal; that in the *real* history, not somewhat merely the non-sense of the *so-called* history but its most profound sense comes objectively and positively to the breakthrough and clarity.³¹

Therefore, the ‘so-called history’ is ‘terminated’ in such a way that its content is found and its purpose fulfilled. Barth insists that

the *possibility* of revelation, on which the human righteousness is based, has become the *reality* of revelation in Christ and in faith through the righteousness of God. It must be manifest that the so-called history is the necessary gateway to the real history.³²

Barth calls this event a ‘sublimation and reset’ [*Aufheben und Neusetzen*]³³ because the negative quality of the up-to-now history is not only made known and superseded, but also overcome and lifted. For Barth, God’s faithfulness is thus established in

³¹ Ibid., 67.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 85. The multiple meanings of the term *Aufhebung* cannot be fully conveyed in one single English word, because it can denote 1) abolition, removal, 2) preservation, and 3) lifting up or sublimation. Here according to its context, we translate the phrase as ‘sublimation and reset’. For more detail see Garrett Green, ‘Translator’s Preface’ and ‘Introduction’ in Karl Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God As the Sublimation of Religion*, trans. by Garrett Green (London: T&T Clark, 2006), viii-ix, 5f.

the intrusion of this event which terminates the old by renewing it.³⁴

Finally, the event of revelation is infused with the notion of an ‘eternal Now’. Barth maintains that, as revelation takes place at one point in history and keeps proceeding in it, ‘the beginning and the end have become present from past and future, and so time disappears in the eternal Now.’³⁵ Of course, this ‘disappearance’ of time is to be understood as the end of the old human time as well as the beginning of a new divine time, because the emergence of the eternal Now is the fulfilment of time. This claim is made on the basis that the end of the ‘so-called history’ and the beginning of the ‘real history’ is brought about by Jesus Christ:

He is the point in time in which the time is fulfilled, [and] the historical appearance in which history is completed. ... He is the beginning and the end; he has become the present.³⁶

Although Jesus Christ ‘stands apparently as “accidental truth of history” outside us’,³⁷ yet ‘the transformation places in us something in which the “eternal truth of reason” comes to be shown to all.’³⁸ The combination of Christ and faith is this eternal Now.³⁹

In summary, what is characteristic of the dialectic of the ‘so-called history’ and the ‘real history’ is the striking *continuity* in what can be depicted as an organic relationship between the two distinct realities, a notion supported by a joyfully triumphant optimism about the final victory of God. Barth refuses to construe the

³⁴ Ibid., 86.

³⁵ Ibid., 86f.

³⁶ Ibid., 91.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 92.

³⁹ This brings to mind Barth’s formulation in ‘Christian Faith and History’ (*Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 193): ‘The Christ outside us is the Christ in us. The effective history is the effected faith.’

two histories as ‘stepping ... one after the other, with the second being the removal and the cancellation of the first. Rather, they are in each other, with the second being the fulfilment of the first’.⁴⁰ To the extent that the ‘so-called history’ is the ‘necessary gateway’⁴¹ to the ‘real history’ and ‘stands in the area of the effect of God in the present-time’,⁴² it can be claimed that in Christ ‘the meaning of history is actually recognised not as nonsense but as sense’.⁴³ Ultimately, the taking over of humanity by the flesh is overcome by God’s triumphant reclaiming of it:

God’s kingdom does not allow the ‘reality’ to stand, nor does it abandon it. Rather, God’s kingdom grows in the ‘reality’ as its own and proper meaning, till the former has absorbed the latter completely in itself, till God is all in all.⁴⁴

2B.2 Misuse and Proper Use of History

In chapter four of the 1919 *Römerbrief* Barth deals with history as a whole in its relation to God. He first refutes three philosophical thoughts which employ the notion of history to oppose God. He further posits that the only proper use of history is to bear witness to the single theme of history, i.e. the absolute triumph of God in history. It is only by pointing to that theme that history acquires its true meaning: ‘[t]he meaning of history is God’s meaning.’⁴⁵

2B.2.1 Rebuttal to Misuse of History

The first thought which Barth perceives as a misuse of history that threatens the sole

⁴⁰ *RI*, 105; see also 100. McCormack identifies this as ‘the Ineinander relation of eschatology and history’, McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 145f.

⁴¹ *RI*, 67.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 106, also 70.

importance of God is individualism.⁴⁶ On his account individualism, together with idealism, envisages God in the name of humanity, aiming to secure its own advantage in the alleged climaxes in history. Behind human viewing of history [*Geschichte*] and writing of history [*Historie*],⁴⁷ then, is individualism's ultimate motivation of 'the legitimation of individual self-consciousness against God'.⁴⁸ In opposition to individualism's pretentious use of history, Barth proposes realism and universalism: the realism of curse and salvation, and the universalism of judgement and grace.⁴⁹ According to him, the history recorded in the Bible is not about the advance of heroes or the development of their personality, but about 'the opening of a new history-connection'⁵⁰ and the 'participation of a new human history in God'.⁵¹

Second, just as the historical heroes in the Bible cannot undermine the sole importance of God, so ecclesiasticism, i.e. all religions and even church in history, is not allowed to limit the sole importance of faith.⁵² The 'divine realism and universalism' advanced by Barth renders problematic not only 'the culture of personality and spiritual Christianity' [*die Persönlichkeitskultur und das Seelenchristentum*, i.e. individualism and idealism],⁵³ but also religion and church as a whole. Religion and church belong to the world which is historically given and available, whereas, Barth contends, Abraham 'stood on the other side of religion and church', and therefore 'God's revelation to him did not coincide with his religiosity

⁴⁶ Romans 4:1-8 'Gott und der Heros', *ibid.*, 106ff.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 110

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 109. And Barth refers to Abraham as an illustration, *ibid.*, 111-115.

⁵² Romans 4:9-12 'Der Glaube und die Religion', *ibid.*, 117ff.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 117.

and churchliness'.⁵⁴ He still gives due credit to religion and church, as '[r]eligion is the necessary spiritual reaction to the creative deed of God, and the church is an inevitable historical [*geschichtlich*] formation, transmission line and canonisation of the breaking-open divine wellspring.'⁵⁵ But in the long run, they are

consequences of a cause, signals of an object, forms of a content ... God's decisive deeds precede them, and God's actual intentions go out far over them. They are means [*Mittel*]. That is what they are, but no more than that, and woe when this is forgotten.⁵⁶

Third, having refuted individualism and ecclesiasticism by denying any individual or collective advantage in history that they claim to have, Barth directs his criticism at 'idealistic moralism',⁵⁷ which considers Jesus as the highest blossom of humanity brought about in history by God.⁵⁸ In opposition, Barth argues that God's promise does not involve moral goodness developed in this 'real' world on our side, but rather concerns the Real itself which lies beyond. What is found at the highest point of human historical development is merely the knowledge of the universal condemnation by God.⁵⁹ The main thrust concerning the dominance of realism over idealism is perfectly illustrated firstly by the essence of God's promise:

The content of the Messianic promise ... is not the ideal goal of the previous up-to-now history, but the real beginning of a new history, [i.e.] the sublation of the Given towards which the morality orients, [and the] ground-laying [of history] in the righteousness [of God].⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁷ Romans 4:13-22 'Die Gerechtigkeit und die Moral', *ibid.*, 125ff.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 128.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 129.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 134, also 135.

and secondly by Abraham's faith:

[Abraham's] faith is not the knowledge of the morality, but the grounded-ness in righteousness; his promise is not ideal and therefore practical, but real and therefore universal; his offspring is not humanly qualified, but spans the whole humanity by virtue of God's faithfulness.⁶¹

To be sure, individuality, religion and morality are all powers which are effective in history. But Barth views Abraham as a sharp contrast to them: 'alone, childless, and isolated without historical effect', Abraham must be confronted with God's miracle. His faith is the acknowledgement of the impossibility of God's creative act, something that is not a given in history as such.⁶²

2B.2.2 Triumph of God as the Meaning of History

It is important to appreciate that Barth's criticism of these three thoughts is levelled at the misuse of history rather than at history as such. Once again, by way of illustration, the biblical history of Abraham shows us that, although the miracle of God does not emerge *from* history, it nevertheless takes place *in* history.⁶³ Moreover, the new world, nature and humanity, in Barth's view, not only *happen in* history, but also *grow despite* history. His conviction is that '[u]nder the firm shell of historical-spiritual reality'⁶⁴ the kingdom of God still prevails. It is precisely because the old 'so-called history' has been completely overcome by God that He can, without nullifying the 'so-called history', have the new 'real history' take place and increase in it. The past in the Bible, the present in Christ, and our own future

⁶¹ Ibid., 135.

⁶² Ibid., 136.

⁶³ Ibid., 137.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 142.

are united in the ‘real history’, because the truth of God runs through the whole of the historical course, constituting the history of God.⁶⁵

On the basis of this absolute triumph of God, Barth is able to speak of the unified meaning of history.⁶⁶ The multiple aspects of history do not make sense in themselves.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, this *manifoldness* in history is the manifoldness of the *One*: ‘God is *God* and the meaning of history is *His* meaning.’⁶⁸ When history is allowed to ‘speak of the one single theme of the coming kingdom of God’,⁶⁹ the meaning of history as God’s meaning will eventually prevail ‘at every point of history’⁷⁰ and ‘throughout all periods of history’.⁷¹ This one theme of God and therefore of history comes from a convergent point—the risen Christ:

For it is in Christ that the meaning of times, which is hidden in the vertical incision of the past history and of the future history [*Geschichte*], becomes manifest. It [i.e. meaning] is available; it also can be discovered.⁷²

To conclude, it is important to notice that, compared to his work in the early 1910s in which history was viewed as one homogeneous whole, Barth’s concept of history in the 1919 *Römerbrief* is characterised by a clear distinction made within the concept. The ‘so-called history’ is construed negatively as an obstacle to the true

⁶⁵ Ibid., 107.

⁶⁶ Romans 4:23-25 ‘Historie’, *ibid.*, 142ff.

⁶⁷ ‘By the sheer “interest” in the once has-been, history [*Geschichte*] becomes a confused chaos of meaningless relations and incidents, and historical investigation [*Historie*], despite all its skills of combination, becomes a triumphant development and depiction of this chaos, by which what was real remains securely hidden’, *ibid.*, 143.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 142.

⁷¹ Ibid., 73.

⁷² Ibid., 144.

knowledge of God, but also positively as the foreground and ‘necessary gateway’ which prepares for and is fulfilled by the ‘real history’. The climax in history is now defined strictly as the resurrection of Jesus. This divine revelation still takes place ‘at one point in history’, as was conceived in the previous period,⁷³ but does so by entering time as a vertical incision from above. Firmly rooted in history, its effect comes to grow organically in the full width and depth of history, rolling like a wheel throughout history, in the triumphantly regained reconciliation of God and humanity.

2C This World Overwhelmed by That World: *Römerbrief* (1922)

In October 1920, it appeared to Barth that ‘suddenly the *Letter to the Romans* began to shed its skin; that is, I received the enlightenment that [...] it is simply impossible that it should be reprinted; rather it must be reformed root and branch’. Unwilling to allow the first edition, which he had then come to view as ‘overloaded and bloated’, as ‘[continuing] to give rise to misunderstandings and errors’, he rewrote the whole book within a year, to reach the conviction that he was ‘a bit closer to the truth of the matter than before’.⁷⁴ Completed in 1921,⁷⁵ the 1922 *Römerbrief* contains, among other things, probably Barth’s most ferocious criticism of history.

A comparison between the two editions regarding their respective headings and subheadings given to chapters three and four of the commentary, where history is the topic, provides a contour of their differences.

⁷³ Ibid., 168. See footnote 28 in this chapter and footnote 91 in Chapter One.

⁷⁴ Barth, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, 53ff.

⁷⁵ The revised *Römerbrief* was completed in September 1921 and printed in December. The publication date was 1922. Busch, *Karl Barth*, 120; John D. Godsey, ‘Barth’s Life Until 1928’, in *Karl Barth, How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966), 26.

<i>RI</i> (1919)	<i>R2</i> (1922)
Chapter 3 The Righteousness of God	Chapter 3 God's Righteousness
3:1-20 Faithfulness	3:1-20 The Law
3:21-26 Revelation	3:21-26 Jesus
3:27-31 Finished Question	3:27-30 Through Faith Alone
Chapter 4 The Voice of the Bible	Chapter 4 The Voice of History
4:1-8 God and Heroes	3:31-4:8 Faith is Miracle
4:9-12 Faith and Religion	4:9-12 Faith is Beginning
4:13-22 Righteousness and Morality	4:13-17a Faith is Creation
4:23-25 <i>Historie</i>	4:17b-25 The Value of <i>Historie</i>

Regarding chapter three, 'faithfulness' (in *RI*) is highlighted to mean God's preservation of his own plan despite human disruption, whilst 'the Law' (in *R2*) indicates the futility of human effort to know God and to establish its own righteousness. Also, in the section of 'Finished Question' in *RI*, we see a faithful God who does not abandon 'reality' but transforms it, whilst in the parallel section 'Through Faith Alone' in *R2* Barth emphatically demands a viewing of the meaninglessness of history, and of a wholly other history from the standpoint of God. In regard to chapter four, the targets of criticism in *RI* (individualism, ecclesiasticism and moralism) are products of human misuse of history, whilst *R2* depicts the unique importance of faith as miracle, beginning and creation—in other words, as what

history is not.

Although von Balthasar suggests that between the two editions of *Römerbrief* there lies a common theme,⁷⁶ most Barth scholars agree with Jüngel's observation that '[w]hile the first edition of Barth's commentary on Romans is characterized by the language of immediacy taken from the philosophy of origins, the second edition is distinguished by an abrupt distinction between God and humanity, between eternity and time.'⁷⁷ And this distinction between continuity and discontinuity, as McCormack rightly points out, results from Barth's shift from a 'process eschatology' to a 'consistent eschatology'.⁷⁸ The result is that the future dimension of the Kingdom of God almost completely devours its present dimension. The tension between 'already' and 'not yet' in the 1919 edition now gives way to an eschatological conception of God's Kingdom as a crisis, as His 'No' to and final judgement upon this world.

Where Barth's concept of history is concerned, the second edition differs from the first in that there is no longer the distinction between the 'so-called history' and the 'real history'. Now history in its entirety is associated with the negativity which was previously ascribed to the 'so-called history'. The 'real history' withdraws, as we shall see, backward and onward, with its positive role transferred to the notions of *Urgeschichte* and *Endgeschichte*. In doing so, Barth replaces the previous optimism about God's victory throughout history by an almost ruthless

⁷⁶ He argues that a 'dynamic eschatology' saturates both editions, presented as *pianissimo* in the first but as *crescendo* in the second. Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 64.

⁷⁷ Jüngel, 'Barth's Theological Beginnings', *Karl Barth*, 101.

⁷⁸ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 207ff.; Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 58-69. Cf. von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 68-72; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Harry R. Boer, American edn (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1956), 26ff.; Jüngel, 'Barth's Theological Beginnings', *Karl Barth*, 101-104.

abolition of history by God's furious judgement.⁷⁹ Behind this drastic accusation of history lies his uncompromising insistence on the absolute otherness of God from this world, and thus the domination of eternity over time.

This section explores three topics: 1) the problem of the historicity of the resurrection; 2) the lack of value of history as a reality in itself; 3) the true value of history as a witness pointing beyond itself to the true theme of all history.

2C.1 The Impossible Possibility of the Resurrection in History

Whilst the resurrection presented in the 1919 *Römerbrief* is the powerful manifestation of God⁸⁰ which fulfils the 'so-called history' by setting forth the 'real history',⁸¹ it appears in the 1922 edition as the revelation of the divine judgement to human history as a whole.

The 1922 *Römerbrief* gives a strong impression that Barth denies the historicity of the resurrection. This is partly due to a common 'failure to enter sympathetically into Barth's convoluted thought [which] can take these words to mean what they say upon the surface',⁸² as Mackintosh notices. Partly, it has to do with the difference between the German original and its English translation. On the one hand, the English translation does not distinguish *Geschichte* from *Historie*, rendering '*unhistorisch*' into 'non-historical' without explanation, thus giving rise to much unnecessary confusion. On the other hand, its rather free style of 'explanatory' rendering, too, sometimes creates misimpressions which could have

⁷⁹ 'Now that the non-sense of history demonstrates its hidden meaning, is it not necessary that this meaning itself is nonsense?' Also, '[t]he non-sense of history is non-sense, despite the meaning which comes from God into it', *R2*, 56, 58; *R2E*, 82, 84. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. Page references to the English translation are included.

⁸⁰ *R2*, 65, 76.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 80, 82.

⁸² Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, 306f.

been avoided. Two examples suffice. The first one comes from the opening passages:

The Resurrection is therefore an occurrence in history, which took place outside the gates of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30, inasmuch as it there 'came to pass', was discovered and recognized. But inasmuch as the occurrence was conditioned by the Resurrection, in so far, that is, as it was not the 'coming to pass', or the discovery, or the recognition, which conditioned its necessity and appearance and revelation, the Resurrection is not an event in history at all.⁸³

And now my revised translation:

The resurrection is the event before the gates of Jerusalem in the year A.D. 30 insofar as it 'occurred' there and was discovered and recognised there. Then again, it is also not that event at all, as long as its necessity, appearance and manifestation is not conditioned by that occurring, discovering and recognising; rather, the resurrection conditions itself.⁸⁴

What Barth registers here is something that we might call a dual nature concerning the relation of resurrection to history, with his famous illustration of the resurrection as a tangent touching the circle, as a mathematical point. On the one hand, in the sense that 'the point on the line of intersection' breaks open the boundary between the world known to us and an unknown world,⁸⁵ the resurrection did take place there and then as an event. On the other hand, in the sense that this tangent simply touches the circle without really entering it or taking up any space in it, the resurrection cannot be taken to mean the event taking place there and then *as such*,

⁸³ R2E, 30.

⁸⁴ R2, 6: 'So ist die Auferstehung das Ereignis vor den Toren Jerusalems im Jahre 30, sofern sie dort «eintrat», entdeckt und erkannt wurde. Und sie ist es auch wieder gar nicht, sofern ihre Notwendigkeit, Erscheinung und Offenbarung nicht durch jenes Eintreten, Entdecken und Erkennen bedingt, sondern selbst ihr Bedingendes ist.'

⁸⁵ R2, 5; R2E, 29.

because the resurrection itself is not conditioned by human discovery and recognition of that event. This dual nature determines the basic tone of Barth's conception of history throughout the whole commentary, and should not be simply dismissed, as the English mistranslation does, by claiming that 'the Resurrection is not an event in history at all'.

More straightforward is where Barth claims:

We have already seen that the raising of Jesus from the dead is not an event in history elongated so as still to remain an event in the midst of other events. The Resurrection is the non-historical (iv. 17b) relating of the whole historical life of Jesus to its origin in God. It follows therefore that the pressure of the power of the Resurrection into my existence, which of necessity involves a real walking in newness of life, cannot be an event among other events in my present, past, or future life.⁸⁶

And my revised translation:

For it is clear that the raising of Jesus from the dead is not an event of historical extension [*historischer Ausdehnung*] alongside the other events of his life and death, but the 'non-historical' (4:17b) relation [*unhistorische Beziehung*] of his *whole* historical life [*historischen Lebens*] to His origin in God. Then again it is also clear that my 'walking in the new life', which presses itself into my existence as necessity and reality in the power of the resurrection, is not and will not be some event *among* other events in my past, in my present, nor in my future.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ R2E, 195.

⁸⁷ R2, 175: 'Denn so klar es ist, daß die Erweckung Jesu von den Toten kein Ereignis von historischer Ausdehnung *neben* den andern Ereignissen seines Lebens und Sterbens ist, sondern die «unhistorische» (4,17b usw.) Beziehung seines *ganzen* historischen Lebens auf seinen Ursprung in Gott, so klar ist es andererseits, daß auch mein in der Kraft der Auferstehung als Notwendigkeit und Wirklichkeit in mein Dasein sich hereindrängendes «Wandeln in Lebensneuheit» weder in meiner Vergangenheit, noch in meiner Gegenwart, noch in meiner Zukunft etwa Ereignis *neben* andern Ereignissen ist und wird.'

It is clear, then, that Barth neither says nor means, as the English translation explicitly states, that the resurrection is not an event in history. Rather, the designation of the resurrection as ‘non-historical’ [*unhistorisch*] is intended to deal primarily with the issue of historical continuity. Since the resurrection is for Barth an event of absolute uniqueness, despite its actual occurrence in history, it must be so delimited that two misconceptions be avoided. First, the resurrection is not an event among other events which can be ascertained by historical method; moreover, it is so unique that it cannot be viewed as an event which is an extension of Jesus’ own life and death (as can be accessed by historical method).⁸⁸ In Barth’s view, it is not a continuation but the initiation and the conclusion, not a *Mittel* but the beginning, the end, and the purpose.⁸⁹ Barth insists that the resurrection, occurring not within the stretch of historical events but at their boundary, be understood strictly as *Urgeschichte* and *Endgeschichte* enclosing and conditioning all history. Second, the resurrection is of such peculiarity that not even ‘the “historical” [*historischen*] fact of the *history* of resurrection (e.g. the empty tomb ... [*sic*])’ can claim immediate continuity with the resurrection *itself*.⁹⁰ Without such strict delimitation, Barth believes, the absolutely uniqueness of the resurrection would be obscured in the haze of any possibility, probability, or even certainty or necessity of history.⁹¹

⁸⁸ That is why, as McCormack observes, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, standing on the plane of history, is not even the medium of revelation. As a historical figure, Jesus is the veil of revelation’. McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 250.

⁸⁹ As McCormack puts it, the resurrection for Barth in *Romans II* is ‘an event without before or after—which is to say, lacking any prior conditions which might be said to have produced the event and lacking as well any ongoing effects which might be said to be a continuing presence of that which produced the event’. The revelation is ‘non-historical’, because it is not brought about by historical causation. *Ibid.*, 253.

⁹⁰ *R2*, 184; *R2E*, 204.

⁹¹ Mackintosh, too, observes a ‘doubleness’ in this connection, but he applies it to ‘the word “history”’ (*Types of Modern Theology*, 292). The preceding discussion, by contrast, demonstrates that the ‘doubleness’ is not so much with the word ‘history’ as with the relationship of the resurrection to it, for with Barth, *Geschichte* and *Historie* are two different categories.

This dual nature of the relationship between the resurrection and history, as delimited above, gives a strong sense of separation. But it is crucial to note that this sense of separation does not deny the historicity of the resurrection. To be sure, viewed from the side of humanity and time the resurrection is *impossible*, in that it differs from any other historical happenings, and is not determined by the causal chain in history. But viewed from the side of God and eternity, in order that the eternal God might be known by human beings in time, the resurrection did occur in and not outside of history,⁹² and is real, and therefore *possible*.

For one thing, as this ‘impossible possibility’, the resurrection does take place in history so that Jesus can be and is ‘the bodily, corporally, personally risen one’.⁹³ For another, by virtue of the grace of God, it is possible for the unhistorical to become historical:

The resurrection of Christ from the dead ... is the *revelation* and *intuition* of the unintuitable grace of God (historically at the boundary of the Non-historical, and non-historically at the boundary of the historical [*historisch am Rande des Unhistorischen und unhistorisch am Rande des Historischen*]). ... The possibility ... that God’s will can happen on earth to humanity and through humanity, [and] also the possibility that a sanctified human life becomes historical [*geschichtlich*] and intuitable as such, that the infinite *contains* the finite—this possibility ... must be affirmed from the viewpoint of grace as the ultimately single possibility ... *This* possibility is the possibility of the impossible. *This* happening is the Unhistorical becoming Historical [*das Geschichtlichwerden des Ungeschichtlichen*]. *This* revelation is the revelation of the eternal mystery, and *this* intuition is the intuition of the Unintuitable.⁹⁴

⁹² Cf. *R2*, 22; *R2E*, 47: ‘The line of intersection between time and eternity, between the present and the future world ... actually runs through the entire history’, and discloses what is invisible.

⁹³ *R2*, 204; *R2E*, 222.

⁹⁴ *R2*, 204f.; *R2E*, 222f.

In summary, in the 1922 *Römerbrief* the resurrection of Jesus is an impossibility made possible by God. Its dual nature consists in the fact that, in that it did take place in history, it is historical [*geschichtlich*]; in that it is not caused by other historical happenings, it is unhistorical [*unhistorisch*].

2C.2 History Deprived of Reality-Value

The resurrection has an important effect on human history. In Barth's view, the fact that it did take place as the impossible made possible, as the unhistorical turned historical, entails that all historical things as such be put to death.⁹⁵ Under the sway of the 'infinite qualitative distinction between eternity and time', historical things come to be viewed as lacking originality and authenticity.⁹⁶ With absolute priority given to eternity understood as the beginning and end, what is historical and in between can only be seen as unreal and valueless.

For Barth, the fact that everything historical is worthless leads to the corollary that no particular period of history enjoys a higher status than the rest. In terms of God's condemnation of those who judge others whilst doing the same thing (Rom. 2:1), Barth declares that '[w]hat is said about men in general is also said about the men of God.' 'Men of God', insofar as they remain human belonging to history, are not to be considered any higher than their fellow human beings. Following is what appears to be Barth's ferocious denunciation of history *in its entirety*:

There is not a particular divine history as particle or as quantity in the general history. The entire history of religion and of church takes place completely in the world. But the so-called 'history of salvation'

⁹⁵ *R2*, 185; *R2E*, 205.

⁹⁶ Based on the Kierkegaardian infinite qualitative distinction between eternity and time, '... time is a nought when measured against eternity, and all things are semblance when measured against their origin and end', *R2*, 18; *R2E*, 43.

is only the continuous crisis of all history, not a history in or among history. There are no saints among sinners.⁹⁷

Faced with the crisis brought about by the 'history of salvation', the entire human history is deprived of any divine or salvific quality.

Again, this rather harsh assertion is illustrated with the biblical history of Abraham.⁹⁸ The argument is that the justification of Abraham arises not as a result of his achievement in the concrete, visible historical reality, but rather from his 'pre-historical' [*prähistorisch*] life.⁹⁹ For Barth, only when this 'prehistoricity' of Abraham's life is upheld can the principle 'through faith alone' be maintained.¹⁰⁰ This principle is then expounded in three aspects. First, Abraham's justification does not consist in his works in history.¹⁰¹ Whatever work that one completes 'in his life and in history', insofar as it is presented in 'the forum of *world* history', cannot receive any credit before *God*, but can only be put under God's judgement.¹⁰²

Second, Abraham's justification does not consist in his religion in history. Just as his justification precedes his circumcision, so faith with its 'pure other-world-ness' cannot be assimilated into a mere 'section in the course of life history, religious history, church history or salvation history'.¹⁰³ Abraham is

⁹⁷ *R2*, 32; *R2E*, 57.

⁹⁸ It might seem questionable when Barth states that Abraham did not live 'on the same historical [*historisch*] and psychological plane' as us. Here Barth has in mind the problem of Lessing's ditch, in which two key dimensions are involved: the problem of historical distance (how can 'merely figures of past history' like Abraham 'run consistently and markedly through history' like a 'crimson thread' to mean anything to contemporary people today), and the problem of the possibility of a metaphysical leap (how can 'relative and incidental and particular' facts about the past, instead of remaining 'ambiguous and relative', become the necessary truth which is not merely 'a time among other times, a history [*Geschichte*] among other histories, and a religion among other religions'). *R2*, 92f.; *R2E*, 117f.

⁹⁹ *R2*, 93; *R2E*, 118.

¹⁰⁰ Romans 3:27-30 'Allein durch den Glauben', *R2*, 81ff.; *R2E*, 107ff.

¹⁰¹ Romans 3:31-4:8 'Glaube ist Wunder', *R2*, 90ff.; *R2E*, 115ff.

¹⁰² *R2*, 94f.; *R2E*, 119.

¹⁰³ *R2*, 102; *R2E*, 126.

reckoned as righteous when his 'faith is *not yet* circumcision, *not yet* religion, *not yet* the spiritual-historical phenomenon of faithfulness'.¹⁰⁴ As the pure beginning,¹⁰⁵ then, faith is not the consequence but the presupposition of the likes of *Religionsgeschichte* and *Heilsgeschichte*.¹⁰⁶

Finally, Abraham's justification does not consist in the institution of the church in history. Although the Christian church is 'the inescapable historical formation, transmission ... of the divine deed towards humanity',¹⁰⁷ it remains true that the divine deed as such never becomes history.¹⁰⁸ Elaborating on this, Barth refers to the Christian church in its manifold spiritual-historical *contents* [*seelisch-geschichtlichen Inhalten*], and notes that they rely on a divine *form* in the Beyond to be filled with meaning [*die göttliche, die sinngebende, die erfüllende Form*].¹⁰⁹ Thus not even the history of the Christian church is in a better position than religion in general to constitute the original relation of God to humanity.

To conclude, the justification of Abraham means for Barth that what is counted as righteous is not Abraham's historical life but his 'prehistorical' life. In view of this prehistoricity, human works, religion, and even the Christian church in history are altogether denied any positive value where the relation of humanity to

¹⁰⁴ *R2*, 104; *R2E*, 128.

¹⁰⁵ Romans 4:9-12 'Glaube ist Anfang', *R2*, 102ff.; *R2E*, 126ff.

¹⁰⁶ Just as faith is always 'faith apart from the circumcision' (Rom. 4:12), just as Abraham's justification is not 'by virtue of the law' but 'by virtue of the righteousness of faith' (Rom. 4:13), likewise it is *not* that Israel constitutes 'the actuality, power and reality of this "becoming"' *but* that God's promise 'became' Israel the historical nation in history. *R2*, 109; *R2E*, 133.

¹⁰⁷ *R2*, 105; *R2E*, 129.

¹⁰⁸ In the first edition, religion and church are depicted as the necessary reflection and historical transmission of 'the creative deed of God', of the 'divine source'. The 'interior' and 'exterior' belong together in God (*R1*, 120). In the second edition, religion and church are still necessary reflection and transmission, but their divine origin is now described as the divine deed 'which as such never becomes history'. The 'form' remain other than its contents (*R2*, 105; *R2E*, 129).

¹⁰⁹ *R2*, 105; *R2E*, 130.

God is concerned:

Religious history, church history is 'weak' in the absolute sense. It is so because of the infinite qualitative distinction between God and man. As completely human history it is flesh. It is flesh even when it disguised as 'salvation history'. And all flesh is grass.¹¹⁰

Therefore, just as humanity always means unredeemed humanity, so history can mean only limitation and transience. The whole of history has a voice which shouts self-accusation. Historical thinking leads only to the doctrine of original sin, which has to be the inevitable sole result of all honest historical investigation.¹¹¹ No value is allowed to pertain to human history in itself and as such.

2C.3 History Provided with Witness-Value

This easily gives the impression that, in Mangina's words, Barth 'lapsed into a form of dualism in which God's eternity floats free of a tragically fallen creation'.¹¹² But it does not follow that history is utterly overwhelmed by God and rendered totally worthless. To Barth's mind, just as the condemnation of the whole world under God's judgement constitutes in part the necessity of the manifestation of God's righteousness apart from the law, so the 'radical sublation [*Aufhebung*] of the historical ... reality and ... the all-embracing relativisation of its levels and contrasts' are also required so that the true and eternal meaning of history may come into view.¹¹³ The question at issue is: given that human history has been so negatively conceived and so radically dissolved, is it still possible at all to relate it to the

¹¹⁰ *R2*, 259; *R2E*, 276.

¹¹¹ *R2*, 60; *R2E*, 85.

¹¹² Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 17.

¹¹³ *R2*, 52; *R2E*, 78.

revelation of God in a positive and meaningful way?

The answer that Barth offers is yes. History can be related to revelation, and it can do so by way of bearing witness. Bearing witness, in this connection, involves three things. First, it means pointing beyond. Here the characteristic of history as being located between its beginning and end is given special attention by Barth. In that history is situated as a mediator [*Mittel*], it is not itself the beginning and the end, but rather a means or a tool to which there is always a purpose or a goal.¹¹⁴ It is only by glancing at the beginning and the end that ‘they *are* what they are: signposts and witnesses which point beyond.’¹¹⁵ Second, bearing witness involves radical self-denial. It is radical in the sense that witnesses not only have to be deemed merely something subsequent and provisional [*nachträglich und vorläufig*]¹¹⁶ in respect to their referents, but also need themselves to decrease and ultimately perish. The paradox of self-denial about history thus lies in the fact that, as a witness, history is affirmed only when it is denied.¹¹⁷

Third, bearing witness also involves renunciation of multiplicity for the sake of singularity. In Barth’s view, the great variety of the contents in the historical series might be interesting and real, but that does not necessarily grant meaning or trueness to history as such.¹¹⁸ On the contrary, it is only when the multiplicity of the contents in history demonstrate a singular divine form that it is possible for

¹¹⁴ ‘Only as the *mediator* [*Mittel*] do ... [the manifold contents of history] stand between Alpha and Omega, between the beginning and the end’, *R2*, 105; *R2E*, 130.

¹¹⁵ *R2*, 105; *R2E*, 130.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ ‘An impression of revelation is eternal reality when it has nothing to do with the impression but everything to do with the indication of revelation’, *R2*, 65; *R2E*, 90.

¹¹⁸ Barth contends that, ‘For “real” is not the same as true, “interesting” is not the same as meaningful, and a past which is intuitive to us in its abundance of facets is therefore not a telling, understood and recognised past’, *R2*, 122; *R2E*, 145f.

history to be provided with meaning and value. It is essential to see how Barth emphatically downplays the multiplicity of history in order that the single non-historical theme [*Unhistorische*] of history may be appreciated. Apart from the unified theme of history:

Even if the antiquarian life and meticulousness were so great, the ‘empathy’ into the atmosphere of the old days and situations were so skilful, and the contingently applied principles were so brilliant, history [*Historie*] still, as a critical collection of material, is not ‘history’ [*Geschichte*], but photographed and analysed chaos.¹¹⁹

This specific formulation of the relationship between *Historie* and *Geschichte* is clearly in opposition to how it was usually envisaged. Historical investigation claims to be the authority which, by way of analytical criticism, verifies *Geschichte* to be *Historie*. But Barth makes the counterclaim that *Historie* cannot become *Geschichte* unless *Historie*, by way of synthesis, moves beyond the manifold contents of the past to grasp the single and unified theme of *Geschichte*. This single theme, described as the ‘unhistorical radiance from above’ [*ungeschichtliche Oberlicht* or *Oberlicht des Unhistorischen*], not only eludes historical investigation (*unhistorisch*), but also originates not from within but from without the historical plane (*ungeschichtlich*). This radiance gives sense to history, and it can be gathered only synthetically from the ‘centrifugal abundance ... of phenomena’.¹²⁰ Enveloped in the radiance from above, the multiplicity of the past is elevated into the monologue of simultaneity, and the witness draws attention to the witnessed. This occurs when the past begins to speak and the present begins to listen, and that is

¹¹⁹ *R2*, 122; *R2E*, 146.

¹²⁰ *R2*, 116ff., 122ff.; *R2E*, 140ff., 145ff. Cf. ‘God’s answer [is] ... an answer which casts the light of eternity upon time and upon all things in time’, Karl Barth, ‘The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching’ (1922), *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 97-135 (121).

when historical investigation can claim its true use [*Nutzen der Historie*], and history is provided with the ‘synthetic value of art’ [*synthetisches Kunstwert*].¹²¹

To conclude, it is true that the Barth of the 1922 *Römerbrief* has a very low opinion of history as a whole. The strong eschatological orientation of his theology makes him construe the history of this world as overwhelmed by the eschatological world that is to come, and therefore as deprived of any value as a reality. But such fierce criticisms are made only as a corrective, in the hope that history might be guided back to its proper use of pointing beyond itself to the singular non-historical history [*unhistorische Geschichte*]. To that extent, history is provided with witness-value. In chapter thirteen of the commentary, Barth speaks of the secret of time, claiming that the fact that time does not come or go is revealed in the eternal moment of revelation. This moment is not in time but between the times, giving meaning to every moment in time.¹²² It is also the moment when the secret of history is revealed:

the framework of history is burst open at the moment when history discloses its secret ... We have no reason to eschew the light of history; it can do nothing other than bearing witness: the witness of one to many, of the forgiveness to the sinners.¹²³

2D Continuation and Moderation of the *Römerbrief* Principles: Early Lectures in Göttingen

In 1921 Barth left Safenwil, beginning his academic career by taking a new chair in Reformed theology at the University of Göttingen. Before he embarked on his first dogmatic lectures in early 1924, he had given several lectures in the fields of

¹²¹ *R2*, 122ff.; *R2E*, 146ff.

¹²² *R2*, 481; *R2E*, 497.

¹²³ *R2*, 116; *R2E*, 139.

historical theology and of theological exegesis.¹²⁴ Two of them are of particular interest for Barth's concept of history: *The Theology of John Calvin* (1922) and *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1923/24). In this section we will first examine how the category of history is elaborated and employed in these two lectures, and then argue not only that the eschatological view of history held in the *Römerbrief* still serves as the controlling factor, but also that some development can be detected in terms of the instructional function and the value of history.

2D.1 History as the Teacher of Life: *The Theology of John Calvin* (1922)

In the summer semester in 1922, Barth lectured on the theology of Calvin. Unsatisfactory and maybe even fragmentary when viewed as a work of historical theology on Calvin in the strict sense, these lectures are significant in their own right, because they are Barth's first attempt at a work of historical theology. They also shed light on Barth's concept of history, which serves as an essential constitutive part in the lectures.¹²⁵

This subsection will first explore the guiding principle which Barth assigns to the lectures: 'History is the teacher of life', and then examine how he puts this principle into practice. Finally, it will be argued that the concept of history as presented in *The Theology of John Calvin* is on the whole a substantiation of the concept of history formed in the 1922 *Römerbrief*.

2D.1.1 Guiding Principle: 'History Is the Teacher of Life'

The 'Introduction' consists of Barth's objection to Calvin's equation of sacred history

¹²⁴ For a complete list of these Göttingen lectures from 1921 to 1925, see McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 293f.

¹²⁵ Hans Scholl, 'Preface', in Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 20. Also McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 304f.

[*historia sacra*] with biblical history over against secular history, and of his explication of Cicero's phrase that 'history is the teacher of life' [*historia vitae magistra*], which was frequently quoted by Calvin and is now made by Barth the methodological principle of the whole lecture. Barth begins the 'Introduction' by taking up the definition of sacred history. He agrees in principle with Calvin's positing of sacred history as opposed to secular history. But he opposes Calvin's equation of sacred history with biblical history. For Barth, biblical history is no different from history as a whole in its relation to sacred history:

the biblical history too can only *proclaim* the sacred history, *salvation* history, the history of God, *the* history that is the hidden meaning and content of *all* history, and that seeks to speak in and above and beyond all so-called secular history.¹²⁶

This passage suggests that like all other histories, biblical history is not sacred history or salvation history, which is the meaning of all history. Insofar as the one history of God is recognised, Barth acknowledges, historical study can be instructive to life. To the extent that the God to whom the one history belongs is the living God of the living, only history that is living can be the teacher of life.

The rest of the 'Introduction' is Barth's explication of what it means to say that history is living and therefore instructive. Three points are made. First, it means the crucial recognition that historical personalities with their words and deeds are only one possibility among other possibilities, a possibility at which true students of history do not stop. Being taught by the living historical means learning the one eternal truth that the Holy Spirit wants to teach. Second, it means that history aims not simply to say but rather to teach something. If history fails to teach, it fails to

¹²⁶ Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 2; translation slightly revised per Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Calvins 1922*, ed. by Hans Scholl (Zürich: TVZ, 1993), 2.

be history. In addition to an able teacher, dutiful students are also required, students who are not satisfied with repeating or echoing but rather strive to enter into dialogue with history, to be taught by it. Third, in order to be taught by history, true students of history must stick to the actual intention and accomplishment of the objects of their study.¹²⁷ When all three requirements are satisfied, history can be properly seen as living and instructive.

Traditionally in Protestant theology, however, history had been widely viewed as a problem rather than a teacher. Barth responds to this problem of history by maintaining that the variety of historical phenomena and the historical distance between objects and their observers are merely facts, not metaphysical realities. What *is* metaphysically real for him is the one eternal truth that there truly is a unity in history, to which individual historical phenomena point as they point beyond themselves. For this reason, historical study must transcend mere interests in the multiple facets in the past and instead seek the one unity of God.¹²⁸ In addition, history as a mirror reflects the soul of its investigators. Spoken to and taught by history, the researchers find what they seek and are shown what they are. This insight means for Barth a twofold verdict given by history: it is impossible to approach history without presuppositions, but it is perfectly possible to reflect on those presuppositions.¹²⁹ Thus, if human multiplicity points beyond itself to the divine unity, and if investigators clearly confront their own presuppositions with critical reflection, then history of the past can be seen as not only true or interesting, but also necessary and significant; ‘the living, speaking, working past is the

¹²⁷ Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 1-5.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7f.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

present'.¹³⁰

2D.1.2 Principle Put in Practice: Reformation as an Example

Barth's own presupposition is the instructiveness of history and the unity of God in history. Applying this principle to his study on Calvin, he deals with the alleged drastic discontinuity between the Middle Ages and the Reformation, arguing that the contrast of 'old' and 'new' in the course of one and the same historical plane can be affirmed only in a very limited sense, and that the Reformers differ from their predecessors and successors only relatively and not absolutely.¹³¹ The relation of the old and the new, Barth proposes, should be considered from two perspectives. Originally and ultimately, there is a hidden antithesis of the distance and fellowship between God and humanity, one that is never intuitable, whether historically or otherwise. This dimension is what is meant by the term 'sacred history'. Then, secondarily and derivatively, there are all sorts of different human possibilities which are historically intuitable, the whole range of which is often called 'secular history'. The invisible hidden antithesis in sacred history and the visible human possibilities in secular history are, according to Barth, not opposed to each other but rather linked in an unintuitable way. That is to say, on the one hand, the latter never corresponds directly to but rather only points to or indicates the former indirectly, otherwise the two would be related in an intuitably given way. On the other hand, however, the latter can never be totally meaningless in regard to the former, otherwise the two would no longer be related at all.¹³²

Ontologically, Barth firmly presupposes an origin which is necessary for

¹³⁰ Ibid., 8.

¹³¹ Ibid., 16.

¹³² Ibid., 16f.

historical occurrences first to exist and then to become known to us. Epistemologically, nevertheless, what is perceptible to us is only the secular history, and not the sacred history. Furthermore, a relation of the two histories is again ontologically presupposed, as is seen from Barth's conviction that all historical events are meant to direct us to the recognition of such a relation. This relation, however, is at the same time epistemologically ambiguous in the sense that it is never comprehensible to human beings exactly how these two histories are related.

Paradoxically, it is only when the ontological presupposition about the unintuitable and absolute antithesis between the divine origin and what is human and historical is clearly *in view* that it becomes known that all epochs on the historical plane are in such earthly continuity that the contrast between them becomes only relatively significant when measured by their likeness.¹³³ In other words, the ontological presupposition serves for Barth to crush the illusional absoluteness of any 'new' or 'ground-breaking' historical epoch. All contrast and distinction in history is located in such a great historical continuity that within it there is no real breach.¹³⁴ The newness of even the Reformation is inevitably dimmed when it is considered in relation to the divine origin of all historical occurrences. As Barth puts it, 'there are no different times in relation to God, or ... there is no progress in world history'.¹³⁵ The conclusion that Barth draws from all this, however, is not all negative. On the one hand, the problem of history consists in the fact that history in its totality has its

¹³³ Ibid., 17f.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 24. By contrast, Schleiermacher's philosophy of history, as Barth understands it, has at its heart the fixed presupposition of an unbroken historical continuum and, therefore, a firm and optimistic conviction, which in turn leads to an affirmation of Schleiermacher's own contemporary age as the summit of history. As a result, church history and the history of the civilised Christian peoples are viewed, alongside the resurrection of Jesus Christ, as the demonstrations of God's grace. Such a presupposition and conviction, among other things, are that which Barth is determined to oppose. Barth, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 23, 35, 51ff, 98.

share in what is eternally old.¹³⁶ On the other, the solution of this problem is disclosed in the fact every epoch in history also has its share in the eternal new.¹³⁷

To conclude, for the Barth of *The Theology of John Calvin*, everything which occurs in history has a human face; it can be new and edifying only provisionally.¹³⁸ The true destination of history, then, is not the end of history as such, but a return to the *Jenseits*, namely the origin and goal which is the meaning and purpose of all history.

2D.2 The End of History as the Frame of Reference: *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1923/1924)

In this subsection we will first examine *The Resurrection of the Dead*, Barth's lectures on 1 Corinthians in the winter semester of 1923/1924. Its importance lies in the fact that it was one of Barth's only two theological exegesis lectures which were published, and the only one of the Göttingen lectures that was printed.¹³⁹ In these lectures one finds Barth's insistence that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the centre of gravity upon which hinges the whole of 1 Corinthians, Christianity and, indeed, the reality of all things.¹⁴⁰ In what follows we seek to demonstrate that, like

¹³⁶ The same strong sense of the division between the Old and the New also appears in Barth's lectures on Zwingli [Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Zwinglis, 1922/1923: Vorlesung, Göttingen, Wintersemester 1922/1923*, ed. by Matthias Freudenberg (Zürich: TVZ, 2004)], where *the New* that is God's benefit to human beings is presupposed not to appear in history. 'To be sure, what seems new in history, 'even in the history of the Reformation, belongs to the Old when seen from the viewpoint of this New.' (47) Therefore, the alleged historical antithesis between the Middle Ages and the Reformation is construed as one that is not essentially serious when one has in view *the* essential seriousness which 'binds the historical antitheses in the oneness of that antithesis which never purely appears in history.' (49) Such an understanding of human history with respect to its essence brings about, in turn, Barth's denial of the saving effect of historical knowledge, namely, his assertion that what saves us is the saving event itself (the *Lord God* was crucified *for us*) and not our historical knowledge of it (the knowledge of *how* or *that* Christ was crucified). (230)

¹³⁷ Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 19.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 251.

¹³⁹ John Webster, 'The Resurrection of the Dead', *idem, Barth's Earlier Theology*, 67-90 (67).

¹⁴⁰ A. Katherine Grieb demonstrates that, up to the point of Barth lectures on 1 Corinthians '[t]here was very little interest in the incarnation as such', A. Katherine Grieb, 'Last Things First: Karl Barth's

The Theology of John Calvin, Barth's treatment of the theme of history in *The Resurrection of the Dead* is also to a large extent a continuation of that in the 1922 *Römerbrief*, but that some modifications can be seen. For illustrative purposes, close attention will be given to Barth's account of the historicity problem of the resurrection.

2D.2.1 Relation of History to the End of History

A central contention of *The Resurrection of the Dead* is Barth's insistence that the end of history is not the termination of history. This negative notion is then followed by Barth's positive elaboration of what the end of history is. This is done on several levels. First, the end of history does not mean its termination, because the last things are so radically the end of all things that they are also fundamentally the grounding and beginning of all things. In this sense, Barth argues, the end of history [*Endgeschichte*] means precisely the primal history [*Urgeschichte*].¹⁴¹

Second, this end of history does not simply lie at the beginning and the end of the linear process of history, serving as the terminals of a linear series. Instead, it forms the boundary of all history, bordering all history by embracing it, thereby dissolving the conventional conception of history as an endless sequence.¹⁴² That is

Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in *The Resurrection of the Dead*', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003), 49-64 (54). This is evident also in Barth's correspondence with von Harnack, in which Barth insists that 'the Word became flesh, [and] God himself became a human-historical reality', but that it is so only to the extent that this event lies beyond human cognition. In other words, whatever is historically cognisable cannot be that event as such; that is why '[t]he existence of a Jesus of Nazareth ... which can of course be discovered historically, is not *this* reality.' Karl Barth, 'An Answer to Professor von Harnack's Open Letter' (Apr 24 1923), H. Martin Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972), 40-52 (44).

¹⁴¹ Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. by H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), 107-110. German original: Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine akademische Vorlesung über I. Kor. 15* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1924).

¹⁴² Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 110-112.

why '[o]f the real end of history it may be said at any time: The end is near!'¹⁴³

Third, the end-and-beginning of history does not stay at the boundary of history, but takes place within it and takes effect in the whole range of it. The 'fundamental and vital significance'¹⁴⁴ carried by this end-and-beginning of history requires that we view our side from the standpoint of God. For that purpose, the end-and-beginning of history takes place precisely on the historical plane:

if the end of history set by God is *here*, if the new eternal beginning placed by God appears *here*, then that which has appeared from God applies to the whole of history *within the scope of this horizon*, then the miracle of God to Christ is immediately and simultaneously the miracle of God *to us*¹⁴⁵

The assertion that the resurrection took place *in* history as revelation is one point that Barth takes to distinguish himself from Paul Tillich. For Barth, 'Christ is *the* salvation history', 'a very special *event*', and not 'the *symbol* of revelation, present and knowable always and everywhere' as with Tillich.¹⁴⁶ But it should also be noticed that Barth was not yet able to hold to this position as firmly as he would later in his dogmatic lectures in Göttingen.¹⁴⁷

Moreover, the end-and-beginning of history is not firstly away from history and only then suddenly approaches it. It is rather ever present: it once was hidden like a 'subterranean stream',¹⁴⁸ and has now become perceptible for the first time on the human plane with the revelation of the resurrection of Christ. Someday, at the

¹⁴³ Ibid., 112.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 158.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 159, emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁶ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 152.

¹⁴⁷ See section 3A.

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 176.

Parousia of Christ, this already-existing ‘subterranean stream’ will come to the surface. That will be the time when the promise given in the resurrection becomes fulfilled in the Parousia. That will be the time when the idea of a boundary of all time ‘revealed and believed’ in the resurrection becomes ‘marked’ in the Parousia.¹⁴⁹ Thus, the end-and-beginning of history not only encompasses history, nor does it merely take place within history; it is also ever-present with history.

Finally, as a result, from the notion of the end of history thus conceived arises something which Barth calls the Christian dualistic view of history,¹⁵⁰ because this end creates a tension in history: the tension between promise and fulfilment. This tension means for Barth that the present human history can be comprehended only in a Christian dualistic way as the expectation of the fulfilment of the promise. In the light of the expected fulfilment to come, whilst the *reality* of history is affirmed, its *completeness* is nevertheless denied. For history can never be an arena in which the meaning of the kingdom of Christ and of Christian faith is ‘exhausted in that which is present and given’.¹⁵¹ In Barth’s view, the relation of history to the end of history means the former’s dependence on the latter. However true Christianity in this world may be, its ultimate meaning rests on ‘the existence or non-existence of this relationship’.¹⁵² However real history may be, there is always a goal to be hoped for, which is the end-and-beginning of history that encloses as well as is ever-present in history.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 179.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 180.

¹⁵² Ibid., 190.

2D.2.2 Historicity Question of the Resurrection

Concerning the historicity of the resurrection, *The Resurrection of the Dead* adheres to the main thesis set forth in the 1922 *Römerbrief* that the resurrection is such a specific event in history [*Geschichte*] that it does not belong to the same category as other events in history [*Geschichte*] which can be historically [*historisch*] investigated and understood. The resurrection took place in history, but it is also distinct from it by embracing the entirety of it as *Urgeschichte* and *Endgeschichte*. However abrupt this juxtaposition may seem, neither pole should be cancelled by the other. The strict separation of the resurrection from all other historical events does not obliterate the fact that Jesus' resurrection took place in history, and Jesus' uniquely historical resurrection is not to be confused with other general historical occurrences. For our purposes, it means that not only does Barth not deny the historicity of the resurrection, but he also '[combats] an inadequate historicist interpretation of Paul's main point'.¹⁵³ It can be argued that, in that the objective event of '[t]he resurrection of Christ ... precedes and constitutes our [subjective] faith', its historicity is to be affirmed.¹⁵⁴ Seen in this light, history is not devalued; it is 'established and framed by the essentially eschatological reality of the resurrection'.¹⁵⁵ It is in the context of the 'larger theatre of eschatological reality' that history is to be construed.¹⁵⁶

Having affirmed the historicity of the resurrection, we also agree with Webster that the question of the historicity of Jesus' resurrection belongs to those

¹⁵³ Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, 55.

¹⁵⁴ David Fergusson, 'Barth's Resurrection of the Dead: Further Reflections', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003), 65-72 (70).

¹⁵⁵ Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth*, 56.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

‘more formal matters’ which are only remotely relevant to ‘the exegetical and theological content of Barth’s reading of Paul’.¹⁵⁷ After all, Barth emphatically and repeatedly states that he understands Paul to have no intention to prove or to defend the resurrection of Jesus, because it is for him a given fact to be recalled and recounted.¹⁵⁸ In line with his interpretation of Paul, Barth, too, has no intention to formulate a Christian apologetics. Instead, he plainly claims that the resurrection is a ‘deed of God’ which as ‘a historical divine fact ... is only to be grasped in the category of revelation and in none other’,¹⁵⁹ refusing to fall into the categories defined by those he refers to as liberals (who explain the appearances of the risen Christ as ‘visions’) or positivists (who attempt to prove or demonstrate them to be ‘historical facts’).

2D.3 Continuation and Moderation

Taken together, these two lectures demonstrate how the *Römerbrief* principles are largely upheld whilst also undergoing some development in Barth’s early years in Göttingen. Where Barth’s concept of history is concerned, all the important *Römerbrief* principles are found in force in the two lectures: eternity’s dominance over time, the primacy of beginning and end over against the process in between, history’s lack of value in itself, and the provision of value to it in bearing witness. What really matters about history is not its multiple content as such, let alone its method,¹⁶⁰ but the unified theme to which it points.

But it is important to notice that some development is still detectable, in

¹⁵⁷ Webster, ‘The Resurrection of the Dead’, *Barth’s Earlier Theology*, 68.

¹⁵⁸ Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 142ff., 150, 158, 193f., 206.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 145f.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, ‘An Answer to Professor von Harnack’s Open Letter’, Rumscheidt, *Revelation and Theology*, 42.

terms of all the elements mentioned above. First, compared to the 1922 *Römerbrief*, we have observed in *The Resurrection of the Dead* a more embracing view of the end-and-beginning in relation to history. David Fergusson observes in this connection an ‘inflation of eschatology [which] coincides ironically with a reticence about the last things’, as he has in view ‘twentieth-century eschatology’ in general.¹⁶¹ Judging from the development of Barth’s own theology, however, one finds a slightly moderated eschatology which no longer dismisses all that which is not ‘final’. Similarly, in this phase Barth indeed has a ‘tendency to telescope all eschatological occurrence into a single momentary event’,¹⁶² but that event is not merely a moment, but rather an event which embraces all history as its beginning and end.

Second, the reality of history as such is articulated in a slightly more positive way in *The Theology of John Calvin*:

Always and everywhere that which we see as historical occurrence on the second front [i.e. ‘secular history’] stands *only* in *relation* to its *origin* in the *primal* antithesis [i.e. ‘salvation history’], but always and everywhere historical events do to some extent *stand* in relation to this their origin.¹⁶³

Lacking newness and dependent on its origin, history still ‘stands’ in its own right. Its reality is no longer as overwhelmed by revelation as was depicted in the 1922 *Römerbrief*.

Third, following a more positive view of the reality of history is a refined view of how history can serve as a witness to revelation. All the requisites

¹⁶¹ Fergusson, ‘Barth’s Resurrection of the Dead’, 71.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 17. Emphasis original.

previously proposed for effective witness-bearing remain here.¹⁶⁴ But some differentiating nuances become clear when it comes to what enables history to bear witness. Whilst in *Römerbrief* it was revelation's 'unhistorical radiance from above' that elevates history as such to be the witness to the unity and simultaneity, there is in the Calvin lectures a slight trace of Barth's approval and even encouragement of the participation of human agents. We have observed Barth's claim that if past history is to be the living teacher of present life, the students of history have a role to play also. In other words, in addition to the divine light from above, we human beings, as 'dutiful students', now have a role to play by 'doing our best to follow [Calvin] and then—this is the crux of the matter—making our own response to what he says'.¹⁶⁵ The 'lessons' that Barth concluded from his study of Calvin were no different from the same fundamental principles that he had already formulated. But they were no longer principles metaphysically construed, but rather historically 'substantiated' by the concrete study of Calvin and his history. The nature of the field of *historical* theology, then, demanded that Barth engage actively with Calvin's theology and times; talk of the multiplicity in history as trivial (as in the 1922 *Römerbrief*) was not officially renounced, but quietly set aside.

The foregoing observations by no means constitute a break in the development of Barth's concept of history. But it can be argued that a slight shift in tone is emerging in which the reality of history is affirmed in its relation to its eternal origin. A consequence of this more positively conceived notion of the reality of history is Barth's more concrete practice of historical investigation in which

¹⁶⁴ Cf. Barth's warning that when looking to history, we must note that 'it points beyond itself to revelation'. His consistent concern is to guard against the confusion of antiquity with the primal order. Barth, 'The Doctrinal Task of the Reformed Churches' (1923), *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 218-271 (230).

¹⁶⁵ Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, 4.

historical happenings are taken into serious account and, in this way, the formulation of the relationship of history to its origin is more firmly grounded.

2E Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have examined the development of Barth's concept of history in the ten years between 1914 and 1924, a period centring upon the 1922 *Römerbrief*. It has been demonstrated that elements such as the First World War, the discovery of eschatology, and the new found starting-point for theology constituted Barth's break with theological liberalism and religious socialism, paving the way for the new theology in *Römerbrief*. The defining motif of this period is the notion culminated and radicalised in the 1922 *Römerbrief* that human history is overwhelmed by the eternal God as the beginning and end of history. Whilst in the 1919 edition God's victory prevails *in spite of* human history, in the second edition it is preserved *at the expense of* history. After 1922, unsurprisingly, the notion of the absolute priority of eternity over time, of revelation over history, extended in lectures that Barth gave in his early years in Göttingen. But equally unsurprising is the fact that these dominant principles underwent gradual development towards a more embracing view of eternity.

Part Two
Early Dogmatic Period (1924-1940)

Chapter Three

Speaking God Revealed in History (I): Two Dogmatic Enterprises (1924-1930)

Introduction

Although 1924 is rarely seen as an important year in the development of Barth's theology, it is chosen as the year dividing the first and second sections of this thesis. At least two reasons can be offered. First, from a chronological point of view, in 1924 Barth began his first lectures in dogmatics. It is true that by that time as a professor of Reformed theology Barth had already undertaken serious academic engagement in the fields of historical theology and of New Testament exegesis. But given that he was to remain in dogmatic investigation for the rest of his life, his 'first exciting preoccupation with dogmatics'¹ cannot be deemed as having no significance. Second, the embarkation upon dogmatic investigation in Göttingen bears material consequence, too, for our exploration on Barth's concept of history. As the Word of God as revelation was established as the central problem of dogmatics, the doctrine of *Deus dixit* came into sharper focus and received systematic treatment in greater detail than Barth had attempted before. In that the doctrine of revelation constitutes the unmistakable doctrinal nexus in which the problem of history is dealt with not only in Göttingen but also in Barth's subsequent dogmatic lectures in Münster and Bonn, the beginning of the dogmatic lectures in 1924 merits close attention, no matter to what extent they were later modified.

¹ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 162.

This chapter comprises four sections. Section 3A will examine Barth's dogmatic lectures in Göttingen, seeking to demonstrate that a new christological understanding of revelation enables Barth to conceive of the communication of revelation in history. Section 3B will be a short exploration of a lecture given in 1925 in which Barth's famous formula concerning the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history first took shape. Section 3C consists of a close reading of Barth's construal of revelation as *Urgeschichte* as presented in the dogmatic lectures in Münster, a notion which witnessed Barth's endeavour to provide a comprehensive elaboration of the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history, but also one which would be discarded soon after.

3A Christological View of Revelation and the Three Forms of the Word of God: Dogmatic Lectures in Göttingen (1924)

In many aspects the dogmatic lectures given in Göttingen (1924-1925) have not received the recognition that they deserve. Many Barth scholars either make mere honourable mention,² or completely ignore them.³ It is true that this document has an obvious provisional character, reflecting Barth's rapidly changing thoughts during those years.⁴ But since a decisive christological view of revelation is established in it, it is significant for our purposes.

² For instance, it is mentioned simply as Barth's first attempt at the definition of his Reformed position in Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, 41.

³ See for example the beginning paragraph in von Balthasar's treatment of the transitional years between *Romans* and the *CD*, in which he judges *Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes*, lectured in Münster in 1927 as Barth's second attempt at dogmatics, not only to be 'the most important document of those transitional years', but also to be Barth's 'first attempt to sketch a full-scale dogmatics', thereby totally neglecting the work in Göttingen from 1924 to 1925. Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 86. Webster's observation that the *Göttingen Dogmatics* has received *more* attention than other lecturing works in this period all the more highlights the meagre scholarship on the work of Barth in the 1920s. Webster, 'Some Unfinished Tasks', *Barth's Earlier Theology*, 1-14 (1-3).

⁴ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 337.

The notion of history is extensively treated in many parts in these lectures. But above all it is the doctrine of the Word of God, of the *Deus dixit*, that decidedly shapes his concept of history. Turning to his doctrine of the Word of God, we will demonstrate in section 3A.1 Barth's clear shift from an eschatological to a christological view of revelation. This shift enables him to envisage the transmission of the Word of God from revelation through Scripture to preaching *in* history. On this basis, we will deal first in section 3A.2 with the epistemological tracing back of God's Word from Christian preaching to its origin, and then in section 3A.3 with the historical passing-down of God's Word into preaching.

3A.1 Basic Orientation: From Eschatological to Christological View of Revelation

In the Introduction (§§1-2) to these dogmatic lectures Barth identifies Christian preaching as the beginning and goal of dogmatics. Then in Chapter 1 (§§3-13) he seeks to ground human preaching objectively in the Word of God in its three forms as revelation, as Scripture, and then as preaching. These three stages constitute what would later be known as the three forms of God's Word in the first volume of the *CD*.⁵

The doctrine of the three forms of God's Word was literally 'taking shape' in Barth's dogmatic lectures in Göttingen. In the first lectures, Barth did not seem to have a clear stance towards revelation as the Word of God. In §2 he registered what he termed as the 'triunity' of God's Word: God's Word in its present form (preaching), in its temporal or historical form (Scripture), and in its eternal form (revelation).⁶

⁵ §4 'Das Wort Gottes in seiner dreifachen Gestalt', *KD* I/1, 89ff; I/1, 88ff.

⁶ *GD*, 36f., cf. 270.

Governed by eternity's priority over time he came to make a very sharp distinction between revelation as such from Scripture and from preaching. Revelation, being eternal, is in time but *not* ongoing and 'never took place as such'.⁷ This construal of God's Word seems to be more bipolar than 'triune', in that revelation is posited at the one end in eternity, and Scripture and preaching at the other end in time. McCormack is right to remark that 'such a statement still stands under the impress of the eschatological perspective which had governed *Romans II*.'⁸ It also suggests that the 'modification' observed in section 2D was part of a process of fluctuation between the governing eschatological eternity-time dialectic and the new emerged view of the resurrection as not only before and after history but also as embracing it and in it.

But in §3 Barth took more seriously the conception of God's Word as 'triune'. Seeking to ground preaching in Scripture and finally in revelation, he modified the construal of an 'eternal' revelation as 'not ongoing' and 'not taking place' and acknowledged the concrete 'there and then' of the incarnation as God's speaking.⁹ The result of this, as McCormack remarks, is a significant shift from a radical, eschatological view of the 'eternal' revelation to a moderate, christological view of revelation in history.¹⁰ On this basis Barth was now able to conceive of a real relationship between revelation, Scripture and preaching as the three forms of God's Word. In what follows we will examine this relationship in its two directions, i.e.

⁷ *GD*, 17; *Unt1*, 20.

⁸ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 338.

⁹ 'Already in his prolegomena lectures of 1924, Barth was describing the subject matter of the Bible in terms of the formula *Deus dixit*—thereby giving evidence of the fact that the focal point of his attention was now increasingly on the incarnation of God in history.' Bruce McCormack, 'Historical Criticism and Dogmatic Interest in Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of the New Testament', *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective*, ed. by Mark S. Burrows and Paul Rorem (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 322-338 (338n36). See section 3A.3.1 for more detail.

¹⁰ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 327.

the epistemological tracing-back, and the historical passing-down.

3A.2 Epistemological Tracing-Back to *Deus dixit*

For Barth, Christian preaching must constantly trace its origin back [*zurückgehen*] to the historical basis in Scripture and the eternal basis in revelation, so that it may remain concrete as the Word of God.¹¹ In this epistemological process two stages are included: the initial tracing-back from preaching to Scripture, and the further tracing-back from Scripture to revelation.

3A.2.1 From Preaching to Scripture

According to Barth, concrete preaching aims to make present the Word of God by working with both Scripture and the Spirit. Working with Scripture means the making present of revelation in Scripture through history; working with the Spirit denotes the making present of revelation in preaching by the Spirit. The loss of either aspect would be disastrous. Had preaching to do only with either the letter of Scripture or the illumination of the Spirit, it would become either mere historical reference or the product of fantasy. As a result, revelation would remain distant from contemporary believers, and preaching would fail to be concrete.

This epistemological tracing-back to both Scripture and the Spirit presupposes history's role in the mediation of God's Word. It is through history that Scripture (and in it revelation) is handed down to present-day believers by the Spirit:

Through the Spirit revelation is as present and close to us as holy Scripture is through history, not without holy Scripture, but in it and

¹¹ *GD*, 36f.

by it, and yet in it and by it it is the Spirit that makes revelation itself present and close.¹²

It is of great importance to note from this passage that history is not placed on a par with the Holy Spirit in relation to their making known of revelation. The Spirit is the subject which makes revelation known, whereas history merely serves as the medium through which Scripture is made known. How close Scripture is to us through history is debatable, but history is still the requisite, indispensable medium. In this sense it can be argued that, just as revelation is not known without Scripture, so Scripture is not known without history.

In order to truly speak of God, present-day preachers have to 'place themselves in a *series*, on the ground of a certain piece of *history*, under an *order*',¹³ in a 'fresh attention to the initial historical datum'.¹⁴ The identity of the true Christian church and the authenticity of true Christian preaching then rely on the church's unceasing tracing-back through a certain chain of history (that of Scripture) to a certain point in history (revelation). In this relation, history is presented as a necessary medium, because for Barth concrete preaching must be historically rooted in Scripture and in the original revelation.

3A.2.2 From Scripture to Revelation

According to Barth the step from the church back to Scripture is necessary but nevertheless insufficient. His affirmation of Scripture as the historical source of preaching is immediately followed by a denial of Scripture as its ultimate origin.

¹² *Unt1*, 45. The English translation in *GD*, 36 ('The Spirit makes revelation as present and close to us as history does holy scripture') can be misleading in regard to the role of history in the making known of Scripture.

¹³ *GD*, 53.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

For him, just as preaching needs a previous historical basis in Scripture, Scripture also needs a source even further back in something which is more than, and indeed on the other side of, a historical datum, i.e. in revelation itself.¹⁵

This view of history as a hindrance to the mediation of revelation finds its root in Barth's insistence on God's inaccessibility and incomprehensibility, which '[do] not cease but [become] very great in [God's] revelation'.¹⁶ Revelation can never be tamed and should never be placed at human disposal. As a result, it is constantly hindered even in preaching by a human inability to attain to it, as well as always remaining concealed even in Scripture by 'the separating distance of everything historical [*Historischen*]'.¹⁷ The hiddenness of revelation, then, compels Barth to regard history as a requisite but untrustworthy medium of revelation.

To conclude, in Barth's view, Christian preaching as the epistemological starting-point of dogmatic theology needs to constantly trace its origin upstream through and beyond history. The tracing-back [*Zurückgehen*] *through* history to Scripture is necessary, but it will not be complete unless the tracing-back is pushed *beyond* history to revelation. As the passively required medium in the working-back through history, history is in nature still an active component in the negative concealment of God's Word which needs to be transcended in the working-back beyond history. In an attempt to uphold God in revelation as supremely and absolutely the only speaking Subject in *Deus dixit*, Barth comes to view everything else involved in history inevitably and properly as relative, ambiguous, distant and fleshly.¹⁸ It is unsurprising, then, to find that the

¹⁵ Ibid., 56.

¹⁶ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷ Ibid.; *Unt1*, 46.

¹⁸ *GD*, 55-57.

epistemological tracing-back ends in Barth's insistence on the hiddenness of the *Deus dixit*, as well as in his opposition to the historicisation (*Historisierung*) of revelation in Scripture and of revelation into revealedness by the removal of the barrier between the two.¹⁹

3A.3 Historical Passing-Down of *Deus dixit*

The epistemological tracing-back from preaching through and beyond history ends with God's Word in revelation, but precisely there Barth finds the starting-point of a return trip of the historical passing-down of revelation, which constitutes his explication of the historical relation between the three forms of God's Word.

3A.3.1 Revelation

In chapter one of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, 'The Word of God as Revelation', the revelation-history problem is explicitly treated twice, in §3 and §6 respectively. In §3 the framework is the doctrine of *Deus dixit*; in §6 that of the incarnation. Within slightly different frameworks, the two treatments take strikingly similar routes. In each of the treatments, as we shall see, Barth first acknowledges the historicity of revelation with an emphasis put on the unveiling side of revelation. He then expresses qualifications on the historicity of revelation, in an attempt to maintain a veiling in unveiling, a hiddenness in revelation, thus distinguishing revelation from history as such.

Unveiling of Revelation

In both §3 and §6 Barth takes up the revelation-history problem by acknowledging the temporality or historicity of revelation, because the *Deus dixit* means an address

¹⁹ Ibid., 58f., cf. 211.

and disclosure, and the incarnation means a real encounter of God with humanity in history.²⁰ In §3, Barth states that ‘the *Deus dixit* means a here and now [, or] rather a then and there, for it is better to say that there is no avoiding the offensive “*there* in Palestine” and “*then* in the years A.D. 1-30”’.²¹ The ‘there and then’ is as much ‘offensive’ as unavoidable, for there has to be an actual and concrete starting-point for revelation to address, to disclose, and to be passed down in time and space.

At the end of §6.1 of the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth states that:

to inquire into [i.e. revelation’s] possibility ... we must first speak about its temporality or historicity, that is, about Jesus Christ.²²

This passage demonstrates two things. First, although Barth feels ‘compelled’ to speak of the *possibility* of revelation, he seems in effect to bracket this problem by appealing directly to Jesus Christ, who is later depicted as ‘the possibility of the possibility’ and ‘the actually existent possibility of revelation’,²³ the latter of which can mean nothing but the *reality* of revelation. Already in Göttingen, therefore, the inquiry about revelation does not start with a presupposed possibility of it, but with Jesus Christ as its actual existence or reality. Second, Jesus Christ is the reality of revelation, in that He is also its temporality or *historicity*. If revelation is to be revelation at all, if God is to *really* reveal Himself to humanity, a *real* encounter must take place between Him and humanity. The basic logic is: revelation is possible *for us*, because it has really been established *by God*.²⁴ Historicity, then, is an

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 59; *Unt1*, 70.

²² *GD*, 133f.

²³ Ibid., 141.

²⁴ This insistence is carried into *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* especially in §14 when Barth claims that ‘[r]evelation of God to humanity becomes possible from God in such a way and not otherwise that God’s Son or Word becomes human’, and then elaborates upon the necessity, the meaning, and the reality of the incarnation (*ChD*, 289; cf. 290, 297, 304). Cf. ‘The question whether

indispensible dimension of the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the reality of revelation. It is indispensable, not because revelation relies on it in order to be real, but in that God *really* became a human being as Jesus Christ in history.

Moreover, the notion of historicity is indispensable also in connection with the *concreteness* of revelation. In revelation, God is genuinely disclosed by really encountering humanity. But the reality of revelation, as Barth stresses, is not general or abstract, but specific and concrete. Earlier in §3 Barth makes the claim that '*Deus dixit* indicates a special, once-for-all, contingent event';²⁵ here in §6 too the incarnation as the reality of revelation is said to be a 'once and for all' event taking place 'in history and in time'.²⁶ The concreteness of revelation understood as its contingency, as McCormack observes, clearly constitutes a 'subtle but momentous shift of accent'²⁷ from Barth's earlier conception of revelation as the 'eternal' Word of God over against Scripture and preaching. The real Subject of revelation is no longer an eternal moment standing outside history, but a concrete and contingent person in history. In addition, just as revelation itself is concrete and

it is possible to speak of God's revelation is ruled, one way or another, by [its] *reality*. It is possible then to speak of God's revelation when it *takes place*', Karl Barth, 'Gottes Offenbarung nach der Lehre der christlichen Kirche' (1927), idem, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, ed. by Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1994), 217-295 (237).

In a paragraph discussing this matter, Gorringer claims that '[i]t was only in the interval between [*Die christliche Dogmatik in Entwurf*] and the *Church Dogmatics* that Barth finally attained to complete clarity on the need to put reality before possibility', stating that in the *ChD* 'Barth spoke of both the objective and subjective possibility of revelation, only then establishing their reality.' Gorringer supports this claim, however, by referring to a passage in I/2 where Barth confesses to have been forced by Karl Heim to reconsider the reality-possibility relationship on the *subjective* aspect of revelation, i.e. the certainty of *faith*. Based on the findings of this thesis, it appears that already in the Göttingen period Barth was very clear about the priority of reality to possibility at least on the *objective* side of revelation. See Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 107; and *KD* I/2, 64; I/2, 58. The foregoing discussion is important to this thesis, in the sense that only when the reality of the incarnation is firmly established prior to the possibility of revelation can we speak of the real and concrete historicity of revelation. And our contention is that Barth made that determination in the *Unterricht* in 1924.

²⁵ *GD*, 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 131.

²⁷ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 340.

historically contingent, so is its encounter with humanity, which takes place in absolute singularity and uniqueness.²⁸ Thus writes Barth, ‘the issue in revelation is not the manifestation of a general relation between the finite and the infinite, between time and eternity, but this concrete, contingent, historically accidental *fact* [*historisch-zufällige Faktum*]’.²⁹

In short, in face of the fact that God really speaks to human beings in a genuine and concrete encounter with them, Barth has come to the realisation that the incarnation is the historicity of revelation. He can now even go as far as to acknowledge that ‘Christian revelation and Christian faith are historical [*historisch*]’.³⁰

revelation and faith are historical in the NT in exactly the same sense as in the OT; namely, they are *prähistorisch* and *urgeschichtlich* in the sense that what happens in time is withdrawn from direct intuition ...³¹

This passage is significant in at least two senses. Compared with the 1922 *Römerbrief*, it indicates a moderation of the term *Urgeschichte*. Being *urgeschichtlich* and being *prähistorisch* mean the same thing now, because the hiddenness of God is His hiddenness *in history*.³² Moreover, compared with *The Resurrection of the Dead*, we can detect here some expansion of Barth’s application of the notion of *Urgeschichte*, which, once exclusively applied to the resurrection, is now extended to the entirety of the incarnation.

²⁸ *GD*, 142f.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 148.

³¹ *Ibid.*; translation slightly revised per *Unt1*, 182.

³² McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 363. See also McCormack, ‘Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 34.

Veiling of Revelation

Having recognised and acknowledged the historicity of revelation for genuinely theological reasons, Barth promptly begins taking all necessary steps to avoid the possible detrimental effects this might bring about. In §3, he defines the ‘there and then’ of *Deus dixit* not as history in the usual sense, but as ‘*qualified history [qualifizierte Geschichte]*’.³³ This term suggests that only under carefully defined circumstances can revelation be deemed history.

At this point, it is advisable to recall the notion of *Urgeschichte* which, meaning not only the beginning but also the end of history, forms the boundary of the whole history.³⁴ With the framework this notion provides, Barth is able to conceive revelation as so remarkable and unique that it does not confront history in antithesis but rather brackets that antithesis from the other side. This important conception is explicitly presented in this passage:

The Word of God ... the here and now of revelation is an event which takes place in time and space (otherwise there would be no here and now), but *insofar as it is revelation*, it does not stand in the series with others which take place in time and space. It is related to the whole contingent reality (to which it belongs!) in the same way as (but this side-glance at a philosophical correlation is made only as an analogy!) the notion of boundary or of idea [*Idee*] is related to the notion of reason: the former does not negate the latter but puts it in brackets, ... coming with principial superiority *over against* it.³⁵

What is highlighted is a divine supremacy which, in distinction from human

³³ *GD*, 60; *Unt1*, 72. Cf. I/2, 58. Cf. Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, ed. by John K. Riches and Joseph Fessio, trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 625; McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 340; Greene, *Christology in Cultural Perspective* (2004), 303.

³⁴ See sections 2D.2.1 and 3C.2.

³⁵ *GD*, 60; translation revised per *Unt1*, 72.

contingent reality, is able at will to enter that reality and even to commandeer that reality for its use. Revelation belongs, according to Barth, to the contingent reality of human history in such divine supremacy that it refuses to be relegated to the historical series where other events belong.

In §6 we find the aforementioned divine supremacy interpreted in terms of or rather, extended into, two further notions. First, God's supremacy means for Barth the hiddenness of revelation, i.e. the famous notion that 'even in His revelation, *precisely* in His revelation God is the hidden God'.³⁶ Barth feels compelled to insist on the hiddenness of God even in His revelation, because for him God is the living God, who is 'the subject that escapes our grasp, our attempt to make him an object',³⁷ and therefore the free Lord of all things whose freedom is not limited even by His own deity.³⁸ Second, the divine supremacy means for Barth the absolute particularity or singularity of that 'historically accidental fact' of revelation. This 'historical' event of revelation is so unique that its transmission or passing-down is utterly reserved for God Himself and God alone, therefore demanding the 'radical dedivinization of the world and nature and history'.³⁹ For this reason Barth refuses to grant any vantage point to the immediate future of Jesus of Nazareth, or to any other periods in history, dismissing as irrelevant the historical proximity to Him in terms of human recognition of revelation, despite the fact that the event of the

³⁶ *GD*, 135; translation slightly revised per *Untl*, 165.

³⁷ *GD*, 136.

³⁸ Assertion of God's life and sovereignty to such an extreme is radical. Barth seems aware of this when he brings forth these hypothetic questions (rather than giving an affirmative claim): what if God is so living and so free that He is revealed in hiddenness, that He becomes another whilst remaining Himself, that He makes Himself known as an object in His subjectivity—that is, what if 'God be so much God that without ceasing to be God He can also be, and is willing to be, not God as well'? *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 144.

revelation of Jesus does takes up a time span in human history.⁴⁰

3A.3.2 Scripture

We now carry on the exploration of the historical passing-down of God's Word from revelation to Scripture. As the historical basis of Christian preaching, Scripture finds its basis in the *Deus dixit* which occurred in Jesus Christ. It is then observed that there is a historical series along the course of the mediation of God's Word from revelation through Scripture to preaching.

In saying so, Barth intends to highlight Scripture as the connecting-middle which prevents the church from falsely equating itself with revelation. Scripture, understood as the second 'address' of the one Word of God, serves as the necessary and exclusive mediation of revelation to the church, whereas the church is deemed by Barth as by no means immediate to or unconditionally contemporaneous with revelation. The significance of Scripture, in his view, lies not in its being the religious record of the historical origins of Christianity, but in the fact that it is the historical dimension [*historische Größe*] on which the beginning of the relation between revelation and the church is grounded. It is that which is mediated, rather than the medium, that really matters.⁴¹ Nonetheless, Scripture is still the necessary middle between revelation and church which cannot be missing.⁴²

Now with Scripture positioned as the linking middle, how is God's Word passed down? Or, to use Barth's terminology, how does church become

⁴⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁴¹ Ibid., 204-206.

⁴² This point is reminiscent of Barth's claim in the 1922 *Römerbrief* that history as a whole stands as the *Mittel* between the beginning and the end (R2, 105, 121), deprived of reality-value and provided only with witness-value. In the Göttingen dogmatic lectures Scripture as a *Mittel* between revelation and preaching is obviously attributed with more (but not totally) positive significance.

contemporised with revelation through Scripture? In adherence to the Protestant principle to uphold Scripture as the authority in the historical relation between revelation and the church, Barth contends that the presence of revelation in the church is not static or fixed. It is the sort of presence that must be ‘established and sought and found and given *afresh*’ by way of Scripture in each individual period of that series.⁴³ God’s Word must be passed down, and the contemporaneity of revelation with church is to be established, but Barth insists that this must not be done at the expense of 1) the temporality or historicity of revelation, which must ‘have an effect and shadow on the recognition of a temporally conditioned form of the *communication* of revelation too’,⁴⁴ or 2) the concealment of revelation, which has a historical relation with the ‘temporally and historically [*historisch*] bound form of its historical [*geschichtlich*] propagation and communication to later generations’.⁴⁵ Thus, Scripture is ‘the normative historical [*geschichtlich*] principle that gives [the church] birth’ that cannot be cancelled.⁴⁶

Barth argues that the contemporaneity between Christ and the church is never a static fact possessed in full by the church, for Christ is the crucified one ‘whose life is revealed in the church only to the extent that it *becomes* manifest to it (not only *in* it but *to* it and against it!)’,⁴⁷ and His ‘becoming-manifest’ is to be sought exclusively in Scripture, not in an immediate relation to God presupposed by the modern concept of history. The church can have revelation become contemporaneous with it only by first relegating the presumption of an immediate presence, and then accepting the

⁴³ *GD*, 207; *Unt1*, 252.

⁴⁴ *GD*, 207; translation slightly revised per *Unt1*, 252.

⁴⁵ *GD*, 207; translation slightly revised per *Unt1*, 252.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 208; translation slightly revised per *Unt1*, 253 to preserve Barth’s purposeful distinction between ‘*offenbart ist*’ and ‘*offenbar wird*’.

fact that revelation is historically mediated to it through Scripture.⁴⁸

In summary, as the historical passing-down of God's Word, Scripture is necessary. In this regard, the paradox or offense of temporality and historicity has to be maintained. The present church will not be allowed a static contemporaneity with revelation; that is to say, the church's own historicity must be conditioned by and subdued under a superior criterion that lies in history: Scripture as the historical mediation of God's Word.

3A.3.3 Preaching

Moving down to the furthest end of the historical passing-down of God's Word, we find Christian preaching totally conditioned and governed by the authority of both revelation and Scripture. Despite the entering into history of revelation (and thus to that extent the becoming-historical of revelation), the human witnesses to revelation in Scripture, and the subsequent development of both in the course of history, revelation still remains revelation, holding as firmly as ever its divine supremacy in sharp distinction from Scripture and preaching in its relation to both. Even though Christian preaching in the church is 'the last and supreme authority that we know in history',⁴⁹ Christian preachers must nonetheless be aware of and content with their status as 'completely empty [vessels]' in their lowliness as God's servants,⁵⁰ as God's speaking is and remains the truth proper to God alone. In short, in the historical passing-down of revelation, preachers stand in a position of authority, but ultimately 'being human and historical they are to be differentiated from the true authority and freedom that are divine', i.e. the authority and freedom 'reserved for Scripture' by

⁴⁸ Ibid., 210; *Unt1*, 256.

⁴⁹ *GD*, 270.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 271, cf. 245, 254.

virtue of revelation.⁵¹

3A.4 Brief Summary

In this section we have dealt with Barth's concept of the historical relation of the three forms of God's Word by way of a round trip via two different routes. Although still an obstacle, history is viewed nonetheless as an indispensable medium through which revelation is really and concretely communicated. We have also demonstrated that the ontological condition for this conception of a real relationship between the three forms of God's Word is a shift that took place in §3 of the lectures, i.e. to a christological rather than eschatological view of revelation. Taking the 'there and then' of the incarnation with all seriousness, Barth has come to the realisation that the incarnation is the historicity of revelation.

Now that the christological view of revelation is established, it will remain pretty much in force in Barth's theology in the rest of the 1920s and the most part of the 1930s. How this christological view of revelation is played out in the development of Barth's concept of history in this period will be the topic of the rest of this chapter as well as the next.

3B Subject-Predicate Relation Announced: 'Church and Theology' (1925)

Before the treatment of Barth's second dogmatic enterprise in section 3C, this short section will be devoted to the elaboration of Barth's concept of history as seen in 'Church and Theology', an address that Barth gave in October, 1925.⁵² We choose this address, because in it Barth for the first time spells out his clearest articulation of

⁵¹ Ibid., 267.

⁵² Busch, *Karl Barth*, 164.

the relation of revelation to history in terms of the relation of a subject to its predicate. As we shall see, this formula will then become the motto which encapsulates Barth's whole concept of history.

In this address Barth agrees with Thurneysen's definition of history as the wholly incomprehensible interim [*Zwischenzustand*] between creation and redemption in which humankind resides.⁵³ One can hardly fail to relate the image of *Zwischenzustand* to that of *Zwischen den Zeiten*; both are in favour of the so-called dialectical theologians because of their acute awareness that this world and this age are but an interlude between the two major events, i.e. God's creation and re-creation of all things.

After describing history as an 'interim', Barth goes on to state that history is more than this, adding to history a negative side and a positive side. The debate with Schmidt-Japing, which Barth refers to in this work, provides a good example. Schmidt-Japing holds that history and revelation belong to one body,⁵⁴ and that in discarding history one runs the risk of losing the living God who effects and rules history. Barth refutes this view fiercely, insisting that just as history does not effect salvation, so Jesus does not come to build history.⁵⁵ On Barth's account, history is the darkness into which the true Light came, and which did not apprehend the Light. 'Whoever speaks of history speaks with it non-revelation. History means in theology just what Pontius Pilate means in the Creed.'⁵⁶

⁵³ Eduard Thurneysen, 'Der Prolog zum Johannes-Evangelium', in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, Jg. 3 (1925), Heft IX, 12-37 (27). Cited in Karl Barth, 'Kirche und Theologie' (1925), idem, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, ed. by Holger Finze (Zürich: TVZ, 1990), 644-682 (659). English translation: Barth, 'Church and Theology' (1925), *Theology and Church*, 286-306 (292).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 657f.; ET, 292.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 658. This part of Barth's rebuttal to Schmidt-Japing is not seen in the English translation.

⁵⁶ Barth, 'Kirche und Theologie', *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, 659; ET, 292. The sentence 'Whoever speaks of history speaks with it non-revelation' is missing from the English translation.

In addition to this negative side of history, there for Barth is also a positive side to it. The positive side of history rests in the fact that history has been somehow assumed to bear witness to the true Light.⁵⁷ But he also makes it clear that this positive side is attributed by God to history and does not lie in history itself. In fact, history ceases to be the subject when it is assumed to become a witness to the true Subject, God.

Thus far nothing appears that is not also found in Barth's previous works. What is new is a formula with which Barth manages to articulate the relation of revelation to history, a formula which he would repeat several times in his later works and which would become very famous:

History can indeed become a predicate of revelation, but revelation never ever becomes the predicate of history.⁵⁸

We mentioned in section 3A that Barth's conception of the relation of revelation to history stabilised in 1924 with his christological view of revelation and his construal of the incarnation as the historicity of revelation. Now in 1925 the new found clarity has come to an articulate and simple expression in this subject-predicate relationship. What is highlighted is that the two are *related*, but only so in an *irreversible* relationship. This announcement would undergo some minor changes in its later versions,⁵⁹ but its definite form is already found here in 1925.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.: 'Geschichte kann wohl ein Prädikat der Offenbarung werden, aber nie und nimmer wird die Offenbarung zum Prädikat der Geschichte.'

⁵⁹ Its immediate recurrence took place in 1926 when Barth proclaimed in §36 'Die Gegenwart Jesu Christi', *Unt3*, 450: 'Revelation is a point in history. Otherwise it would not be revelation (Joh. 1:14). But the flesh is not revelation; the *Word* that became flesh is. The point in history is not the Revealer; *God* at this point of history is. He remains *Subject*; He does not become the predicate of history. *His* day is the day of revelation, not a day of history. It is *also* a day of history, but insofar as it is such a day, it is not the day of revelation.' This formula would then recur in the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* (see footnote 70 in section 3C.2); in Barth, 'Gottes Offenbarung

3C Revelation as *Urgeschichte*: Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf (1927)

In October 1925 Barth moved to Münster to take the post of Professor of Dogmatics and New Testament Exegesis,⁶⁰ and was to stay there until March 1930 when he moved to Bonn. In Münster Barth revised his prolegomena lectures, which were published in 1927 under the title *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*. This work is regarded by McCormack as adding ‘little that was decisively new’ to the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, as ‘the fundamental dogmatic decisions which control even *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 were already made in 1924/5 in Göttingen’,⁶¹ and Barth was to abandon this project some years later.⁶² This being the case, *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* still provides a new and definite framework within which to analyse his view of the relation of revelation to history. In what follows we will examine §15 ‘Weissagung und Erfüllung’, where Barth explicitly lays out the conception of revelation as *Urgeschichte*.

The category of *Urgeschichte* first appeared in Barth’s work in 1911,⁶³ and then it caught Barth’s interest when it was introduced to him by Thurneysen in 1920 as one of Overbeck’s insights.⁶⁴ In the revision of the *Römerbrief* in 1921 this notion played a central role,⁶⁵ and then constantly appeared explicitly or implicitly

nach der Lehre der christlichen Kirche’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, 275; and in the 1938 I/2 (see footnote 85 in section 4C.2). For more detail, see the two footnotes indicated.

⁶⁰ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 162ff.; McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 374.

⁶¹ McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 375.

⁶² For detail see *ibid.*, 421ff., and ‘Introduction’ in Chapter Four of this thesis.

⁶³ Barth, ‘Menschenrecht und Bürgerpflicht’ (1911), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1909-1914*, 363.

⁶⁴ Barth, ‘Unsettled Question for Theology Today’ (1920), *Theology and Church*, 55-73. Thurneysen, 21. Januar 1920, in *Barth-Thurneysen Briefwechsel: Band I: 1913-1921*, 364-365 (365).

⁶⁵ *R2*, 6, 219, 231, 233; *R2E*, 30, 237, 248f., 250.

on a number of occasions in his subsequent works.⁶⁶ But it was not until in the 1927 dogmatic work that Barth decided to appropriate this category for a comprehensive theological construction of the ‘distinctive relationship between revelation and history’ by explicitly designating ‘the incarnation of the Word, the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, as “*urgeschichtlich* event”’.⁶⁷ Barth then expounds three dimensions of this statement.

3C.1 More than Supra-History, Revelation is History

First, the statement that ‘revelation is *Urgeschichte*’ means for Barth that ‘revelation is *history*’, and the designation of revelation as history means that it is more than just supra-history.⁶⁸ He maintains that God does not stay in the *opera ad intra* of the Trinity; rather, He freely chooses to have a real encounter with humanity in time in the *opus ad extra* of the revelation. Revelation first took place ‘there and then’, and from there it encounters human existence in our ‘here and now’. The expression that revelation is supra-history falls out of favour with Barth, since it easily leads into the conception of a God who always resides in His eternity, thereby calling into question the reality of the incarnation, which is the possibility of revelation. To be sure, Barth affirms the existence of this eternal history, or supra-history, inside the triune God Himself. But in addition to it Barth endeavours to make it clear that this

⁶⁶ Barth, *Die Theologie Zwinglis 1922/1923*, 66; Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, 58; English translation: *The Resurrection of the Dead*, 110; Karl Barth, ‘Das Schriftprinzip und seine Begründung’, in idem, *Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften 1923*, ed. by Eberhard Busch (Zürich: TVZ, 1998), 63-103 (90); §4 ‘Die Enzyklopädie’, in Karl Barth, *Die Theologie Schleiermachers: Vorlesung Göttingen, Wintersemester 1923/1924*, ed. by Dietrich Ritschl (Zürich: TVZ, 1978), 245-317 (273, 276), English translation: ‘The Encyclopedia’, *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, 137-177 (152-154); *Unt1*, 182, *GD*, 148.

⁶⁷ *ChD*, 310; cf. 309. Neither before nor after 1927 did Barth place the notion of *Urgeschichte* and that of revelation in such close connection. In the *Unterricht*, the notion of *Urgeschichte* was left almost totally untreated, with only one occurrence of the term ‘*urgeschichtlich*’ when Barth describes revelation and faith as *prähistorisch* and *urgeschichtlich* (*Unt1*, 182; *GD*, 148). Later in *I/2*, 58 it will be explicitly discarded. See footnote 85 in section 4C.2.

⁶⁸ *ChD*, 310.

supra-history in God is *not yet* revelation, because revelation means a real encounter between God and humanity. Therefore, in that *Urgeschichte* is not only supra-history but also history, revelation is also history, not in a reduced but in the genuine sense.⁶⁹

3C.2 More than History in General, Revelation is Particular History

Second, the statement that ‘revelation is *Urgeschichte*’ means for Barth that revelation, originating from the eternal supra-history and entering into human history, is more than mere history in general. Like the notion of supra-history alone, the notion of history as such, too, is insufficient to account for revelation construed as *Urgeschichte*. The subject-predicate relation of revelation to history, first formulated in 1925, recurs here. Revelation is history, but history is not therefore revelation:

History is a predicate of revelation, but revelation does not therefore become a predicate of history. God acts in history, but history is not therefore God’s revealing act. ... One cannot speak of history first in order to speak of revelation subsequently in some sort of application with some sort of amplification and emphasis. One can only speak of revelation first, in order to speak of history subsequently by way of explanation.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ In Eberhard Jüngel, *Barth-Studien* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1982), 144, Jüngel explores Barth’s conception, in *ChD*, of revelation as *urgeschichtlich*. This adjective is misinterpreted in the English translation as ‘unhistorical’ in Jüngel, ‘Barth’s Theological Beginnings’, *Karl Barth*, 39.

⁷⁰ *ChD*, 311f. Whilst it is stated in the 1925 ‘Kirche und Theologie’ that ‘[h]istory *can indeed become* a predicate of revelation, but revelation never ever becomes the predicate of history’, the 1927 formulation is ‘[h]istory *is* a predicate of revelation, but revelation does not therefore become a predicate of history.’ It is not certain whether there is any decisive difference between ‘can indeed become’ and ‘is’. One could argue that the expression ‘can become’ is revised, because it implies a possibility based on the ability on the part of history as such, whilst ‘is’ clearly refers to a reality.

Following the 1927 dogmatics, there are two more occurrences of this formulation, in 1927 and 1938, and both speak first of revelation and then of history, thus demonstrating stricter adherence to the fundamental precedence of revelation over history. See Barth, ‘Gottes Offenbarung nach der Lehre der christlichen Kirche’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, 275; and I/2, 58; *KD* I/2, 64. For detailed explication of these two later occurrences see footnote 85 in section 4C.2.

Revelation is more than history, because it is the case neither that history became divine, nor that someone or something in history is chosen to become revelation, but that God Himself freely enters into history and becomes revelation. To use Barth's term, revelation possesses a 'more-than-historicity' [*Mehr-als-Geschichtlichkeit*].⁷¹

Now the attribution of revelation as more than history means for Barth that revelation is particular history or qualified history. This is the case because here we have to do with revelation, and the Subject of revelation in history is not history but God. Revelation, as the revelation of God, is not necessary within history but is totally contingent upon God. Earlier Barth depicts revelation as history, thus adding the notion of history to that of supra-history; now he depicts revelation as particular history, thus adding something special to the general notion of history. That special element is the act of God's speaking: 'God in person speaks to us, and that is the particular historicity of revelation.'⁷² The general concept of history, then, is distinguished from the particular concept of history of revelation. What is also at stake is the *particular* historicity of *this concrete* event of revelation. Consequently, Barth places the investigation of revelation understood as *Urgeschichte* in the specific discipline of theology and dogmatics.⁷³ This particular historicity sets revelation out of the reach of historical science [*Geschichtswissenschaft*], historical inspection [*Geschichtsbetrachtung*] and historical depiction [*Geschichtsbild*].⁷⁴ Not even Christian faith as such is adequate for the task of 'opening the closed door of history' to trace this *Urgeschichte*.⁷⁵ In summary, in virtue of the particular

⁷¹ *ChD*, 312.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 313f.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 314-316.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 317, *Zusatz f.*

historicity of revelation, ‘faith in *revelation* is grounded in the *historical* revelation’.⁷⁶ But in virtue of its *particular* historicity:

revelation is to be thought as ... that indissoluble unity of event, speaking and hearing, as it is objectively attested in the Bible! Whoever wants to *find* it must *seek* it and not anything else, not merely that which it also is. Otherwise he will never find it.⁷⁷

3C.3 Revelation Transforming History into the History of Promise

Third, the statement that ‘revelation is *Urgeschichte*’ means that the event of revelation has an effect on history as such. Barth maintains that history in general, although not revelation, still possesses some positive qualities. For one thing, history can bear witness to revelation.⁷⁸ For another, history, being in need of meaning, is capable of receiving meaning from revelation, which is the prototype, meaning and fulfilment of all history. Revelation as *Urgeschichte* takes effect when history receives meaning from it, that is, when there arises ‘a history in history’, which Barth calls the ‘history of promise’.⁷⁹

In Barth’s view, *Urgeschichte* and the history of promise are linked in an irreversible but genuine relationship. This relationship is *irreversible*, in that *Urgeschichte* is original and effective, and the history of promise is derivative and effected. It is *genuine*, in that *Urgeschichte* takes effect in history by giving rise to the history of promise. More specifically, *Urgeschichte* is effective in history, not by being situated at one point in history, but by *embracing* all history. The effects of *Urgeschichte* are not simply after-effects. If *Urgeschichte* were effective only in

⁷⁶ Ibid., 318.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 319.

its own time, then it could only become decreasingly effective in the age after it, and not effective at all in the age before it. But Barth makes it clear that every age in history is capable of becoming the history of promise, because *Urgeschichte* embraces all history, transcending historical distance. Therefore, although as such ‘*Urgeschichte* has no historical continuity’,⁸⁰ it still ‘has effects directly as the speech of God to human beings of the nearest as well as the most distant ages.’⁸¹

Barth concludes by writing the following:

Revelation is more than eternal history in that it is a moment in the temporal history. It is also more than temporal history in that it is not bound up to the irreversible series of temporal history, but itself the centre around which the remainder of the history closes into a circle, uniformly but also distinctively as Before and After. And the positive relation of all history to *Urgeschichte* consists in this: that history *can* be related to revelation as the peripheral to the centre, as the promise to the fulfilment, as the Advent to Christmas. Unlike *Urgeschichte*, history is not revelation, but it, in knowing about revelation, can bear witness to it, have a *share* in it, and thus be qualified history of the *second* order, that is, history which takes place on the plane of *Urgeschichte*⁸²

3C.4 Brief Summary

It is beyond doubt that §15.1 of *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* constitutes the most comprehensive formulation of Barth’s concept of history in his doctrine of revelation up to this point of his career. Having devised the motto about the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history, he kept seeking to refine and

⁸⁰ Ibid.: ‘Die Urgeschichte hat keine geschichtliche Kontinuität.’

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid., 320. To the extent that history plays its proper role as promise and the Advent bearing witness to the *Urgeschichte*, Barth proposes that the problem of ‘revelation and history’ be replaced by ‘revelation and church’. *ChD*, 320f. See also ‘Kirche und Theologie’, *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, 660; ET, 293.

expand it, and found the category of *Urgeschichte*. By way of a very broad interpretation of *Urgeschichte* (as supra-historical, temporally historical, and historical in a particular sense), Barth was able to form a multi-layered conception of revelation in which both its immanent side (in history) and its transcendent side (not of history) were preserved.

Precisely this two-sidedness is probably the reason why this conception would soon fall out of favour on both sides. On the one hand, Friedrich Gogarten criticised Barth for failing to stay consistent with his self-acknowledged starting-point, i.e. the incarnation in history. And this, according to Gogarten, led to the fact that Barth's conception of revelation as *Urgeschichte* still presupposed a realm above history. In short, Barth was not 'historical' enough.⁸³ On the other hand, Barth himself would become more radically christocentric come the 1930s, and find the category of *Urgeschichte* 'too historical', in the realisation that he was still starting from 'history' of some sort in order to give account to revelation. The result, then, is an explicit renouncement of the category of *Urgeschichte* in the late 1930s.⁸⁴

3D Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have shown 1) Barth's shift from an eschatological to a christological view of revelation in 1924 in Göttingen, which enabled his construal of the three forms of God's Word as the communication of revelation in history; 2) his

⁸³ Friedrich Gogarten, 'Karl Barths Dogmatik', *Theologische Rundschau*, nf 1 (1929), 75. Cited in McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 401. In response to Gogarten's criticism, it can be argued that the incarnation, as Barth's new theological starting-point, was never simply human-historical but human-historical with a divine-eternal origin. For this reason, Gogarten could disagree with Barth's conception of the incarnation as in history with its origin above history, but the criticism that Barth did not remain true to his new theological starting-point does not seem justified.

⁸⁴ I/2, 58. See footnote 85 in section 4C.2.

formulation of the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history in 1925; and 3) his appropriation of the category of *Urgeschichte*, in 1927, for an experimental, comprehensive conception of revelation as above history, in history, and in history in a particular sense. Once seen as an impossibility made possible by God eschatologically in the resurrection, revelation in history is now seen as a reality brought about by God christologically in the incarnation.

Chapter Four

Speaking God Revealed in History (II): *Church Dogmatics I (1932-1938)*

Introduction

In March 1930 Barth moved to Bonn, staying there for five years before he was expelled from Germany and moved to Basel. In the turbulent decade of the 1930s Barth was alert to the external factors which he viewed as menaces to the Word of God. He defined theology as a function of and within the church,¹ emphasised on the first commandment while warning against the danger of having ‘other gods’ than the true one God,² appealed for continuous, single-minded dedication to theology ‘as if nothing had happened’,³ strengthened his firm insistence on the primacy of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God and the one source of church’s proclamation, rejected any other lords in the form of ‘prevailing ideological and political convictions’,⁴ and directed a loud ‘No’ to what he considered the dangerous possibility of any contact point between God and humanity.⁵

Regarding the development of Barth’s theology, two events stand out in the 1930s. The first is the publication of his famous *Anselm* in 1931, a book based on his seminar on Anselm’s *Cur Deus Homo?* given in the summer of 1930. As

¹ Karl Barth, ‘Die Theologie und der heutige Mensch’, *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 8 (1930), 374-396 (375).

² Karl Barth, ‘Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom’, *Zwischen Den Zeiten*, 11 (1933), 297-314.

³ Karl Barth, *Theological Existence To-day!: A Plea for Theological Freedom*, trans. by R. Birch Hoyle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933), 9.

⁴ Karl Barth, ‘The Theological Declaration of Barmen’, 1934 <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm>> [accessed 10 October 2010].

⁵ Karl Barth, ‘NO!: Answer to Emil Brunner,’ in Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology*, trans. by Peter Fraenkel (London: G. Bles, The Centenary Press, 1946), 74f.

McCormack convincingly demonstrates, this book does not constitute the theological breakthrough that it was believed to be;⁶ it is probably not the or even an ‘important key’ to understanding his theological method as Barth himself described it,⁷ but rather an accumulation and recapitulation of Barth’s ongoing commitment since the christological grounding of revelation in the incarnation in 1924. The centre of this book is Barth’s determination to give unwavering priority to ‘what is’ over ‘what can be’,⁸ and his contention that knowledge about God’s reality can only be given to us by God, and that we, instead of trying to prove or build that knowledge, can only recognise and assent to it with faith and hence reflect upon or think-after [*nachdenken*] it with understanding.⁹ For our purposes, this line of thinking means that, as in the two dogmatic enterprises in the 1920s, Barth’s concept of history in the 1930s will continue to be developed in and measured by his doctrine of revelation.

The second significant event in the 1930s, of course, is Barth’s decision ‘to begin again at the beginning, saying the same thing, but in a very different way’, the result of which is the thirteen volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*.¹⁰ Volume one is dedicated to the construction the doctrine of the Word, the very doctrine on the basis of which Barth establishes his grand theological enterprise. For our purposes, *CD I* is significant for the remarkable extent to which Barth, within the bounds of the

⁶ For detail see McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 434ff.

⁷ Barth, ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ (1958), Karl Barth, *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm’s Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme*, trans. by Ian W. Robertson, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 1960), 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 52: ‘[Anselm’s] starting point is therefore not to seek “what can be” but to seek “what is” and in fact to seek “what cannot fail to be”. It is precisely as “what cannot fail to be” that he tries to conceive “what is”.’

⁹ *Ibid.*, 40. It should also be remarked that for Barth, faith seeking understanding is not an option but a demand. Acceptance of the truth of God’s reality necessarily entails thinking-after and describing it: ‘Any extension or explication of or meditation upon the acceptance of the Credo in faith can be nothing more than a description of this acceptance’, *ibid.*, 28.

¹⁰ ‘Preface’, I/1, xi.

subject-predicate relation, allows the notions of revelation and history to interact. Drawing on this subject-predicate *interaction*, we seek to demonstrate that, on the one hand, Barth allows the reality of the history which revelation both becomes and is to shape his doctrine of revelation and, conversely, allows the reality of revelation to shape his concepts of history and of time.

For that purpose, this chapter is divided into three sections. Section 4A will show that the historicity of revelation is placed at a crucial point in Barth's conception of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of God's Word. As this dialectic continues into Barth's trinitarianly conceived doctrine of revelation, the concrete historicity of revelation in Jesus Christ exerts such significant impact that several specific forms of 'historicisation' can be detected with regard to revelation, the Son, and the Spirit, as will be argued in section 4B. Finally in section 4C we will attempt to show that, in Barth's teaching on the incarnation, corresponding to the 'historicisation' in the doctrine of revelation, there is what might be termed a christological or revelatory concentration of human history. Taken together it will be shown that, in that the speaking God is *revealed*, revelation takes place not above or on the verge of but precisely and really *in* history, reacting *with* history.

4A The Dialectic of Veiling and Unveiling of God's Word in History

§5 of the *CD* constitutes a point of departure where Barth's third attempt at a dogmatic project palpably differs from the previous two. In it he emphatically announces that 'we have to deviate ... from the first edition of this book [i.e. *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*]' in a painstaking attempt to rid himself of any

possible traces of existential thinking and anthropology.¹¹ Whilst its parallel paragraphs in the two predecessors began with the human side,¹² §5 begins distinctively with the an exploration of ‘the nature [*Wesen*] of the Word of God’.¹³

In this paragraph Barth first defines God’s Word as God’s speech (§5.2), and then defines God’s speech as His act (§5.3) and as His mystery (§5.4). In designating God’s speech as His act, Barth poses the dialectic of non-contemporaneity and contemporaneity; in designating God’s speech as His mystery, he poses the dialectic of mystery and secularity. These two forms of dialectic can be seen as belonging to the dialectic of the veiling and unveiling of revelation, as revelation is the divine speech to humanity in history and in the world. By examining these two forms of dialectic, this section seeks to demonstrate that Barth unequivocally affirms the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is.

4A.1 God’s Speech-Act Taking Place in History: The Dialectic of Non-Contemporaneity and Contemporaneity

In §4 of the *CD* Barth defines revelation, Scripture, and preaching as the threefold form of God’s Word. In §5 he defines the Word as God’s speech in act, and then asserts that ‘[t]he fact that God’s Word is God’s act means first its contingent contemporaneity’.¹⁴ With this statement Barth registers the dialectic of non-contemporaneity and contemporaneity of God’s Word. This dialectic consists

¹¹ I/1, 125ff.

¹² §4 ‘Man and His Questions’, *GD*, 69ff.; §5 ‘The Word of God and the Human as Preacher’, §6 ‘The Word of God and the Human as Hearer’, §7 ‘The Becoming-Known of Human in the Word of God’, *ChD*, 69ff., 90ff., 109ff.

¹³ Cf. *KD I/1*, 128.

¹⁴ I/1, 145.

in that 1) the three moments are separated by historical distance (the veiledness of revelation), and 2) that it is only upon God's act that they become contemporaneous (the unveiling of revelation). When they become contemporaneous, it can only be a contingent occurrence (the unveiling of revelation contingent upon God's act). Moreover, the three moments of God's Word are distinguished 'not only by the difference in periods and contents ... but also by the fact that they place God to human beings in different ways.'¹⁵ What is observed is a differentiation which is not only temporal but also in terms of order: due to Jesus Christ's unity with God, the revealed Word is prior to the written Word; because Scripture is the ground of Church proclamation, the written Word is prior to the proclaimed Word. In this dialectic Barth is highlighting the fact that the differentiation in terms of order includes the temporal differentiation. When the temporal differentiation is ignored, the differentiation in terms of order, too, is obscured.

In maintaining this dialectic, Barth rejects modern Protestant theology's attempt to view Jesus, biblical authors and even the Reformers as their 'companion of one and the same time'.¹⁶ Specifically he deems Gotthold E. Lessing the forerunner of the new epoch of Neo-Protestantism and its overcoming of the *Ungeschichtlichkeit* of the Enlightenment with the newly found dictum 'revelation in history'. Whilst agreeing with Lessing in the latter's contention for a 'broad, ugly ditch' between historical truths,¹⁷ Barth differs with him in how this non-contemporaneity—in Barth's terms—is to be overcome. Whilst Lessing

¹⁵ Ibid.; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 150.

¹⁶ *I/1*, 146.

¹⁷ 'If no historical truth can be demonstrated, then nothing can be demonstrated by means of historical truths. That is: *accidental truths of history can never become the proof of necessary truths of reason.*' Gotthold E. Lessing, 'On the Proof of the Spirit and of Power', idem, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. and trans. by Chadwick Henry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957), 53. Emphasis original.

(according to Barth), resorting to truths felt and experienced by us (not to truths demonstrated by historical investigation), ‘abandoned the non-contemporaneity of order, which is not to be sublated, in favour of an immanent non-contemporaneity, which is to be sublated immanently’,¹⁸ Barth holds that the non-contemporaneity cannot be overcome from the human side:

if we abandon the distinction of the three times in terms of order, then no matter how loudly or sincerely we may talk about revelation and its concreteness and historicity, and no matter how illuminating or practical [everything may turn out to be], we have really abandoned the concept of the Word of God itself.¹⁹

Barth’s insistence on this non-contemporaneity can be viewed as an affirmation of the historicity of revelation. The history which revelation becomes and is is real history, so that the moment of revelation is differentiated from the other two moments of the same Word of God.

The contingent contemporaneity of the three moments of God’s Word, when taking place on the basis of God’s act, also means that the unveiling of revelation takes place in history not generally but in a particular and concrete way:

The problem of God’s Word [consists in the fact] that this specific revelation of God is imparted to this specific man to-day through the proclamation of this other specific man by means of this specific biblical text, so that a specific *illic et tunc* becomes a specific *hic et nunc*.²⁰

The concrete particularity of God’s Word can be understood from two aspects. First, like all historical events, each moment of God’s Word in history has its own

¹⁸ I/1, 147; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 152.

¹⁹ I/1, 147; *KD I/1*, 152.

²⁰ I/1, 149; translation slightly revised per *KD I/1*, 154.

particular *ubi et quando*. In contrast with a general view of timeless truth, the particularity of the truth of God's Word consists in its specific locale in time and space. Second, different from all other historical events, which too have their own particular 'there and then', the moments of God's Word in history claim a higher, unique particularity. Their unique particularity consists in their being utilised by God Himself for the speaking and hearing of His Word. In this light, in addition to Barth's distinction between general, timeless truth and the particular truth of revelation in history, we might add another distinction, i.e. that between the 'general particularity' of all historical events and the 'unique particularity' of the historical event of God's Word. Due to this 'unique particularity', a purely historical understanding [*historisches Verstehen*] of God's Word is dismissed for treating God's Word as though it were among general events in history and thus abstracting it from the unique particularity proper to it.²¹

4A.2 God's Speech-Mystery Hidden in History: The Dialectic of Mystery and Secularity

A second form of the dialectic of veiling and unveiling is that of mystery and secularity. In that the event of revelation is the unveiling of something veiled, it is also an event of mystery taking place in the world.

The dialectic of mystery and secularity is presented when Barth writes that

²¹ David Ford is right in commenting that in this regard there is indeed a 'scandal of particularity', meaning that 'God is not primarily to be described in terms of general attributes ..., but these attributes have their content determined by the way in which God has in fact determined himself, as told in the Bible.' David Ford, 'Barth's Interpretation of the Bible', in Stephen Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth*, 55-87 (61). In the same book Rowan Williams makes a similar complaint that 'History, and the *world* as such, are wholly foreign to God: he can act through, but not in, the historical *qua* historical.' Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', *ibid.*, 153. For Barth, however, God *does* act in history [*Geschichte*], but only so in a way that is not historically [*historisch*] demonstrable.

‘[t]he speech of God is and remains the mystery of God, above all, in its secularity.’²² On Barth’s account, God Himself is a mystery hidden from humanity, but the speech-act of God is God’s act of speech to human beings in the world and history. When God’s speech-act takes place, then, it takes forms which are human, secular and historical. But even as the forms taken by God’s speech-act, in Barth’s view, Jesus, Scripture and the Church do not break open their thick veil of secularity; as a result, ‘[w]e do not have the Word of God otherwise than in the mystery of its secularity.’²³

The dialectic of mystery and secularity is obviously an expression for the dialectic of the veiling and unveiling of revelation. On the one hand we do not have the Word of God except in those secular forms which it takes; on the other hand the form ‘as such is *not* the Word of God and ... does not even give evidence that it is the *form* of the Word of God’.²⁴ This form which the Word takes can be described as both necessary and unsuitable. It is *necessary for us* to the extent that it addresses the weakness of us as human addressees of the Word. It is *unsuitable for the Word* to the extent that it, not corresponding to but rather contradicting the Word, is not a reflection or complement but in essence an antithesis to and concealment of the Word. The form then has the function of a buffer zone, so to speak, so that the mysterious can be unveiled in the world. And the dialectic of mystery and secularity, then, consists in the fact that the mystery of God is unveiled to us not only in this secular form (as it is necessary for us) but also in spite of it (as it is unsuitable

²² I/1, 165; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 171.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, *KD I/1*, 171f.

for Him).²⁵

The inappropriateness of the form of God's Word, again, renders questionable the attempt to understand the Word by historical [*historisch*] method. 'Historical' thinking which purports to penetrate those unsuitable forms is, in Barth's view, simply a confusion of categories, as the secular form which God's Word takes does not by itself lead to God's speech-act, which, even in unveiling, remains a mystery hidden in the world and history.²⁶

In summary, this section has demonstrated 1) that in Barth's notion of the dialectic of non-contemporaneity and contemporaneity the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is is affirmed (in that it is historically separated from other moments of God's Word); and 2) that in view of the dialectic of mystery and secularity the contingent events of God's Word are still hidden in history.

Before we turn to the next section, it is crucial to notice the passage in fine print with which Barth concludes his treatment of God's speech-act as mystery at the end of §5. Here the dialectic of veiling and unveiling is directed to a clear distinction between God for us and God in Himself. Barth warns against any forms of engagement in what he views as 'correlation-theology', in which 'God swings up or down in His relation to us, either from below upwards so that God becomes a

²⁵ Ibid., 166ff. Rowan Williams argues that the form of the Word, thus conceived, constitutes a 'divorce' of the form from the substance of revelation and is to be deemed as merely 'external', 'accidental' and almost separable from it. Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth*, 153. In Barth's view, however, if the dialectic of mystery and secularity is not to be dissolved but maintained, the unsuitability of the form of the Word, too, needs to be maintained.

²⁶ I/1, 168. It is important to notice that the Word as the mystery of God is not hidden in history in such a way that it is powerless in and limited by history. As the Word is not confined within the bounds of or defined by those categories which are taken as important by 'historical thinking', it also is the ruling power that changes and makes history. To a certain degree, this can be accounted for with Barth's conception of the one-sidedness of the Word as a mystery. See *ibid.*, 149ff (especially 152) and 174ff. In this connection, Laurence Wood is misled to posit that Barth said that 'revelation is not concerned with the general understanding of history as such' because he 'still defined revelation as the "Moment" of the pure presence of God' (Wood, *God and History*, 198). Revelation evades historical thinking, not because it is an eternal 'Moment', but because it remains a mystery in history.

predicate of man, or from above downwards so that man becomes a requisite in God's nature.'²⁷ To keep a distance from this danger, it is necessary that:

we make a deliberate and sharp distinction between the Trinity of God as we may know it in the Word of God revealed, written and proclaimed, and God's immanent Trinity, i.e., between 'God in Himself' and 'God for us', between the 'eternal history of God' and His temporal acts.²⁸

Accordingly, Barth emphatically contends that 'the "God for us" does not arise as a matter of course out of [the background of] "God in Himself"',²⁹ that the Lord God exists *not only* as He addresses us in relation to us but also before that relation as God in Himself, in His eternal history. In the final analysis, one might venture to say, Barth is seeking to keep the doctrine of revelation or Christology (understood as God's revelation to us in Christ) in check by resorting to the doctrine of the Trinity (understood as God's being in Himself): 'in the strict doctrine of the Trinity as the presupposition of Christology [we] must speak of God in Himself, in isolation from man'.³⁰ This statement suggests a view of God's involvement with humanity and with history as grounded absolutely in God's triune being in Himself. It also indicates an attempt to control the revelation of Christ in history by the immanent Trinity in eternity. Therefore, it not only opens up the gateway from the doctrine of the Word (§§1-7) to that of the Trinity (§§8-12), but also raises the question about the relationship between the doctrine of revelation and that of the Trinity. With this question we move to the next section.

²⁷ I/1, 172.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.; *KD* I/1, 179.

³⁰ I/1, 172.

4B 'Historicisation' in the Doctrine of Revelation

The relationship between the doctrine of revelation and that of the Trinity in Barth's theology is a clear focus of §8. Here Barth attempts to establish the doctrine of the Trinity—along with all Christian dogma—on the ground of revelation.³¹ As the doctrine of revelation is being unfolded along a trinitarian line, the 'unveiling' aspect of the dialectic is given further and fuller consideration,³² as we shall see shortly.

What follows in this section is based this significant passage from §8.2:

And now we are no longer following the schema of subject, predicate, object (revealer, revelation, [being-revealed]) ... Or rather, we now dissolve [*lösen*] this scheme ... in the manner suited to the concrete form of revelation on the one side and the doctrine of the Trinity on the other. The question of revealer, revelation and [being-revealed] corresponds to the logical and material [*logisch-sachlichen*] order both of biblical revelation and also of the doctrine of the Trinity. ... But we must now follow another order if we are to see how biblical revelation and the doctrine of the Trinity are interconnected, how the second could and did proceed out of the first. This is a historical question which has as such its own special form. But it is governed by the fact that biblical revelation has on the one side a specific historical centre and the doctrine of the Trinity has on the other side a specific historical occasion [*Anlaß*] in biblical revelation. Historically considered and stated the three questions answered in the Bible, that of revealer, revelation and [being-revealed], do not have the same importance. The true theme of the biblical witness is the *second* of the concepts, God's *action* in His revelation, revelation in answer to the question *what* God does, and therefore the predicate in our statement. Within this theme the two other questions, materially no less important, are answered. Similarly the doctrine of the Trinity,

³¹ I/1, 308ff, especially 311: 'The basis or root of the doctrine of the Trinity, if it has one and is thus legitimate dogma—and it does have one and is thus legitimate dogma—lies in revelation', and 312: 'We are not saying, then, that revelation is the basis of the Trinity, as though God were the triune God only in His revelation and only for the sake of His revelation. What we are saying is that revelation is the basis of the doctrine of the Trinity; the doctrine of the Trinity has no other basis apart from this.'

³² I/1, 315ff.

when considered historically in its origin and development, is not equally interested in the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Here too the theme is primarily the *second* person of the Trinity, God the *Son*, the deity of *Christ*.³³

This passage is remarkable in that 1) in the context of the doctrine of revelation the usual scheme of subject preceding act is dissolved, and emphasis is given to the action, the concrete form, and the historical centre of revelation; 2) in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity the usual scheme of Father preceding Son is dissolved and emphasis is given to its specific historical occasion, the Son; and 3) that which interconnects the biblical revelation with the doctrine of the Trinity is specified as a concrete form, a historical question. With these three points in view, Barth decides to ‘follow another order’, i.e. a historical order that is pertinent to this historical question.

In this light, this section seeks to argue 1) that in placing the act of revelation prior to the Subject of revelation, Barth ‘historicises’ the notion of revelation; 2) that in placing the self-unveiling of God prior to the veiled God, Barth ‘historicises’ the notion of the Son; and 3) that in Barth’s explication of the element of the revelation’s ‘becoming-imparted to human’, we find a ‘historicisation’ effected by the Spirit. This threefold ‘historicisation’ in Barth’s doctrine of revelation is possible, we also contend, because the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is has been unequivocally affirmed by Barth.³⁴

³³ Ibid., 314f.; *KD* I/1, 331f. Note that the schema of subject, predicate, object is one of revealer, revelation and *being-revealed* [*Offenbarer, Offenbarung, Offenbarsein*]. In this thesis the term *Offenbarsein* is consistently translated into ‘being-revealed’, instead of the somewhat confusing fluctuation between revealedness (e.g. I/1, 295, 298, 299), being revealed (e.g. 298, 299, 314, 330, 331, 332), and revealing (e.g. 314).

³⁴ Two explanatory notes are to be made about the way we present our argument. First, with the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history clearly in view, the ‘historicisation’ proposed here only refers to the history which revelation becomes and is, and not to human history in the general sense. Second, in giving ‘historicisation’ such emphasis, we are not unaware of the general

4B.1 Act Preceding Subject: 'Historicisation' of Revelation

As Jüngel rightly remarks, the notion of *Deus dixit* is considered the foundation of the doctrine of the Trinity already in *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*.³⁵ In the *CD*, the doctrine of revelation is treated along an obvious trinitarian line. This is clearly seen in Barth's threefold definition of revelation as the event in which 'God reveals Himself, He reveals Himself *through Himself*, [and] He reveals *Himself*.'³⁶ In this formula, 'God Himself in unimpaired unity yet also in unimpaired difference is Revealer, Revelation and [Being-revealed].'³⁷ Put differently, God as the Subject of revelation is totally identical with His act of revelation as well as with its effect. In revelation 'He [as the Who of revelation] is completely Himself in this That and How.'³⁸ In this threefold perspective of revelation thus structured an important aspect of Barth's dialectic of veiling and unveiling begins to unfold.

With in view the unity of God in revelation, we recall from the long passage cited at the beginning of this section that '[t]he question of revealer, revelation and being-revealed corresponds to the logical and material order'. Logically and materially, the Revealer (the Subject, the who) precedes the other two elements, as admittedly there first is a subject to then perform the act, and then the effect follows the act.³⁹ Somewhat surprisingly, however, Barth then replaces this order by

directionality in I/1 of referring from the revealed, acting God in the world to the eternal God in Himself (as in §§10-12). What this proposal attempts to demonstrate is that already in I/1 the doctrine of revelation, even as the epistemological starting-point, still has some ontological import ('historicisation') to the second mode of being of the Trinity.

³⁵ Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth; a Paraphrase*, trans. by John Webster, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 28.

³⁶ I/1, 296.

³⁷ I/1, 295; *KD* I/1, 311.

³⁸ I/1, 297.

³⁹ The positing of a subject prior to its action presupposes an essentialist ontology. In contrast, an actualistic ontology posits that a being consists in its actions, and therefore that God's being is an act.

‘another order’ which gives priority to ‘the *second* of the concepts, God’s *action* in His revelation, revelation in answer to the question *what* God does’. The act of revelation is then given priority to its Subject, because it is only through what God does that we may know who God is, and not the opposite. The problem of revelation is for Barth a ‘historical question’, because in the biblically attested concept of revelation there is a ‘specific historical centre’, which is the ‘concrete form of revelation’. In view of this historical centre, then, Barth suspends the more logically oriented order and follows the more historically oriented order, focusing on the reality of the act of revelation as it has takes place in human history. In this sense, then, it can be argued that Barth has in a specific sense ‘historicised’ the notion of revelation.⁴⁰

4B.2 ‘Self-Unveiling’ Preceding the Veiled: ‘Historicisation’ of the Son

The act of revelation is placed prior to the its Subject at the ‘historical centre’, because it is in this act that God is unveiled. This is seen in another definition of revelation provided by Barth:

Revelation in the Bible means the *self-unveiling* (which becomes imparted to humanity) of the God who by His nature cannot be unveiled to humanity.⁴¹

What constitutes the act of God’s self unveiling as a ‘historical question’ is the fact that ‘in His revelation He takes form, and precisely this taking-form [*Gestalthaben*]

For more detail see Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth’s Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007). See related discussions in sections 5B.1 and 8A.

⁴⁰ The point made here is that the concrete historicity of revelation is taken with such seriousness that revelation cannot be said to be not in history. By contrast, in the sense that ‘[t]he eternal Son is present in history indirectly, never becoming directly identical with the veil of human flesh in which He conceals Himself’, revelation is not historicised, as understood in the general sense. See McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 366.

⁴¹ I/1, 315; translation revised per *KD* I/1, 332f.

of His is His self-unveiling.’⁴² Because God by nature cannot be unveiled, when He unveils Himself, He takes a form, and in taking-form God distinguishes Himself from Himself. For Barth God’s self-unveiling, taking-form and self-distinction are one and the same event. Differently put, the act of revelation is the one act in which God unveils Himself and distinguishes Himself from Himself by taking a form. God’s taking-forming then stands out in Barth’s elaboration of God’s self-unveiling.

Concerning God’s act of taking-form, two things need to be noticed. First, the ‘form’ which God takes is not one which is independent of ‘content’. ‘The distinction between form and content [*Form und Inhalt*] cannot be applied to the biblical concept of revelation.’⁴³ The form [*Gestalt*] which God takes is not a form, so to speak, infused with some content which is external or separable from it;⁴⁴ rather, it is a specific shape or configuration which is peculiar to one of His modes of being [*Seinsweise*].⁴⁵ Second, God’s taking-form is an act peculiar to His mode of being of the Son in contrast with that of the Father, who ‘always, even in taking form in the Son, does not take form’.⁴⁶ This form that God takes, then, is a form in history, a historical form, taken in the Son’s incarnation.

In that the self-unveiling constitutes the ‘historical centre’ of revelation, and in that this self-unveiling consists in the Son’s taking form in history, we propose, a specific ‘historicisation’ of the Son is made possible and even necessary in Barth’s doctrine of revelation. We refer to a passage of crucial importance to this understanding:

⁴² I/1, 316; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 333.

⁴³ I/1, 306; *KD I/1*, 323.

⁴⁴ Cf. Williams, ‘Barth on the Triune God’, Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth*, 153.

⁴⁵ I/1, 316; *KD I/1*, 333.

⁴⁶ I/1, 324.

When the Bible speaks of revelation, it does so in the form of the report of a history or of a series of histories. The content of this history and of each of these specific histories, however, is that self-unveiling of God. In that it gives us this report, we admittedly also experience the fact that the One who thus unveils Himself is the God who by His nature cannot be unveiled to humanity, and that this self-unveiling becomes imparted to specific human beings. Logically and materially this immediately becomes equally important as that reported self-unveiling. Historically the latter constitutes the centre. ... In the historical life of humanity He takes up a place—indeed a very specific place—and makes Himself the object of human outlook, human experience, human thinking and human speech. He makes Himself an instance and a factor, a concrete instance and a historical factor, i.e. an element of human existence, one that is significant and effective in time and in temporal connections.⁴⁷

The proposition that ‘historically the latter [i.e. the reported self-unveiling] constitutes the centre’ can be accounted for in two complementary ways. First, in terms of its recipients, revelation comes *ad extra* to human beings in the form of the history of God’s self-unveiling as it is reported in the Bible. It is only by virtue of the historical report of the Son’s unveiling act that human knowledge of God is possible. That is why ‘historically’ the self-unveiling, which takes place in and with the specific ‘historicisation’ of the Son, is said to constitute the centre. This centre is ‘a concrete instance and a historical factor’, so that it may become the object of human perception. This account of the historical reality of the event of revelation is not new. What is remarkable is Barth’s conception of this historical centre as ‘significant and *effective* in time and in *temporal connections*’. Revelation, then, is not merely significant in time but also effective in temporal connections.

Second, the self-unveiling of God as the ‘historical centre’ is seen as also

⁴⁷ Ibid., 315f.; translation revised per *KD* I/1, 333.

related to God's work *ad intra*, i.e. to His self-distinction. In Barth's view, God's self-unveiling consists in His taking-form in the act of revelation. And in taking form God becomes an 'alter ego' in the sense that whilst God in His 'first mode of being' is hidden in Himself, He in His 'second mode of being' becomes unlike Himself by taking form in history. The incarnation of the Son in history, then, is the historical centre at which God's self-unveiling and self-distinction takes place. In the incarnation, God becomes historical whilst remaining eternal, thus distinguishing Himself as God the Son from Himself as God the Father whilst still maintaining the divine unity.⁴⁸ The incarnation, as the historical centre, can then be taken as the specific 'historicisation' in which the Son is distinguished from the Father by taking form in order to unveil the veiled God.

In registering this proposal, we are aware of the fact that the Son does not differ from the Father only in His assuming a historical form. Even before the incarnation took place in history the Son is already differentiated from the Father in the eternity which they share with the Spirit.⁴⁹ But there has to be a correspondence between God's self-unveiling and His self-distinction, because in both cases we have to do with one and the same Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the correspondence between the unveiled God and the veiled God has to be taken to mean also the correspondence between the Son in history and the Son in Himself: if the One who is revealed to us is the same One as He is in Himself, then the One who is the historical

⁴⁸ I/1, 316-320. In this connection Eberhard Jüngel remarks that revelation is the predicate of God in such a way that it is in every way identical with God, and therefore that 'the doctrine of the Trinity is the interpretation of the self-interpretation of God', Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 29.

⁴⁹ See I/1 414ff. where Barth discusses 'The Eternal Son'. Drawing heavily on this subsection Paul Molnar emphasises that 1) Jesus Christ does not first become the Son of God in revelation; 2) Jesus Christ is the Son, not because He reveals Himself to us, but because He is; and 3) all thinking about Jesus Christ must begin and end with thinking about God. Molnar, 'Can Jesus' Divinity be Recognized as 'Definitive, Authentic and Essential' if it is Grounded in Election?', 45f.

centre of God's self-unveiling is also the same One in distinction from His Father in eternity. Therefore we make the point that, to the extent that Barth gives precedence to the self-unveiling over the veiled in his doctrine of revelation, he also 'historicises' his concept of the Son in his doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁰

4B.3 'Becoming-Imparted to Humanity': 'Historicisation' by the Spirit

In this subsection we intend to elaborate Barth's conception of the historical impartation of revelation. In Barth's terms, this aspect of revelation refers to the 'becoming-imparted to humanity' of the self-unveiling of God by the Spirit. With the stress shifting to God the Spirit, Barth is now focusing on the ongoing effect of revelation, i.e. the impartation of the event of revelation to its human recipients. In this sense, then, revelation entails not only the specific 'historicisation' of the Son, but also the Spirit-effected appropriation of it for concrete human beings in their historical particularity: a 'historicisation' by the Spirit.

Barth's account of the self-imparting dimension of revelation is constituted by a special treatment of the 'particular historicity' of revelation,⁵¹ a notion related to particular human beings as the destination of revelation. That which is historical has constantly been regarded by Barth as particular, concrete, accidental, and unrepeatable.⁵² Here in the context of the self-impartation of revelation, too, the 'particular historicity' has to do with the particular and concrete recipients of revelation. As Barth sees it, this notion stands on guard against abstract and

⁵⁰ In the meantime, we must add, in view of the fact that at this stage Barth still speaks of the eternal Son as 'so antecedently in Himself as the Son or Word of God the Father' (I/1, 399), the 'historicisation' observed in the doctrine of revelation is rather limited in scope. But in view of the 'historicisation' more fully developed in his actualistic ontology registered in II/1 and unfolded in II/2, this limited 'historicisation' in I/1 cannot be taken to have no significance.

⁵¹ I/1, 326, 327, 329; *KD* I/1, 345, 347.

⁵² Cf. *RI*, 20; Barth, 'Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und ihre Aufgabe' (1923), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, 202-247 (211); I/1, 147f., 314f.

metaphysical ideas about revelation on the one hand, and distinguishes itself from historical demonstrability as defined in modern historical research on the other.⁵³

These two battlefronts are related to the ontological question of the nature of the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is, and to the epistemological question of the proper approach to the knowledge of that reality, respectively. In terms of the former, Barth holds that the particular historicity of revelation shares at least one certain ontological quality with other historical occurrences:

if we bring in the concept of history in explanation, only this can be the *tertium comparationis*: that in revelation as in history it is a matter of a definite event which is different from every other event and which is thus incomparable and unrepeatable.⁵⁴

All historical occurrences are unique in the sense that none of them is a ‘mere exponent of some general occurrence’, ‘a special case under a rule’, or ‘the realisation of a general possibility’.⁵⁵ Likewise, the relation of God to humanity in revelation is also to be understood as existing in a concrete and definite way. The modern attempt to make a distinction between ‘eternal content and historical [*historisch*] “vehicle”’⁵⁶ is to be denied, because it renders that particular God-human relation in revelation effective everywhere and at all times.⁵⁷ On the contrary, the self-impartment of revelation possesses a particular historicity which is

⁵³ I/1, 324ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 329; translation revised per *KD* I/1, 348.

⁵⁵ Ibid. Cf. I/2, 209f.: ‘Revelation does not encounter man in any general way, as though it were the eternal definition or eternal meaning of all time, or the general solution of the riddle of temporal occurrence.’

⁵⁶ I/1, 329.

⁵⁷ As Colin Gunton remarks, Barth has a commitment to ‘[preventing] the conception of revelation from degenerating into triviality, metaphysical generality, or myth.’ Colin E. Gunton, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 2001), 134.

shared by all other historical events.

The other front is related to the approach to historical knowledge. The approach to historical knowledge in general, according to Barth, is by way of assessing, therefore claiming or denying the possibility, probability or actuality of historical events. What is and can be known through that approach, however, is merely the human side and temporal form of historical events. By contrast, the particular historicity of revelation refers to the divine side of the specific historical event of revelation. This particular relation between God and humanity in revelation, then, cannot be established or denied by purely historical judgement. 'No genuinely "historical" [judgement] can be passed on the [particular] historicity of the history recorded in the biblical witness',⁵⁸ for it is not a matter of general possibilities of human beings but of 'hearing or non-hearing of the biblical history'.⁵⁹

At this point it seems suitable to consider Ebeling's conception of particular historicity. To Ebeling's mind, the 'particular historicity' of revelation (or its historicity *sui generis*) derives from the presupposition of revelation's ontological uniqueness. He then criticises this notion for building 'a [protective] wall around a certain sphere of history, distinguished from all other history'⁶⁰ which isolates the historical fact of revelation from general history. And 'if the historicity of revelation is said to be a historicity that is essentially different and ontologically unique, in contrast to the historicity of history in general, we have turned our backs on the message of revelation of God in history.'⁶¹

⁵⁸ I/1, 326; *KD* I/1, 345.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 327.

⁶⁰ Gerhard Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation*, trans. by Grover Foley (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 73.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

Barth would agree with Ebeling insofar as the ontological particularity of revelation is concerned, but for Barth that ontological particularity does not translate into a protective wall. Ebeling has this ‘isolated’ view of the particular historicity of revelation, because he presupposes that all historical events are ‘completely accessible to historical observation’.⁶² In Barth’s view, however, that particular historicity is not removed from general historicity, but added to it.⁶³ Therefore, the particular historicity of revelation does not need to be surrounded by a protective wall; it rather, as it were, tears down the wall with which general historicity is surrounded by adding itself to it.

The particular historicity of revelation consists in the impartation of revelation to particular human beings, and this is the work specifically of the Spirit. On Barth’s account, this third element of revelation is necessary, because revelation is not something self-evident, intelligible *per se*, or accessible to human beings everywhere and at all times. It has to be the work of the Holy Spirit, so as to secure the one divine subjectivity in revelation by ensuring that He who makes impartation is totally identical with He who unveils and with He who is unveiled.⁶⁴ Moreover, this moment of impartation by the Spirit gives rise to the responsive confession made by the human recipient: ‘this factual taking place, this becoming ascertainable and

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ *ChD*, §15, 309ff. Cf. section 3C.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 330. By defining the third moment of revelation within the trinitarian framework, Barth distinguishes the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in revelation from the Hegelian dialectic in which the progress from in-itself to for-itself is self-evident and intelligible, and the outcome of which is the sublation of the first and the second into a third. In sharp contrast with the Hegelian dialectic, God’s revelation, precisely on the basis of in-Himself, goes through the historical course, not for self-realisation of any sort, but rather in order to be not only in Himself but also *pro nobis*, that is, for us as historically located and conditioned beings. Neither the first nor the second moment of the divine revelation is sublated or sublata into a third; instead, all three moments are and remain united in the one deity of the triune God.

acknowledgeable, is the historicity of revelation.’⁶⁵ To the extent that the Holy Spirit imparts the concrete event of revelation at one specific time in history to concrete human beings at many specific times in history, the self-impartation as the third moment in revelation can well be said to be the ‘historicisation’ of revelation by the Holy Spirit.

Finally, it is true that Barth’s epistemological starting-point (the economic Trinity) in time leads his theology to the ontological end-point (the essential or immanent Trinity) in eternity.⁶⁶ But as McCormack makes clear (based on his understanding of Jünger), the revelation of Jesus Christ is not only an epistemological starting-point but also the only reality to which his doctrine of the Trinity can only provide ontological conditions.⁶⁷ In Barth’s own words:

we did not derive our differentiation of the *Loci* from the doctrine of the Trinity. We derived the doctrine of the Trinity itself from the same source as that from which is now derived the differentiation of the *Loci*, viz., the work and activity of God in His revelation.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid.; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 349.

⁶⁶ Bromiley, *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, 21.

⁶⁷ McCormack, ‘God Is His Decision’, *Theology as Conversation*, 58: ‘the doctrine of the Trinity is made to be the ontological condition of the possibility of revelation in time understood in Barth’s sense’, and 63: ‘Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity was constructed ... in an effort to provide the ontological ground—not of his later Christology!—but of his doctrine of revelation, construed along the lines of a dialectic of veiling and unveiling.’ In this regard, David Ford’s comment is right that for Barth the doctrine of the Trinity is ‘exclusively revealed in the events of Jesus Christ’s existence’. But what he terms ‘a strong Christocentric bias’ reflects in fact simply Barth’s close adherence to God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Ford, ‘Barth’s Interpretation of the Bible’, *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, 60.

⁶⁸ I/2, 878. At this point it seems proper to register a critique of Paul Molnar’s contention that the doctrine of the Trinity constitutes the centre of Barth’s dogmatics. In *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity* Molnar claims that Barth places ‘God as the foundation of true knowledge’ (x). He is right in stating that for Barth ‘[t]he doctrine of the Trinity ... depends on this Word’ (xi). But ambiguity arises when he goes on to claim that ‘[i]t [i.e. the doctrine of the Trinity] can help to clarify who God is in revelation and is itself the central Christian doctrine, but it is not itself the controlling centre of dogmatics. Since God is this centre’ (xi). This remark is dubious for two reasons. First, Barth does not write in the passage cited by Molnar (I/2, 878f.) that the doctrine of the Trinity ‘is itself the central doctrine’. What Barth does write is that it is by first being instructed by the doctrine of the Trinity that we are then able to understand the ‘interconnexion and yet also the independence of the doctrines of creation, atonement and redemption’ to be analogous to

In this doctrine of revelation, which Barth unfolds along a trinitarian line with ontological conditions provided by the doctrine of the Trinity, the particular historicity of revelation is unequivocally affirmed. It is because of this historicity that the three forms of ‘historicisation’ take place in Barth’s doctrine of revelation.

4C Revelatory Concentration of History: The Time of Revelation

The three specific forms of ‘historicisation’ in Barth’s doctrine of revelation demonstrate the remarkable extent to which Barth allows the ‘predicate’ (history) to exert influence on our understanding of the ‘subject’ (revelation). In this final section, we seek to demonstrate how Barth shapes his concept of history and of time from the viewpoint of the ‘subject’, revelation.

Revelation takes place in history as the subject of their relation. The usual demand made on revelation for a justifiable account of its relation to history presupposes that history is an autonomous reality complete in itself and as such, and that we human beings are in possession of that reality. But since revelation is the most actual reality, it means that we do not possess time as a dependent reality but that in revelation God has time for us.⁶⁹ It then follows that a demand is made on

the ‘independent modes of the being of God Himself, and therefore irreducible to any higher unity’ (ibid., 879). The doctrine of the Trinity, then, is for Barth the prototype which sheds light on the other three doctrines at issue; but it is hardly ‘the central doctrine’ of every other doctrine.

Second, just as Barth does *not* affirm the doctrine of the Trinity as ‘the central doctrine’, so does he *not* designate God Himself to be ‘the foundation of true knowledge’ or the centre of dogmatics. When Barth ties the doctrine of God, including that of the Trinity, with the other three doctrines into one series of loci, what he has in mind as something of a higher order standing ‘outside the series of *Loci*’ (ibid., 879) is not God as such but God’s *self*-revelation. For apart from this revelation we as human beings have no other access to God Himself. Here as much as elsewhere Barth understands ‘this *being* of God in His work and activity’—as is revealed to us—as the event [*Ereignis*] of the Word of God (ibid., 879; *KD* I/2, 983). Revelation, inasmuch as it is God’s self-revelation, is not merely God’s action but has God as its Subject and to that extent corresponds to God’s being as such. On this ground, revelation is ascribed the status of the controlling centre of dogmatics. For more detail see Hensley, ‘Trinity and Freedom’, especially 91-93.

⁶⁹ I/2, 46.

us for a justifiable account of history in the light of revelation. Precisely this is what Barth attempts to do in §14 of the *CD*.

This section will argue that to the ‘historicisation’ of the doctrine of revelation, there corresponds what I call the christological or revelatory concentration of history in Barth’s teaching of the incarnation. This notion, which runs through §14, consists of a threefold conception of revelation as the ‘subject’ of history, namely the conception of revelation as God’s gift and fulfilment of time, as the Lord of time, and as the midpoint or centre of all history.

4C.1 Revelation as the Gift and the Fulfilment of Time

According to Barth, the statement that ‘*God reveals Himself*’ means that God’s revealing act is an *event*, and therefore that in the event of revelation ‘*God has time for us*’.⁷⁰ Because revelation is the most actual reality, its presence in history and in time immediately brings two things to light. On the one hand, revelation means for us the realisation that ‘our possession of time must be made comprehensible as God’s possession of it for us’.⁷¹ It is not as if we were in possession of time and were in the position to decide what has a share of it and what does not. Instead, God is and is to be confessed as the sole owner and, indeed, creator of time. Barth categorises time into three kinds—the God-created time, the fallen time of ours, and the time of revelation—and contends that none of it is possessed by us. The originally created time is hidden and withdrawn from us, and the fallen time is problematic and is only thought to be known and owned by us.⁷² We must not fail to notice that here Barth is not denying the reality of time as such, which is created and rightfully owned by

⁷⁰ Ibid., 45; *KD I/2*, 50.

⁷¹ *I/2*, 46.

⁷² Ibid., 47f.

God. He is countering the view that we as human beings are the owner and master of time. Whilst we do not own time, in that God reveals Himself in revelation, God still has time for us. In revelation, therefore, the time which we do not possess is given to us by God. In this sense, revelation is God's gift of time for us.

On the other hand, with revelation coming into history and time, a real picture of time in its entirety is presented. Whilst time was created by God and became lost with the Fall of humanity, God is determined to restore it for us by creating a 'right, genuine and real' time in and with His revelation,⁷³ i.e. in and with the most actual reality. In that it is brought about by no other than the creator of time, the time of revelation is no other than the time originally created by God. In that it is 'posited anew in and with revelation',⁷⁴ the time of revelation is set apart as a new time different from the other two. As the reset of the originally-created time, therefore, revelation is the fulfilment of time in time as God's time and God's time for us.

One thing merits attention in this connection is a remark which Barth makes about his view of revelation in the 1922 *Römerbrief*. Although Barth's shift took place in Göttingen, he is seen here to register an official rejection of the eschatological view of revelation in it by uttering:

an express warning against certain passages and contexts in my commentary on Romans, where play was made and even work occasionally done with the idea of a revelation permanently transcending time, merely bounding time and determining it from without.⁷⁵

As the battle at that time with 'the prevailing historicism and psychologism' was over,

⁷³ Ibid., 55.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 53; translation revised per *KD I/1*, 58.

⁷⁵ I/2, 50.

Barth is now more informed by the actual reality of the incarnation taught in John 1:14, to which his *Römerbrief* did not do justice, and accordingly comes to conceive revelation as the God's gift and fulfilment of time.⁷⁶ By virtue of the event of the incarnation, which is not 'divine necessity' nor 'human possibility',⁷⁷ revelation possesses the historicity and temporality which is not the slightest less genuine than 'any other real events in this space of ours':⁷⁸

The reality of revelation in Jesus Christ is also what we call the lifetime [*Lebenszeit*] of a human being. It is also a section of what we call the 'historical [*historisch*] time', or the world history with its ahistorical prehistory. It is not only that, but it is also that. ... Revelation in the sense of Holy Scripture ... is an eternal, but not therefore a timeless reality. It is also a temporal reality. So it is not a sort of ideal; rather, it is itself the timeless content of all or some times. It does not remain transcendent over time, it is not merely tangent to it, but it enters into time; nay, it assumes time; nay, it creates time for itself.⁷⁹

Obviously we have seen most of this. Whilst the idea that revelation 'is not merely tangent to [time]' and the notion that revelation assumes time to itself can be viewed as a recapitulation of Barth's previous insights, what is new here is the statement that revelation creates time for itself. In doing so, revelation also fulfils time by restoring in time what it was and ought to be when it was originally created, and gives this fulfilled time to us.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Cf. Karl Barth, *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creed: Sixteen Lectures Delivered at the University of Utrecht in February and March, 1935*, trans. by J. Strathearn McNab (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936), 65: 'We know of no divine necessity on the basis of which the Word *had* to become flesh. And we have absolutely no knowledge of any human possibility on the basis of which the Word *could* become flesh. We can only know of the actuality: the Word *became* flesh.'

⁷⁸ I/2, 51.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 50; translation revised per *KD* I/2, 55.

4C.2 Revelation as the Lord of Time

The linking of the creation of time to revelation is brought about by, as well as also strengthens, the affirmation of revelation as the most actual reality. Revelation can assume and include history and time precisely on the basis of the fact that it creates time. Like its reality, its historicity or temporality too is not derivative but original. In this sense, Barth properly calls the subject of revelation the Lord of time.⁸⁰

The identification of the subject of revelation with the Lord of time, according to Barth, is a problem which belongs to 'the nature of revelation'.⁸¹ The failure to grasp this identification gives rise to three errors, namely: mistaking history (the general phenomenon of time) as the starting-point, refusing to seek revelation where it is given and already found, and the misconception that revelation is something to be 'discovered, dug up, worked out as the deeper ground and content of human history'.⁸² By contrast, the recognition of the subject of revelation as the Lord of time means approaching the revelation-history problem strictly from revelation as the only starting-point.⁸³ In accordance with the notion that the

⁸⁰ I/2, 52.

⁸¹ Ibid., 56.

⁸² Ibid., 58.

⁸³ Von Balthasar argues that history means real encounter with mutual influence and exchange of what is proper of each partner in it. This Catholic viewpoint suggests starting from both God and humanity to look at history. For him, real participation necessarily brings out a lasting ontic effect, and that makes the human part of the history between God and humanity a codetermining role that is relevant for God. According to this principle, he criticised that 'Barth rejects all discussion of anything in the realm of the relative and temporal that would make for a real and vibrant history of man with his redeeming Lord and God' (Von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 371). We can respond by making two points. First, it is certain that for Barth both the divine and the human take part in the history of the encounter between them; the human part is surely relevant to God, but probably not in the sense that it plays a codetermining role with any ontic effect or influence on God. The human part has a share in this history because God determines for it to be so, because God has an 'ontic effect' on it. Second, Barth does allow for 'a real and vibrant history' between God and humanity, but this history is real, not by virtue of human participation, but by way of a two-way participation, i.e. first the divine in the human, and then the human in the divine, as it is actualised in the history of Jesus Christ. For more about this real encounter and participation in Jesus Christ, see section 8C.

subject of revelation is the Lord of time, Barth reiterates the well-known motto: 'Revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation.'⁸⁴

In the light of the development of the motto, three observations can be made about its final form.⁸⁵ First, since 1927 *revelation* has been decidedly set as the grammatical subject prior to 'history', denoting more rigid adherence to the principle that revelation precedes history as its subject. Second, the depiction of the relation of history to revelation has developed from 'can become' (1925), through 'is' (1927) and 'became' (1927), to the final version 'is' (1938). If this is not careless alteration but rather deliberate revision, one might argue, it perhaps reflects a development in which Barth has placed more and more stress on the actual reality of revelation. Having been actually assumed by this revelation, whose subject is the Lord of time, history not only 'can become' or 'did become' but once and for all 'is' a predicate of revelation. Third, in *CD I/2* Barth explicitly bid farewell to the notion of *Urgeschichte*, realising that his earlier employment of it in the explanation of the relation of revelation to history in fact rendered revelation a predicate of history.⁸⁶ The priority or subjectivity ascribed to revelation has grown so strong that even the original conceptual tool the notion was once associated with could no longer be considered comparable to the notion itself.

In an attempt to elaborate this irreversible relation of subject to predicate,

⁸⁴ I/2, 58.

⁸⁵ As mentioned in sections 3B (fn59) and 3C.2 (fn70, 84), this motto appeared first in the 1925 article 'Church and Theology' and then in the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*. Then, it recurred in the 1927 work 'Gottes Offenbarung nach der Lehre der christlichen Kirche', this time with revelation taking the place of history as the first grammatical subject of the sentence, as follows, 'Revelation is not a predicate of history; rather, history became a predicate of revelation' (*Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, 275). A decade later, it took its ultimate form in §14 of the *CD*, as cited above in the text.

⁸⁶ I/2, 58; *KD I/2*, 64

Barth registers what he terms the ‘proper meaning [*Eigen-Sinn*]’ of revelation,⁸⁷ and gives three determinations on it, namely, God’s lordship over history,⁸⁸ His hiddenness in history,⁸⁹ and His miracle in history.⁹⁰ These notions altogether make a strong claim about the ontological superiority pertaining to the Lord of time over against our history and time. The ignorance or neglect of this superiority inevitably results in the losing sight of revelation altogether.⁹¹

In identifying the subject of revelation as the Lord of time, in reiterating and elaborating the irreversible subject-predicate relation, does Barth in effect render historical predicates ‘basically external’, as if ‘there is nothing *in* these predicates which in any sense makes them “appropriate” to their content’?⁹² If by ‘internal’ is suggested an equation of revelation with history as defined by the modern historical science [*Historie*], then this relationship is undoubtedly ‘external’. But if we accept, with Barth, that not all *Geschichte* is *Historie*, then in that revelation does become and is history in history, in that the taking-form has an effect even on God Himself, the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history is by no means ‘external’ but genuinely internal.

⁸⁷ I/2, 59; *KD* I/2, 65.

⁸⁸ I/2, 60; translation revised per *KD* I/2, 66: ‘The fact that it is the temporal, historical revelation does not abolish its freedom. Instead, precisely in its temporality and historicity it is free and so not the object of human interpretation and appraisal.’

⁸⁹ With God’s revelation as the new aeon encountering and confronting the old, there inevitably arises the human resistance together with the divine offence. Thus the fulfilled time, that is the years 1-30, comes in a hidden, unknown form ‘as though it were not revelation at all’, *ibid.*, 62.

⁹⁰ The juxtaposition of two things which are incompatible due to their difference in order of rank, which is also the hiddenness of the divine offence in the midst of the human resistance, will be known as nothing other than a miracle. To categorise revelation as a miracle, then, is to confess that it is completely inconceivable except as ‘the exponent of the special new direct act of God in time and in history’, *ibid.*

⁹¹ The all too common attempt to ‘to abolish and to level up that order of rank’ between the fulfilled time and our time, to disregard the divine offence, according to Barth, would only create a ‘singular, indestructible, importunate picture of a single, almighty world-time and world-reality’, one that includes all kinds of different histories except the history of God’s great deeds. *Ibid.*, 62f.

⁹² Williams, ‘Barth on the Triune God’, Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth*, 153.

Therefore, although at this point Barth is showing the strongest determination in asserting the ontological superiority of revelation to history and time in general, it does not alter the fact that for Barth this superiority evolves from the actual reality of revelation and of its particular time. The ontological superiority of the particular time of revelation on which Barth insists is not, and is not to be, achieved at the expense of the general time of history, but derives from the actual reality of revelation, i.e. its concrete historicity. The reality of revelation comes from itself, and once it is established it needs not be maintained or accounted for by any human possibilities.⁹³ In this way, the subject of revelation is affirmed as the Lord of time.

4C.3 Revelation as the Centre of History

In the final subsection, we will briefly mention the third form that Barth gives to what we term his christological or revelatory concentration of history, i.e. Barth's conception of the time of revelation as the centre of history.

In §14.2 and §14.3 Barth defines the Old Testament as the time of expectation looking forward to revelation, and the New Testament as the time of recollection looking backward to revelation. He gives a lengthy exposition on the both Testaments, explaining how 1) both are witnesses to the time of revelation, 2) in both God is revealed as the hidden God, and 3) in both God is revealed to be present to humanity as the coming God.⁹⁴ In this connection we will make three observations which directly concern our contention that revelation is the centre of history.

⁹³ Understood from this view, one might venture to say, bearing revelation in mind does not entail losing sight of history; on the contrary, overlooking history, which revelation entered and assumed, will eventually lead to the losing sight of revelation. One *needs* not to mute history in order to hear revelation; moreover, we might add, one *must* not silence history if one wants to hear revelation, because the Subject of revelation is precisely the Lord of time. It is also worth noting that the notion of the subject-predicate relation will undergo some implicit but momentous development in IV when Barth reshapes his Christology. This will be treated in section 8A.1.

⁹⁴ I/2, 70ff., 101ff.

First, we notice a concentration of general history upon a particular history. Barth makes it clear that it is not the time before revelation and after revelation *as such* that are directly related to the time of revelation. Instead, the time directly linked to revelation is ‘a time within [general] time, the time of a definite [*bestimmten*] history that takes place in it’,⁹⁵ that is, the history of the both Testaments. In that the two Testaments are singled out from the view point of revelation, there is a concentration of general history upon a particular history.

Second, we notice a second concentration, i.e. that of this particular history upon revelation itself. Although the two Testaments differ in their ‘locations’ in relation to revelation, and therefore in the directionality with which they are related to it (forward and backward), they are oriented to one and the same fulfilled time of revelation. The general linear conception of time and history is replaced by a convergent conception. In that ‘revelation itself is nothing else than the ultimate continuation, the peak and the goal of *this history*’,⁹⁶ this particular history, which is itself the line upon which the whole history is convergent, is in its turn concentrated upon revelation.

Third, this particular history can be said to be concentrated upon revelation, not by virtue of itself, but only when it bears witness to revelation. In other words, the histories of the two Testaments, although conceived as particular, do not possess anything intrinsic to themselves that make them particular. Barth stresses that, serving as signposts pointing to the signified,⁹⁷ the singularity of the two Testaments has to be viewed strictly as acquired and not innate.⁹⁸ This denotes that the whole

⁹⁵ I/2, 70; *KDI* I/2, 77.

⁹⁶ I/2, 70, emphasis mine.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71f.

process of concentration of general history upon a particular history, and then of that particular history upon the history which revelation becomes and is, entirely depends on revelation as the Lord of time and the centre.

4D Concluding Remarks

Drawing on the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history, this chapter has demonstrated the remarkable extent to which Barth allows revelation and history to interact in his doctrine of revelation. We began in section 4A with the dialectic of veiling and unveiling of God's Word in history, examining closely the explanation of this dialectic in terms of contemporaneity-non-contemporaneity and mystery-secularity, arguing that, concerning the speech-act of God, history functions both as that which necessarily separates the three forms of God's Word and as that which is secular and veiling the mystery of God's revelation. In section 4B, regarding how the 'predicate' influences the 'subject', resorting to Barth's definition of the doctrine of revelation as a 'historical question' we identified three specific forms of 'historicisation' in Barth's doctrine of revelation, namely 1) revelation is 'historicised' in that the act of revelation precedes its subject; 2) the Son is 'historicised' in that the self-unveiling of revelation precedes its veiledness; and 3) the Spirit 'historicises' revelation in that He imparts revelation to particular human beings. Finally in section 4C, concerning how the 'subject' precedes and defines the 'predicate', we examined Barth's christological concentration of history and time upon revelation, arguing that for him revelation means the gift, fulfilment, the Lord, and the centre of all history and all time. Revelation and history are allowed such extensive interaction in their subject-predicate relationship, because for Barth revelation as God's speech taking place in history is the most actual reality.

Chapter Five

Knowledge of God in History, and Eternal God in Time: *Church Dogmatics II/1 (1940)*

Introduction

On the basis of the irreversible yet highly interactive subject-predicate relation of revelation to history, Barth has been able to envisage the convergence of the whole human history upon revelation as the centre of time. The question then arises: if in revelation God reveals *Himself*, then would revelation's actual presence in history bring any ontological implications on the conception of the being of God as such? This question leads us into *CD II*.

Focusing on *CD II/1*, which covers Barth's accounts of knowledge of God and reality of God, this chapter seeks to demonstrate: 1) that human history is viewed as a limitation and also medium in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in the formation of human knowledge of God; 2) that the notion of history is crucial to Barth's actualistic conception of God's being a being in act; 3) how Barth construes God as remaining the same as He is when He does new things in history; and 4) how Barth constructs the positive relation of eternity to time, with special attention to what he terms as the supra-temporality of God's eternity. At the end of the chapter, we will indicate the actualistic-ontological direction in which Barth seems to be led by his firm commitment to God's revelation in Jesus Christ in history.

5A The Dialectic of Veiling and Unveiling in the Knowledge of God

In the beginning of *CD* II/1 Barth continues with the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in his treatment of the knowledge of God.¹ And throughout §§25-27 we find several forms of this dialectic: 1) the dialectic of the primary objectivity (of God's self-knowledge) and the secondary objectivity (our human knowledge of God); 2) that of the indirect object (i.e. God) and the direct object (i.e. God's works in history) of our knowledge of God; and ultimately 3) that of veiling and unveiling in our knowledge of God.² These forms of dialectic maintains both God's hiddenness and the truthfulness of human knowledge of Him.

In the unfolding of this dialectic human history plays a crucial part. Drawing on Barth's understanding of 'man's *knowledge* of God as the knowledge of *faith*'³, in what follows we seek to demonstrate 1) that in understanding the *knowledge* of God as faith, Barth maintains the objectivity of our knowledge of God, a knowledge that is mediated through history; 2) that in understanding the knowledge of God as *faith*, Barth construes the absolute particularity and concreteness of God as manifesting in history; 3) that human knowledge of God is always in need of repetition in time, and is always 'on the way' awaiting fulfilment. It will be argued that, for all its inappropriateness, history is still used by God as a medium of knowledge of Him.

¹ II/1, 3.

² In this dialectic 'His unveiling in His works and signs always means for us His veiling too, ... His revelation always means His hiddenness', but 'the *purpose* of His revelation, the *direction* of His will' is not veiling but unveiling. *Ibid.*, 50, 215. Cf. 183.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

5A.1 'Knowledge' of Faith: True Objectivity Indirect, Mediated in and through History

5A.1.1 The True Objectivity Proper to Knowledge of God

Understanding knowledge of God as true knowledge, Barth tackles the question of the objectivity in which God becomes revealed to human beings. Careful deliberations are given on this objectivity. First, knowledge of God can be real and true, because God has indeed revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. If God has really revealed Himself, 'forcefully [carrying] through that self-demonstration in His Word',⁴ all questions of our 'human non-understanding and misunderstanding'⁵ are in fact excluded. This fact signifies a *true* objectivity of knowledge of God, because '[God's] very revelation consists in His making Himself object to us'.⁶ But this objectivity is also *constrained* objectivity, as human knowledge of God is bound to His Word proclaimed by the Church. This knowledge 'takes place, not in a free choice, but with a very definite constraint',⁷ and 'is bound to the object set before it by God's Word—and to this object in its irrevocable objectivity.'⁸

Second, the objectivity of God is a *secondary* objectivity in contrast to the primary objectivity in which God is known to Himself. To be sure, the God revealed to us is truly God Himself. But prior to human knowledge of Him in revelation there is first of all God's self-knowledge in Himself; before God becomes

⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁵ Ibid., 28.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

⁷ Ibid., 7.

⁸ Ibid., 12.

objective to us He is first of all objective to Himself.⁹ This subordination of a secondary objectivity to the primary objectivity is meant to prevent the knowledge of God from being jeopardised by human objectification even in revelation. To be sure:

It was proper to seek this objectivity [of God] first in God's revelation, in His works and signs, in His veiling and unveiling in the creaturely sphere ... But even in this connexion we have already seen that without God's objectivity to *Himself* there is no knowledge of God; without the truth of a *primary* objectivity of Him who reveals Himself to us there is no truth of His *secondary* objectivity in His revelation. But the primary objectivity of God to Himself is reality in His eternal being as the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. As the triune God, God is first and foremost objective to Himself.¹⁰

What is granted by Barth, then, is only the self-objectification of God, and not human objectification of Him.

Finally, the objectivity of human knowledge of God is also *indirect* and *mediated*. For Barth, for the human knower to have God as the direct object of knowledge it would simply mean cancelling the distinction between them. A medium is then necessary in this relation so as to maintain the distinction between the human knower and God as the object of human knowledge:

The reality of our knowledge of God stands or falls with the fact that in His revelation God is present to man in a medium. ... The real

⁹ Ibid., 50: 'even in His revelation we know Him only in consequence of the fact that knowledge of God is real as God's own hidden work in His being as the triune God from eternity to eternity'.

¹⁰ Ibid., 49; *KD* II/1, 53. When the event of knowledge of God takes place, as Jüngel rightly points out, 'in his being-as-object God *remains deus coram homine* [God before the human person] and, in becoming the subject of the knowledge of God, the human person *remains homo coram dei* [the human person before God]. ... God as God differentiates himself from humanity precisely at the point at which he reveals himself to humanity', Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 60.

knowledge of God is concerned with God in His relationship to man, but also in His distinction from him.¹¹

As the knowledge-relation between God and human beings is a relation-in-distinction, it has to be maintained that '[God] is mediately objective to us in His revelation, in which He meets us under the sign and veil of other objects.'¹² As God gives Himself to be known only in a medium, 'we really know Him *only* in His *clothed* objectivity.'¹³

5A.1.2 History as Medium for Knowledge of God

These three determinations on the objectivity of human knowledge of God bring to light what we may call Barth's *mediatory* understanding of human history. Since direct knowledge-relation between God and human beings is impossible, human history is used by God as 'a piece of the objective reality surrounding human beings which is different from God',¹⁴ serving as a medium or a 'sign' in this relation. It is only in this medium that God gives Himself for us to know; it is only under this sign that we are directed to God. In Barth's words, '[e]ven our faith as such belongs to the veiling and limitation of revelation. Our knowledge of faith itself is knowledge of God in His hiddenness. It is indirect and mediate, not immediate knowledge.'¹⁵

In the meantime, like the form of God's Word, this medium or sign of knowledge of God is also unsuitable for its purpose, not corresponding to but rather contradicting that which it signifies. Barth lays such great weight on the

¹¹ II/1, 10.

¹² Ibid., 16.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ *KD* II/1, 17: 'einem Stück der ihn umgebenden, von Gott verschiedenen gegenständlichen Wirklichkeit'; II/1, 17.

¹⁵ II/1, 57.

inappropriateness of this medium that precisely as a sign it is conceived also as a 'veil'.¹⁶ As both the sign and the veil, then, history possesses a 'necessary conditionedness [*Bedingtheit*]'—necessary, because it is only through it that God gives Himself to be known; conditioned, because from it God is sharply distinguished.¹⁷ It is only when God freely makes use of history that this conditionedness become removed, and that God becomes unveiled through the veiling medium.¹⁸

Barth's understanding of history as 'sign and veil' has received criticism for his refusing to grant an internal unity between the 'form' and its 'content', thus rendering the former only external to the latter. For instance, despite Barth's explicit expression that it is only 'in, with and under this form' that God gives Himself to be objectively known,¹⁹ Rowan Williams suggests that Barth treats worldly circumstances as vehicles which are merely concealing and external.²⁰ In Williams' view, what Barth will not allow this medium is not only an inner unity of some sort with the content that it refers to, but also a real relation between the two.

Two notions might help here. First, in Barth's own account of a positive relationship between a sacrament and the reality to which it refers, he insists on viewing a sacrament, which is posited in creaturely reality but which becomes taken up when used by God, positively from God's side as a 'divinely willed and ordained

¹⁶ Cf. Barth's discussion of a similar relation of the content and the form of the Word, I/1, 166f. See also section 4A.2.

¹⁷ II/1, 56.

¹⁸ Barth's mediatory understanding of the reality of human history as 'sign and veil' is close to his understanding of the sacrament. A sacrament is the visible form of an invisible content, and it is employed by God for the knowledge of God to take place. *Ibid.*, 50, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁰ Williams, 'Barth on the Triune God', Sykes (ed.), *Karl Barth*, 154f.

determination'.²¹ In other words, despite its unsuitability, the medium, form or sacrament is still willed, ordained and really utilised by God as a means to bear witness to Him. If knowledge of God is grace from God,²² as Barth describes it, the medium chosen and used for it, too, can only be grace.

Second, in this connection, McCormack points out that it is due to his persistent worry over the *analogia entis* that Barth is only willing to grant an analogy of extrinsic attribution (and not intrinsic attribution) between God and the creature.²³ Challenging Barth on a 'Barthian', eschatological view of the creature, McCormack suggests that 'Barth ought to have insisted that the *analogia attributionis extrinsecae* as realized in history presupposes the existence (protologically and eschatologically) of an *analogia attributionis intrinsecae* ... [i.e.] the momentary actualization of that *analogia attributionis intrinsecae*'.²⁴ In our context this suggestion means that, on the dynamic ground of the actualisation of an external relationship between God and history (understood as the medium for human knowledge of Him), it is possible and perhaps even necessary to assert an internal relationship between the two, not permanently granted but 'momentarily actualised' contingent upon God's act.

5A.2 Knowledge of 'Faith': in His Particularity and Concreteness Manifest in History

When knowledge of God is understood as knowledge of *faith*, Barth proposes, it means that God as the object of our knowledge of Him is also the object of our faith in Him. The notion of faith highlights chiefly the particularity and concreteness of

²¹ II/1, 53.

²² See for instance *ibid.*, 27, 29, 69.

²³ *Ibid.*, 175ff. Cf. also 238f.

²⁴ Bruce McCormack, "'The Limits of the Knowledge of God': These on the Theological Epistemology of Karl Barth", *Orthodox and Modern*, 167-180 (178).

the knowledge of God. In Barth's view, knowledge of God as faith 'becomes and is a special knowledge, distinct from the knowledge of all other objects, outstanding in the range of all knowledge.'²⁵ It is only proper for the God who distinguishes Himself from all other objects to give Himself as a particular object in the particular human knowledge of Him. For us to know God in His particularity is to believe in Him.

Corresponding to the particularity of the faith-knowledge of God, there is a particular process through which knowledge of this particularity is formed. Barth makes it plain that the particularity at issue is not assumed *a priori*, but concretely formed *a posteriori*. For him, the particular faith-knowledge of God does not originate from any abstract 'preconceived idea about the transcendence and supramundanity of God',²⁶ but rather is brought to happen through concrete encounters between God and humanity in history as recorded in Scripture. Then, drawing on the historical records in the Bible, Barth understands the occurrence of faith to be a 'separation' [*Ausnahme*] as the execution of God's choice of sanctification.²⁷ When God removes some people 'into one particular position distinct from all other positions',²⁸ faith in God occurs accordingly and so does knowledge of God. The only way for us to believe in God and know God is then to be faithfully in keeping with the concrete 'historical events, forms and relationships which are His work.'²⁹ And all these God's dealings with humanity in history Barth deems to be initiated by nothing but the Word of God:

²⁵ II/1, 15.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ II/1, 15.; *KD* II/1, 15.

²⁸ II/1, 15.; *KD* II/1, 15.

²⁹ II/1, 17.

What happens [through] the Word of God is the history of this choice and sanctification. It is this history that we recount; and our own faith only comes into play in so far as we keep to this history.³⁰

In this connection, the history of God's dealings with humanity is affirmed as the direct object or medium through which human knowledge of God takes place. When it comes to the question as to how in general it comes about that *creaturely reality*, being distinct from the reality of God, can represent God, and how in particular it comes about that *human history*, being at least conceptually distinguished from the history of God's dealings with humanity, can serve as the locale where that latter history takes place, Barth's answer is straightforward: As the One the knowledge of whom has to be mediated, God has the sovereign freedom to commandeer 'a piece of the objective reality'³¹ of history into the service of Himself. The chosen piece of history is taken up 'above and beyond its own existence'³² so that it may and must serve to attest the objectivity of God; or, it may and must advocate or defend [*für Gott eintritt*] God 'in so far as it is determined, made and [as such] used by God' as a particular work of God.³³ Note how Barth correlates the particularity of the creaturely object 'in, with and under' which knowledge of Him happens with that of the event of knowledge of Him:

Thus, to the particularity of this event which, in contrast to all other objects, is grounded in the nature [*Wesen*] of God, there corresponds the particularity of one such other object which, in the sphere of the creaturely reality, points to the nature [*Wesen*] of God, a uniqueness which does not belong to this object in itself and as such, but which

³⁰ Ibid., 16; *KD* II/1, 15.

³¹ *KD* II/1, 17; II/1, 17.

³² II/1, 17.

³³ Ibid.; *KD* II/1, 17.

falls to its lot [*zuteil wird*] in this event, and in which it is now effective.³⁴

Also note how he differentiates these two sorts of particularity by making the particularity of the object totally dependent on God's making use of it:

But [this object] is effective, not on account of its own ability, but in virtue of its institution [*Einsetzung*] to the service which this object has to perform at this point. In other words, it is effective in virtue of the special work to which God has at this point determined and engaged it, because it has become the instrument of this work and has been marked off and is useful as such.³⁵

The particularity of the history of God's dealings with humanity as the medium of knowledge of God consists, therefore, in the fact that it is contingently utilised ('at this point ... at this point') and not universally valid, dependent and not self-sufficient. Finally, note how faith is construed as that through which the human knower receives the indirect and particular knowledge of God:

At bottom, knowledge of God in faith is always this indirect knowledge of God, knowledge of God *in His works*, and in these particular works—in the determining and using of certain creaturely realities to bear witness to the divine objectivity. What distinguishes faith [*Glaube*] from unbelief [*Unglauben*], erroneous faith [*Irrglauben*] and superstition [*Aberglauben*] is that it is content with this indirect knowledge of God.³⁶

5A.3 Knowledge of God Proceeding in History

From Barth's conception of knowledge of God as faith in God concretely mediated

³⁴ II/1, 17; *KD* II/1, 17. Also note the close relation between 'uniqueness' [*Eigenart*] and 'belong to' [*zu eigen ist*].

³⁵ II/1, 17; *KD* II/1, 17.

³⁶ II/1, 17; *KD* II/1, 17.

through particular events in history, there arises what we might call his actualistic understanding of the knowledge of God. Although it is not until the second half of *CD II/1* that Barth began to explain in detail his teaching of God's being as being in act,³⁷ already in the first half of it we find this notion at work in the context of the historical mediation of the knowledge of God in its particularity.

According to Barth, the Israelites in the Old Testament were not dealing with an abstract idea of God, but the God who acted concretely in history. Their conception of God was not formed once and for all, but through their 'continual explanation of the *divine work*, of the action of God in the history of Israel, that is to say, in *what had happened and what was happening to Israel*'.³⁸ The same can be said of the message of the New Testament, too, in that 'it is given in the form of a continual explanation of a definite historical event—of the same historical event that began with the Exodus' whose 'concrete aim and its totality become quite clear.'³⁹ On the part of God, His self-manifestation always consists in His particular actions which take place in history; on our part, our knowing God always arises from our *continual* perceiving, conceiving and explaining of those events. On God's part, He is known 'not simply because He is God in Himself, but because He reveals Himself as such; not simply because His work is there, but because He is active in His work.'⁴⁰ On our part, our knowledge of God occurs when there are encounters between God and humanity.

It might be helpful to at this point consider what it means for us to know God in time. One important factor that composes the difference between God's

³⁷ See section 5B.1.

³⁸ II/1, 19; *KD II/1*, 19.

³⁹ II/1, 19.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 23.

self-knowledge and human knowledge of Him is the fact that, whilst God knows Himself perfectly in eternity, or ‘in an instance and once-and-for-all’ [*in einem Nu und ein- für allemal*],⁴¹ we know Him only conditionally in time. This means that the eternal God so lowers Himself that we as human beings in time may know Him ‘in a temporal way [*zeitlich*]’.⁴² ‘According to the measure of our human cognition’,⁴³ we human beings can know God only temporally, i.e. in a continuous time flow in which knowledge of God occurs and recurs:

Temporally means ... in *repetition* [*Wiederholung*], in a cognition which progresses from one present to another and which begins afresh in every present, [and] in a series of unique acts of knowledge.⁴⁴

The notion of repetition is employed by Barth to illustrate the fact that human beings, as temporal beings, do not have knowledge of God unless it is a matter of procession in time. Supposedly, then, from *our* point of view, *our* knowledge of God takes place in a linear procession in history, in time. But in regard to the subject matter, in Barth’s view, the procession of our *knowledge of God* is conceived as surrounding a centre:

[Our knowledge of God] happens in the whole circumference of this centre, in the whole circumference of sacramental reality, in a *succession* of attestations and cognitions, of which each expects and indicates another, each conditions and is conditioned by another—not as if each one did not always exist in whole truth, but in such a way

⁴¹ Ibid., 61; *KD* II/1, 67.

⁴² II/1, 61.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.; *KD* II/1, 67.

that the whole truth is truth temporally and thus in need of repetition for us.⁴⁵

This circular understanding of the knowledge of *God* is important, because it makes it clear that the linear procession of *our* knowledge of God does not rely on repetition as such, but rather on pointing to the centre. This circular conception has the apparent advantage that, in that each point around the circle is equidistant from, and in that sense equally related to and conditioned by, its centre, no point can claim to be a ‘vantage point’ nearer to the centre than others. We might call this an actualistic understanding of the human knowledge of God: that it constantly proceeds in the convergent movement towards its centre: God’s revelation in Jesus Christ.

5A.4 Knowledge of God ‘On the Way’

Now we turn to §27 in *CD* II/1, the last paragraph of Barth’s teaching on knowledge of God, in which he deals with its limits or boundaries in respect to its human knowing subject. Defining the event of our knowledge of God as a way or path, he sets out to delimit it by investigating its *terminus a quo* [starting-point] and *terminus ad quem* [end-point]. Formally speaking, according to the two headings of §27, he designates the hiddenness of God as the starting-point,⁴⁶ and the veracity or truthfulness [*Wahrhaftigkeit*] of human knowledge of God as the end-point.⁴⁷

Materially considered, these two points converge on the one single fact of God’s

⁴⁵ II/1, 61f.; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 67. It is noteworthy that each attestation and cognition at issue here *conditions* and is *conditioned* [*bedingt und auch ... bedingt ist*] by another, instead of *determines* and is *determined* by another, as the English translation has it. Also, the key point that it is ‘for us’ [*für uns*] that the knowledge of God needs to be repeated in time is somewhat obscured.

⁴⁶ II/1, 183; *KD* II/1, 205: ‘our knowledge of God begins in all seriousness with the knowledge of the *hiddenness* of God’.

⁴⁷ II/1, 214f.: ‘Just as the hidden God, and therefore faith in Him, forms its beginning, so also the true God and again faith in Him, forms its goal’.

sovereign freedom in human knowledge of Him, i.e. the fact that ‘God is known by God and by God *alone*.’⁴⁸ This sovereign freedom of the Subject who makes Himself objective for human knowledge means on the one hand the divine hiddenness which stands between God and us,⁴⁹ and on the other the ‘insurpassable and incontestable *certainty*’ of the knowledge of God.⁵⁰ In terms of the *hiddenness* of God, neither the creaturely object as medium nor the human subject as the knower has any credit to claim in this matter. Knowledge of God does not occur without creaturely objects, but it does not occur by virtue of them. Also, knowledge of God consists in human perception and conception of God, but it does not occur on the strength of them. ‘Knowing God, we do not ascribe to ourselves the capacity for the knowing.’⁵¹ As regards the *certainty* of this knowledge, however, neither the mediatory objects or the human knowing subject can be made in vain or put to shame in this matter. For it is the Subject of knowledge of God Himself as the free Lord who not only allows but also commands our human attempt to know Him, and therefore guarantees the certainty and truthfulness of our human knowledge of Him.

In this light, the human subjects in their noetic relation with God can be said to be kept in check (regarding the hiddenness of God) and at the same time held under guarantee (regarding the truthfulness of our knowledge of God) in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in their knowledge of God. Just as the mediatory object, the human knowing subject, too, is a creature that is situated in history. It means

⁴⁸ Ibid., 179; *KD* II/1, 200f.

⁴⁹ II/1, 182.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 180; *KD* II/1, 202.

⁵¹ II/1, 184. In this connection McCormack identifies a ‘twofold limitation’, i.e. the ‘internal limitation’ (hiddenness of God) and the ‘external limitation’ (incapacity of human thought and language for knowledge of God). McCormack, “‘The Limits of the Knowledge of God’”, *Orthodox and Modern*, 171f.

that, not knowing God ‘in an instance and once-and-for-all’,⁵² he/she is situated in a historical series whose terminals consist in the hiddenness of God and the truthfulness of our human knowledge of Him, respectively. Posited in this historical series, being neither its own beginning nor its goal but between the two, *human* knowledge of God has to be understood as ‘on the way’.

At this point Barth employs the notion of *theologia viatorum*, theology of the pilgrims, in an attempt to uphold the divine transcendence of grace. The transcendence of grace over nature is in his view not to be lightly made equated with the distinction of eternity from time, of our future knowledge of God from its present temporal and perhaps corrupted form. Instead, ‘[e]ven as eternal grace, freed from the whole enshrouding veil of our temporality and corruption, grace will still be the grace of God and not our nature.’⁵³ In the usual sense this notion denotes the limited and imperfect theology of Christians on their pilgrimage on earth in contrast to *theologia comprehensorum*, the theology of those who have arrived in heaven, attaining to perfection. But if, as Barth sees it, it is the distinction of God from humanity, and not of eternity from temporality, that makes human knowledge of God ‘on the way’, then both the limits and *possibility* of human attempts at knowing God are indicated. In terms of its limits, our knowledge of God is at best *theologia viatorum* even in eternity; in terms of its positive side, it can really be *theologia viatorum* even in the temporal process in history. In this sense, history is not to be negatively construed as that which separates us from authentic knowledge of the eternal God, but rather positively as the opportunity given to us in which we can keep striving towards the goal of true knowledge of Him by His grace.

⁵² II/1, 61; *KD* II/1, 67.

⁵³ II/1, 209.

5A.5 Brief Summary

In summary, beginning from the true objectivity of the knowledge of God presupposed by the reality of revelation, we have in this section dealt with some theological implications carried by Barth's statement that knowledge of God means faith in God, and that it takes place only 'on the way' in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling. What immediately concerns us is the assertion that knowledge of God is true and possible on condition that it is mediated through God's concrete works in the proceeding time flow in history. In this connection it has been established that human history is a limited medium, but a medium nonetheless. But it is so, as should be clear by now, not in the sense that God has no choice but to make use of it, nor that, having made use of it, God is conditioned by or even imprisoned in it. The proper sense in which human history is the medium consists in the fact that, sovereignly keeping distance from direct human knowledge, God has determined to make use of it and actually has made use of it, and that knowledge of God has therefore actually taken place with, under and in it. Moreover, the historicity of the knowing subjects are also addressed in the sense that, just as the human knowers have past, present and future in history, their knowledge of God, too, is conceived as being informed and formed in the process from past through present to future. Needless to say, both the object (the creaturely reality in history) and the subject (the human knower) are limited and imperfect; that is why knowledge of God has to consist in the fact that 'He unveils Himself as the One He is by veiling Himself in a form which He Himself is not.'⁵⁴ But if God as the ultimate Subject in this connection has actually laid claim to them both, if it is true that 'God reveals Himself

⁵⁴ Ibid., 52.

in the *mode* of hiddenness[,] but the *meaning* of His revelation is His veracity'⁵⁵—if God is for them—then we in our position as the secondary subject must not and certainly cannot be against either ourselves or the creaturely reality, denying the possibility of our knowing God or improperly underestimating the significance of the medium of history as the secondary object.

5B The Reality of God

In the second half of *CD* II/1 (§§28-31) Barth deals with the reality of God. In §28 he registers the axioms that God's being is in His act of revelation and that God is the One who loves in freedom, and in §§29-31 he reinterprets what is traditionally termed the attributes of God, categorising them into God's 'perfections' of love qualified by His freedom,⁵⁶ and God's perfections of freedom qualified by His love.⁵⁷ What directly concern our purposes are his actualistic understanding of God's being, and his treatments of God's constancy and of His eternity.

5B.1 God's Being in His Act

The crucial significance of §28.1 of the *CD* lies in Barth's actualistic understanding of God's being. For him the statement that 'God is' must mean that 'God is who He is in the act of His revelation.'⁵⁸ This statement binds together being and action, and guarantees that the God whom we meet in revelation is God's 'own, inner, proper reality, behind which and above which there is no other'.⁵⁹ This conception of God's being as being-in-act means four things.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁶ §30: 'Grace and Holiness', 'Mercy and Righteousness', 'Patience and Wisdom'.

⁵⁷ §31: 'Unity and Omnipresence', 'Constancy and Omnipotence', 'Eternity and Glory'.

⁵⁸ II/1, 257, also 262.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

First, it speaks of the God who not only acknowledges the reality of history but also works in His revelation effectively throughout the historical series in time, with which a God construed as being in eternity in opposition to time would and could have nothing to do. The act of revelation, in which God's being is, is an event [*Ereignis*] or happening [*Geschehen*] which is never not active.⁶⁰ This act takes place comprehensively enclosing in itself past, present and future. To be sure, the divine act of revelation of Jesus Christ took place once in the past, at one certain point in history. But it never simply stayed in the past, but is still taking place here and now in the present, that is, in each present in every period in history. Moreover, this divine act is equally futuristic in the sense that it is always in front of us, coming towards us. With all these taken into account, Barth is able to conceive the divine act of revelation as historically closed or finalised in the past, fully contemporaneous in the present, as well as truly coming towards us from the future.⁶¹ His actualistic understanding of God's being and his comprehensive view of revelation suggest that, on our side, we do not stand still but are walking actively in the circle of this event of revelation and that, on God's side, His being is not only life but also the Living.⁶²

Second, the designation of God's being in revelation as event, act and life needs further qualification, for this designation is not predicated on the general terms in which we understand these concepts. In the strictest sense, Barth argues, we are

⁶⁰ Ibid., 262, 263.

⁶¹ *KD* II/1, 294: 'eben in ihrer geschichtlichen Abgeschlossenheit und vollen Gegenwärtigkeit zugleich wahrhaft zukünftig ist'; II/1, 262: 'it is in its historical completeness and its full contemporaneity that it is truly future.'

⁶² II/1, 262f. On these two pages Barth begins his discussion by stating that 'God is who He is in His revelation', and ends it by stating that '[t]o its very deepest depths God's Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event—not any event, not events in general, but the event of His action, in which we have a share in God's revelation.' Whilst the first statement indicates that God's being is *in* His act of revelation' (God's being-in-act), the second suggests that God's being *is* His act of revelation (God's being-as-act). In this thesis we will stick to the heading of §28.1: 'The Being of God in Act'.

to understand these concept in terms of God, and not *vice versa*:

God's revelation is a *particular* event, not identical with the sum, nor identical with any of the content of other existing happenings either in nature or in human history. It is a definite [*bestimmte*] happening within general happenings: so definite that, whilst it takes part in this happening [i.e. general happenings], it also contradicts it, and can only be seen and comprehended together with it in its contradiction So, ... the action of God that takes place in revelation is a *particular* action, different from any other happening, even in contradiction to it.⁶³

To be sure, all events in history are 'particular' in their own right, for no historical event is a mere repetition of another event or a re-enactment of a general rule. Barth himself goes along this line of thinking when he argues for the particularity of theology against the general categories of philosophy or metaphysics.⁶⁴ But more frequently he is seen to raise the standard for 'particularity' when he feels the need to safeguard the particularity of the historical event of revelation from any other historical events in their 'particularity'. That is why here Barth is upholding, so to speak, the 'unique particularity' of the historical event of revelation within but also in contradiction to the 'general particularity' of all other historical events.⁶⁵ This 'unique particularity', then, is one which 'is not exhausted' by the 'dialectical transcendence' of revelation which 'must always be understood with equal strictness as immanence.'⁶⁶

Third, Barth further elaborates this 'unique particularity' of the event of revelation, emphasising that it does not separate itself from the visible, natural and

⁶³ II/1, 264; *KD* II/1, 296.

⁶⁴ See for example I/1, 39f., II/1, 14-16.

⁶⁵ Cf. section 4A.1.

⁶⁶ II/1, 264. Cf. Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 79f.

outer world, staying only in some invisible, spiritual and inner realm. On his account, the ‘spiritual’ world does not stand closer than the ‘natural’ or physical world does to the reality of God in His act of revelation. Revelation, and therefore God’s being, do not simply transcend the physical and overlap the spiritual; they rather transcend both in comprehending both. Precisely because the event of God’s being is also in the natural world, Barth contends, there is indeed a ‘true, real *history* of His doings in [the] genuine sense of the term’.⁶⁷

Finally, the three foregoing determinations of God’s being-in-act—as pure act and therefore life, as singular act and therefore freedom, and as act not only spiritual but also ‘natural’—point to a fourth: that this act ‘necessarily (if, when we speak of it, we turn our eyes solely on His revelation) means [God’s] own conscious, willed and executed decision.’⁶⁸ This decision is that of the triune God, ‘executed once for all in eternity, and anew in every second of our time ... in such a way that it confronts what is not divine being, not as a mere possibility, but always as a self-contained, self-containing reality’.⁶⁹ What Barth aims to emphasise in the present context is that God’s being-in-act is that of a personal God, and that human conception of ‘person’ derives from this ‘personal’ God and not *vice versa*.⁷⁰ And what this means for our concerns is that God’s being-in-act as revelation in history is an act willed by God’s very own being.⁷¹

⁶⁷ II/1, 267; emphasis mine.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 271.

⁶⁹ Ibid. The rich implications contained this highly compressed account of possibility, reality and necessity on the one hand, of being, action and will on the other, as well as of the doctrines of revelation, the Trinity and God will be discussed in Chapters Six and Eight.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 272. Justin Stratis correctly points out that in this connection ‘Barth deploys the *Entscheidung* terminology specifically in defence of the *Persönlichkeit* of God’, Justin Stratis, ‘Speculating about Divinity? God’s Immanent Life and Actualistic Ontology’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12 (2010), 20-32 (26).

⁷¹ As Webster summarises, ‘the essence of God’s will’ has to be taken to mean ‘the will of God’s essence’, so as not to ‘leave a gap in a metaphysical background to the being of God which is

With these determinations of God's being-in-act in mind, we now proceed to examine Barth's treatments of two specific perfections or attributes of God which are of special interest to the purposes in this thesis: God's constancy and His eternity.

5B.2 The Constancy of God

This subsection deals with Barth's explanation of God's *constancy*, focusing on the relationship between God's constancy and God's working in history. The next subsection will be devoted to an investigation of Barth's account of the relation between *eternity* and time.

The constancy or immutability of God means that God is changeless, eternally remaining the same without any succession, change or variation.⁷² In Barth's words, it means that:

there neither is nor can be, nor is to be expected or even thought possible in Him ... any deviation, diminution or addition, nor any degeneration or rejuvenation, any alteration or non-identity or discontinuity. The one, omnipresent God remains the One He is. This is His constancy.'⁷³

But this traditional definition is immediately followed by a qualification from the viewpoint of revelation. In view of the fact that God has indeed established a true relationship with the world and humanity, Barth states, this constancy must not be

indifferent to God's historical acts of revelation'. John Webster, 'Translator's Introduction', in Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 6. For a brief account of Barth's actualistic ontology in §28 of the *CD*, see McCormack, 'The Actuality of God', *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, 213-219. As McCormack sees it, '*The root of Barth's actualism is to be found in this eternal act of self-determination and in it alone*' (ibid., 217). Whilst it is clear that the actualistic scheme registered in §28.1 receives great material elaborations in Barth's doctrine of election in II/2, it has been argued that in II/1 Barth's actualism already acquired material claims, '*the most important of which is the dialectic of love and freedom*'. Stratis, 'Speculating about Divinity?', 22.

⁷² Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. by Ernst Bizer, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), 67.

⁷³ II/1, 491.

negatively considered a constraint preventing God from building this relationship. Concretely understood, 'it is not a matter of knowing God in a more or less consequently conceived immutability as such, but of knowing *God* as "immutable"',⁷⁴ for the predicate 'immutable' should be determined by the subject 'God'.⁷⁵ Qualified by the notion of revelation, as Gunton rightly formulated, the proper and positive meaning of God's constancy consists in the fact that 'God is what he is in eternal actuality; he never is it intermittently, but always and in every place he is what he is, continually and self-consistently',⁷⁶ both in His being in Himself and in His existence in relation to the world and humanity.

On the basis this actualistic and concrete understanding of constancy as God's constancy made manifest in revelation, Barth establishes his understanding of the relationship between the constant God and His works of creation, revelation and reconciliation. This relationship can be explained by four important statements. First, being constant, *God does new things*, and in doing so He has a real history, i.e. salvation history, with the world and humanity. In Barth's view, the constancy of

⁷⁴ Ibid., 493; translation revised per *KD II/1*, 554f.: 'es handelt sich nicht darum, in einem mehr oder weniger konsequent als solches begriffenen Unveränderlichen Gott zu erkennen, sondern es handelt sich darum, Gott als «unveränderlich» zu erkennen'.

⁷⁵ In his treatment of God's glory Christopher Holmes posits that, if God's glory is to be *God's* glory, it should be predicated not to 'a relation or a way of God's working', but to God's being as such. In this regard, 'Barth insists that God is revealed to us as God is; that God's perfections are not anterior to God's being, but that God has them in Godself prior to the historical outworking of the covenant.' Christopher R. J. Holmes, 'The Theological Function of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes and the Divine Glory, with Special Reference to Karl Barth and His Reading of the Protestant Orthodox', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 61 (2008), 206-223 (217). Contrary to this reading, we propose that Barth's designation of constancy as *God's* constancy is not aimed to safeguard God's being antecedent to His attribute. Rather, what he seeks to ensure is *concrete* conception of 'constancy' as God's attribute; that is to say, we have to do not with a general notion of constancy, but with the constancy of the particular, concrete God. And the only proper and only possible way for us to have concrete knowledge of God's constancy, is not to start from 'Godself' but from what is revealed to us in history. This approach to knowledge of God's attributes, of course, is built on the ground of Barth's actualistic understanding of God's being-in-act: the One revealed to us is no other and no less than the One who in Himself is. We would consent to Holmes' claim that 'God is complete in Godself' (ibid., 217) if by 'Godself' is meant the God of Jesus Christ, who is never not for us and therefore never without us.

⁷⁶ Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, 107.

God in no way hinders Him from doing new things. It is in doing new things that:

[the constant] God has a real *history* in and with the world created by Him: the history of the *reconciliation* and *revelation* accomplished by Him, by which He leads the world to a future *redemption*.⁷⁷

In other words, a constant God who does not or cannot do new things cannot have a real history with the world. And this real history between God and the world consists not in any new works, but in God's new works of reconciliation, revelation and redemption. Then we are told that this real history of these new works of God is precisely *salvation* history. In *this* history there is indeed the 'particular act of God' [*Das Besondere Gottes*], and to this act there are indeed real peculiarities [*Eigentümlichkeiten*].⁷⁸ These works in salvation history are so particular and so new that they cannot be understood simply 'as the continuation and crown of the work of creation'.⁷⁹ Rather, vis-à-vis the history of the created world in general, God's particular works in salvation history has to be acknowledged as absolutely new:

Taking place in the sequence [*Folge*] of another and many others, the special work of God does not result from [*folgen aus*] this other or from the series of all others; instead, amidst this other, it has the character of a termination [*Abschluß*] of all others and at the same time that of a beginning of a complete other. In that they take place within the course and development of created things, in that they themselves too have the character of such created things, God's words and deeds and also the faith and obedience in which humanity meets them (and also the unbelief and disobedience in which it opposes them!) have, at the same time and decisively, the character of an

⁷⁷ II/1, 502; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 565.

⁷⁸ *KD* II/1, 569, 570.

⁷⁹ II/1, 506.

interruption [*Unterbruch*], of an annulment [*Aufhebung*] of all that which hitherto exists in favour of a new order.⁸⁰

One need not be surprised to find Barth re-employing the notion of salvation history, which he explicitly dismissed in *CD* I/2.⁸¹ Whilst in I/2 the focus of discussion is revelation in its subject-predicate relation to history, in II/1 the immediate context is God's new works in history as disclosed to us in revelation. Here in insisting that salvation history takes place in but does not result from general history, Barth retains the same basic argumentation that, just as revelation is in history but not of history, salvation history takes place in general history but does not result from it. Revelation is precisely one of the new works which God does in salvation history.

The second statement is that, in doing new things in salvation history, *God remains constant*. If it is *this* constant God that created the world, then in the work of creation as *His* creation God became without becoming anything that He had not

⁸⁰ Ibid., 509; translation revised per *KD* II/1, 572. Three things are to be noticed in this block quote—the first two concerning my reworking of translation; the third about two specific German words. First, in the English translation there is observed the clear attempt to preserve the connection between *Folge* and *folgen aus* by using the two verbs 'follows' and 'follows from'. In doing so, however, the sense is obscured in which Barth says that God's special work simply 'takes place' [*geschehend*] without following anything, a sense to which I choose to keep. Second, I retain the long sentence beginning with 'In that they', thus preserving the connection between those clauses taken apart in the English translation, so as to highlight the fact that between the ordinary character (taking place 'within the course and development of created things') and the extraordinary character of the divine-human dealings, there exists a relation of a paradoxical 'in that' [*indem*] rather than a contradictory 'however'. Third, the words *Abschluß* and *Aufhebung* are translated into 'termination' and 'annulment' respectively. It would be helpful to bear in mind, however, that they could also mean, with a more positive tone, 'completion' and 'sublimation' respectively (cf. footnote 33 in Chapter Two). And the latter understanding finds support in how Barth conceives the relation between nature and grace: 'when grace reveals itself, nature indeed *does not cease to be*—how should it, as God there does not cease to be its Creator? There *within* nature, however, is more than nature; there nature itself becomes the *theatre* of grace; there grace becomes visible as the lordship over nature and thus in its freedom over against it' (II/1, 509; *KD* II/1, 572, emphasis mine). Certainly Barth would not mean (at this point at least) for grace to be simply the perfection of nature. But if it is *within* nature—which *does not cease to be*—that grace, in finding its *theatre*, makes nature more than nature, then the free lordship of grace over against nature is not to be understood as consisting in the pure negation or destruction ('termination' or 'annulment') of the latter by the former.

⁸¹ I/2, 58. See section 4C.2.

been.⁸² And if it is *this* constant God that brings about new things in His work of revelation and reconciliation, then these ‘new’ works of *God* do not overthrow but rather confirms the constancy of God. Moreover, just as God the Creator does not oppose but rather asserts the God *in se*, so God the Revealer, Reconciler and Redeemer known in salvation history does not contradict but rather affirms God the Creator and therefore the God *in se*.⁸³

Third, not altering God’s being, these peculiarities seen in the new, particular work of God in salvation history demonstrates who this constant God *in se* is. In doing these new works ‘God in some sense sets Himself apart from Himself, namely, from His being and doing as Creator’.⁸⁴ And ‘in those peculiarities, His being [*Sein*] and doing as Creator and therefore also His divine essence [*Wesen*] as such acquires contours’ in a particular and concrete manner.⁸⁵ Therefore, in that the constant God is who He is in His new works in salvation history, He can be known to us only retrospectively through these new works. ‘It is in and with the knowledge of this second that we know the first; it is in and with this particular work that we know the general, and not *vice versa*.’⁸⁶

Fourth, like the discussion about God’s being-in-act in §28.1, the present discussion about God’s constancy and his new works in salvation history, too, leads distinctively to the notion of God’s *choice*:

⁸² II/1, 499.

⁸³ ‘In this history God does not become nor is He other than who He is in Himself from all eternity and in eternity [*der, der er von Ewigkeit her und in Ewigkeit in sich selber ist*; with *in sich selber* missing from the English translation]. Again, His constancy does not hinder Him from being the real subject of this real history; instead, it is precisely in His constancy that He is able, empowered and willing [*fähig, ermächtigt und willig*] to be this. ... God does not contradict Himself but confirms Himself precisely as the Creator of the world, in that He has a particular history with it also in the work of reconciliation and revelation’, *ibid.*, 502f.; translation revised per *KD* II/1, 565.

⁸⁴ II/1, 506; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 569.

⁸⁵ II/1, 506; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 569.

⁸⁶ II/1, 507; translation revised per *KD* II/1, 570.

The special act of God in this new work of God's appears ... in the fact that from the very outset and in all its stages salvation history is based on a *choice* [*Auswahl*] ... God does not become nor is another in this act of choice which constitutes the salvation history; rather, He is the One who He is as the Saviour out of sin and death in this particular form.⁸⁷

The full implications of the notion of the constant God grounding His new works in salvation history in His choice will be treated in the next chapter. But one thing to be noted is that the choice of the constant God is not an arbitrary choice. Rather, it is in aiming to 'enter into a kind of partnership with humanity' that God, the free Lord who is graciously loving, makes this choice.⁸⁸

5B.3 The Eternity of God

5B.3.1 God's Eternity Positively Related to Time

In the context of the Christian doctrine of God, just as the notion of constancy is often defined negatively as changeless, that of eternity is often defined as timeless.⁸⁹ At the outset of §31.3 of the *CD* Barth rejects viewing eternity abstractly and negatively. The eternity at issue is for him God's eternity, as a determination of God's freedom, denoting His sovereignty and majesty.⁹⁰ Behind this is clearly Barth's insistence on viewing God's being-in-act *concretely* and strictly from the view point of revelation. On this ground, he registers a *positive* account of eternity.

⁸⁷ II/1, 508; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 572.

⁸⁸ II/1, 507; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 570.

⁸⁹ The two notions are also used to interpret each other, strengthening the image of a timeless and therefore changeless God. Cf. Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 65. The Barth of the *Unterricht* maintained that one could talk legitimately about 'the great and solemn "No" of the eternity of God' only by way of negation, and that '[w]e do not begin to conceive God's eternity and omnipresence by infinitely extending time and space but by negating them' (*Unt2*, 113, 158f.; *GD*, 400, 434). He was then quite happy about Schleiermacher's definition of God's eternity as absolute timelessness.

⁹⁰ II/1, 608. Cf. 464f.

On this ground, he gives a preliminary definition of eternity as pure duration in which beginning, succession and end happen at one moment and at the same time [*Einmal und Zugleich*],⁹¹ thereby agreeing to view eternity as ‘non-temporality’ in a limited sense, excluding from the notion of eternity not time as such, but what he deems as the negative elements of time, i.e. separation, distance and contradiction.⁹² On this positive view, when eternity is understood as pure duration, it might well be endless, not due to a lack of beginning and end, but due to their simultaneity; it is indivisible, not because there is no succession in it, but because beginning, succession and end are inseparable;⁹³ it is independent, not in the sense that it is devoid of all change, but that time has no power over it.

Having cleared the notion of timelessness from that of eternity, Barth furthers his account of a positive relation of God’s eternity to time. This positively constructed relation of eternity to time can be accounted for from three aspects. First, their positive relation consists in the *readiness* of eternity for time. This eternal God not only created time and therefore owns time, He also has time for us in His revelation in Jesus Christ; to this extent, ‘although God’s eternity is not itself time it is as such the absolute *basis* of time, and therefore absolute *readiness* for it.’⁹⁴

Second, it follows that this positive relation consists in eternity’s *inclusion* of time. As discussed earlier, eternity, understood by Barth as pure simultaneous

⁹¹ Ibid.; *KD*, II/1, 685.

⁹² II/1, 608. Note that in the block where Barth reservedly agrees to deem eternity ‘in fact non-temporality’, he does not mean or write that ‘Time can have nothing to do with God’, as the English translation has it. Instead, he is saying, ‘What would this [i.e. infinite extension of time] have to do with God?’ (‘Was hätte diese mit Gott zu tun? Was hülfe ihr die Unendlichkeit ihrer Verlängerungen?’ *KD* II/1, 686.) Readers must not be led to the misconception that the ‘non-temporality’ specifically defined here means that eternity has nothing to do with time.

⁹³ Note that for Barth, ‘as true duration, the duration of God Himself is *the* beginning, [*the*] succession and [*the*] end.’ II/1, 610; *KD* II/1, 688.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 618; *KD* II/1, 696.

duration, does not lack time understood as before, present and after; it ‘simply lacks the fleeting nature of the present, the separation between before and after.’⁹⁵ The opposition of the distinction between those three moments are excluded, but the distinction itself does not disappear but is included simultaneously in the totality of the divine eternity. In addition to this conceptual argument, the concrete fact that eternity did become time also affirms the eternal God as ‘*eminently temporal*’,⁹⁶ meaning that He is ‘*not only eternal but also temporal*’,⁹⁷ that is, ‘both timeless *and* temporal’.⁹⁸

Third, advancing from eternity’s readiness for time and inclusion of time, Barth goes on to delimit their positive relation as eternity’s *surrounding* or *embracing* time on all sides.⁹⁹ Applying the boundary concept to this connection, Barth brings his explication to a climactic moment by developing a detailed elaboration of what he terms as the threefold temporality of God’s eternity. According to it, the eminently temporal eternity of God is in its completeness and

⁹⁵ II/1, 613.

⁹⁶ *KD* II/1, 692; II/1, 614.

⁹⁷ II/1, 617; *KD* II/1, 695.

⁹⁸ II/1, 617; *KD* II/1, 696. At this point in his discussion of eternity’s readiness for and inclusion of time Barth interposes a discussion about the basis and starting-point of this positive understanding of God’s eternity. He first claims that ‘[a] correct understanding of the positive side of the concept of eternity, free from all false conclusions, is gained only when we are clear that we are speaking about the eternity of the triune God’ (II/1, 615). This claim is followed by his affirmation that a correct understanding of the concept of eternity is reached only if we start from the other side, from the real *fellowship* between God and the creature, and therefore between eternity and time. This means starting from the *incarnation* of the divine Word in Jesus Christ’ (ibid., 616; *KD* II/1, 694). Therefore, whilst the Trinity is the *ontological* ground or ‘inner divine basis’ (II/1, 618) of God’s eternity, its *epistemological* starting-point is God’s revelation in Jesus Christ. Differently put, Barth’s concept of eternity, like all his teachings up to this point in the *CD*, derives from revelation and moves towards the doctrine of the Trinity. That is why George Hunsinger, in offering an explication of the trinitarian implications of Barth’s concept of eternity, still complains that ‘God’s being as it is in itself needs to be more carefully distinguished, though not separated, from God’s being in relation to the world.’ George Hunsinger, ‘*Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth’s Concept of Eternity*’, in *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. by George Hunsinger (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 165-190 (180).

⁹⁹ II/1, 613f.

comprehensiveness to be understood as pre-temporal [*vorzeitlich*], supra-temporal [*überzeitlich*] and post-temporal [*nachzeitlich*]. Whilst the pre-temporal and the post-temporal aspects are two crucial constituents of the temporality of eternity,¹⁰⁰ what directly concerns our purposes here is the supra-temporality of eternity, to which we now turn.

5B.3.2 The Supra-Temporality of God's Eternity

Supra-temporality is the notion at which Barth brings eternity closest to time. He makes it plain that eternity is to be understood as 'supra-temporal' [*überzeitlich*], 'co-temporal' [*mitzeitlich*] as well as 'in-temporal' [*inzeitlich*].¹⁰¹ Eternity is 'supra-temporal', not in the sense that it is high above time or far away beyond it, but that eternity is present all over the sphere of time, surrounding it from every side, embracing the whole of it.¹⁰² That is why 'this "supra-temporal" must not have the flavour of "timeless".'¹⁰³ The supra-temporality plays the pivotal part in Barth's conception of the positive relation of eternity to time. For one thing, it connects God's 'before' and God's 'after', so that the two would not be separated, and that eternity would not cease when time begins. For another, it also relates our time to the beginning and the end, so that our time would not become self-enclosed, separated from the two, and that eternity would not be conceived merely as a perpendicular break-in in its relation to time.¹⁰⁴ Only by virtue of the supra-temporality of God's eternity, then, may and must we as human beings in time

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 621-623, 629-638.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 623; *KD* II/1, 702.

¹⁰² II/1, 623.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Therefore 'any conception of the relation of time and eternity is in error which tries to find eternity only in an immediate perpendicular connexion with each moment of time', *ibid.*, 624.

‘seek to know God as present not only in that which is before all time, but *in* all time and in each single part of time.’¹⁰⁵

To the possible objection that such conception of eternity accompanying and surrounding time runs the risk of rendering God’s transcendence over and beyond the world diminished by or subordinate to His immanence in the world, Barth has two replies. First, eternity’s being in company with time is a gracious decision of God’s free will by virtue of which He allows His eternity to be accompanied by time.¹⁰⁶ Second, directly engaging with Leopold von Ranke’s famous aphorism that ‘Every epoch is immediate to God’,¹⁰⁷ Barth feels that he must reverse the subject-predicate relation by claiming that it is not the case that each epoch is immediate to God, but rather that God as the Lord of history is immediate to each epoch in His giving meaning immediately to every epoch.¹⁰⁸ In this way, world history has been, so to speak, dethroned from the judgement seat, on which it arrogated the authority to judge the world, ‘arbitrarily exalting an epoch here and equally arbitrarily debasing an epoch there’.¹⁰⁹ Instead, it is the transcendent God in His immanence in world history that is rightly and justly in the position to judge the world and its history. The sovereign God therefore remains transcendent, as He freely chooses to be with time and stays free in the company of history.

On this ground, Barth goes on to remark that von Ranke’s statement can and should be stretched to mean that ‘the meaning [not only of every *epoch* but] also of

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.; *KD* II/1, 703.

¹⁰⁶ II/1, 623: ‘eternity does not will to be without time, but causes itself to be accompanied by time’.

¹⁰⁷ Leopold von Ranke, *Weltgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1881), Band 8, 177.

¹⁰⁸ II/1, 625.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

the *whole* world history as such is immediate to God'.¹¹⁰ Specifically speaking:

because the concrete work of God's hands in time is the Church which has its root in Israel, every epoch, every period of history and every life-time has its significance from *Israel* and the *Church* and with a view to *Israel* and the *Church* [*von Israel und von der Kirche her und zu Israel und zur Kirche hin*]. In its innermost content, its final riddles and revelations, its true possessions and privations, its peculiar [*eigentlichen*] height of achievement and its catastrophes, and no less in the times which lie between light and shadow [*in den jeweils zwischen Licht und Schatten liegenden ... Zeiten*], which seem empty and are really most decisive, the whole world history is *not* 'world history', but the history of Israel and the Church.¹¹¹

It is, then, not history in general but the history of Israel and the Church that is the real 'world history', because it is this history to which revelation is directly related, which is revealed to us in God's being-in-act, and which is constituted by God's new works of revelation, reconciliation and redemption.¹¹² In Barth's view, this notion is *sufficient* to correct the 'speculation' of historians (if not historicists) such as von Ranke's, in which the term 'God' is left undetermined and contentless. It is also *necessary* for avoiding the usual theological-mythical attempt to '[take] refuge in a desperate hypostatizing of the "now" of our time which cannot be hypostatized'.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Ibid.; translation slightly reversed per *KD* II/1, 704. Emphasis mine.

¹¹¹ II/1, 625; translation slightly revised per *KD* II/1, 704f. Whilst David Ford is right in remarking that 'Barth's definition of eternity is tailor-made for making Jesus Christ's history eternal', Barth is more 'ambitious' than that—he aims to include world history in the history of the Church, and therefore in the history of Jesus Christ. David F. Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981), 141.

¹¹² This line of thinking can be traced back to the mid-1920s. 'For history has no theological authority; the *Church* does', Barth, 'Kirche und Theologie' (1925), *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925*, 660; English translation: 'Church and Theology', in Barth, *Theology and Church*, 293. Also, 'it is precisely the *church*, the history of God on earth which was grounded once and for all in Jesus Christ, which in history surpasses the remaining history. ... Above all, it would require that the fearful further-negotiation of the problem "revelation and history" should ultimately again take place under the right name, and the name would just have to be "revelation and church"', *ChD*, 320f.

¹¹³ II/1, 625.

Barth's concept of 'world history', then, resists both the positivistic-historicist approach on the one hand and the theological-mythical contemplation on the other, and concentrates instead exclusively upon the revelation of Jesus Christ and the particular history pointing to it.

5B.3.3 God's Eternity Distinct from and Inclusive of Time

At this point it seems proper to discuss Richard Roberts' criticism of Barth's concept of time, according to which this concept incurs detriment to the whole of Barth's theology. Acknowledging that the *Church Dogmatics* differs from the *Römerbrief* in that 'the dialectic of antitheses in *The Epistle to the Romans* has given way to a dialectic informed by a new conjunction of transcendence and immanence, that is a creative "inclusion" of time by eternity',¹¹⁴ Roberts still makes the severe criticism that Barth's concept eternity and time

is double-edged at the very least. On the one hand he denies the involvement of true eternity with the dialectic of finite and infinite categories; on the other he affirms eternity as the total time-positing action of God.¹¹⁵

Roberts takes this juxtaposition to mean that the alleged 'time', too, cannot be involved in the finite-infinite dialectic. And this also means for him that 'the vast and complete temporal system that emerges in the *Church Dogmatics* must never coincide with the non-theological temporal categories in identity, only in the so-called dialectic transcendence'.¹¹⁶ On this view, the 'time' posited by Barth's doctrine of eternity is not involved in 'the world of experience and the cosmos',

¹¹⁴ Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', *A Theology on Its Way?*, 21.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

because it is ‘systematically at one remove from it’. This ‘time’, with Barth’s theologically posited realities, is ‘absolutely undetectable outside the peculiar theological mode of [its] positing and perception’. Contained in this self-enclosed ‘theological circle’ and ‘systematically excluded’ from the ‘shared time of human and cosmic existence’, Barth’s concept of time will eventually undergo a ‘logical implosion into timelessness’.¹¹⁷

According to our findings, Roberts’s account can be faulted at several crucial points. First, in the *CD* there is indeed posited a divine transcendence over the finite-infinite dialectic. But the divine transcendence, too, is conceived by Barth as belonging to another dialectic, i.e. the dialectic of transcendence and immanence. This means that wherever there is God’s transcendence over the world, there is also His immanence in it.¹¹⁸ In other words, God is never posited as simply ‘transcending’ the world. Second, by virtue of the dialectic of transcendence and immanence, Barth is able to conceive the divine being-in-act, including God’s eternity, as transcending the finite-infinite dialectic, not by being removed from the dialectic, let alone simply from the ‘finite’ realm, but by embracing, including both the finite and the infinite.¹¹⁹ Therefore, in that the divine transcendence in and not over the world consists in its inclusion of both the finite and the infinite in the divine, the divine is in no way a ‘self-enclosed’ system self excluded from what Roberts terms the ‘shared time of human and cosmic existence’.

Third, Roberts directs a rigorous challenge to Barth’s concept of time,

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ As mentioned in section 5B.1, Barth insists that the ‘dialectical transcendence’ of revelation ‘must always be understood with equal strictness as immanence.’ II/1, 264.

¹¹⁹ See section 5B.1: ‘Revelation, and therefore God’s being, do not simply transcend the physical and overlap the spiritual; they rather transcend both in comprehending both.’ Cf. II/1, 267.

because he interprets it as deriving from Barth's doctrine of the Trinity: 'as Barth derives the Fatherhood of God from his antecedent, eternal Fatherhood of Jesus Christ, so, likewise, *must* time be derived from within the "self-enclosed" circle.'¹²⁰ On this view, Barth presupposes the notion divine eternity in antecedence, and only then derives the notion of time from it, just as he presupposes God's eternal fatherhood in relation to His eternal Son, and only then derives God's fatherhood in relation to us. Now, as we have mentioned, the doctrine of the Trinity is for Barth the ontological basis and not the epistemological starting-point of his notion of God's eternity. Barth's entire treatment of God's eternity in the first half of §31.3 of the *CD* starts from the concrete understanding of God's eternity positively related to time *from the viewpoint of* the reality of God's self-revelation in history. From God's eternity *thus* understood it then derives the three forms of temporality of God's eternity. At the end it undergirds the conclusion *thus* reached by resorting to the life, the unity and especially the *perichoresis* of the triune God.¹²¹ God's eternity *thus* known, then, is far from a self-enclosed circle but literally in every way relating to time by preceding, accompanying and following it.

It then seems clear that Roberts' criticism of Barth's doctrine of time is misguided. What he attacks are the general concepts of 'transcendence' and 'eternity', and not what Barth understands as God's transcendence and eternity according to His self-revelation in Jesus Christ. His interpretation of Barth's notion of eternity as self-enclosed and exclusive could only have derived from a failure to appreciate Barth's strict commitment to the *historical* actuality of revelation as the only starting-point of theological knowledge.

¹²⁰ Roberts, 'Karl Barth's Doctrine of Time', *A Theology on Its Way?*, 20. Emphasis mine.

¹²¹ II/1, 639f.

5C Concluding Remarks

Focusing on Barth's treatments of knowledge of God and the reality of God, this chapter has examined three things. First, in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in the knowledge of God, history is construed by Barth negatively as a limitation but also positively as a medium. On the side of God, this medium ensures that He is known without becoming a direct object of human perception, and that He is believed in the particularity and concreteness proper to Him. On the side of human knowers, this medium constitutes a way on which human knowledge of God proceeds, surrounding revelation as the centre, towards the end of the truthfulness of our knowledge of God.

Second, we have affirmed in Barth's actualistic understanding of God as being-in-act that in the history which revelation becomes and is we have to do with no other and no less than God Himself, as God's being is His pure, particular action in this history, an action which transcends the nature-spiritual distinction, and is based on a self-willed act of decision of God.

Third, we have affirmed in Barth's treatments of God's constancy and His eternity that the constancy of God consists in His doing new things in salvation history whilst remaining constant, and that the eternity of God is His eminent temporality, in its readiness for time, positive relation to time, and inclusion of it in itself, without rendering itself merely temporal or confining itself in a self-enclosed realm separated from reality as we know it.

At this point in the thesis, at the end of the chapters covering the 'Early Dogmatic Period (1924-1940)', we have demonstrated Barth's firm commitment to the revelation of the speaking God in Jesus Christ, and his subsequent, unequivocal affirmation of the reality of the history which revelation becomes and is. It has

been observed that, starting strictly from his doctrine of revelation as the epistemological point of departure set in *CD I/1*, Barth seems to be moving in *CD II/1* towards a position which gives priority to the dynamic action over the static being (as in the case God's being-in-act, section 5B.1), to the salvation history of God's new, ongoing works over the history of the already created world as such (as in the case of God's constancy, section 5B.2), and to a revelatory and therefore christological grounding of theological knowledge over a trinitarian grounding of it (as in the case of God's eternity, section 5B.3). It has also been noted that these new works of God in salvation history, in which His being is, are said to be based on a choice, a decision. In that in *CD II/2* Barth begins to explicitly unfold this notion, it will constitute the beginning of Section Three, 'Mature Dogmatic Period (1940-)'.

Part Three
Mature Dogmatic Period (1940-)

Chapter Six

Electing God Determining History: *Church Dogmatics II/2 (1942)*

Introduction

Barth's doctrine of election, in its christocentric form in *CD II/2*,¹ is the volume which Barth wrote with a great 'joy of discovery' and indeed a particular sense of satisfaction.² Broadly speaking, it consists of a twofold argument: a radical *correlation* of God's being in Himself to His works in relation to the world, and a radical *concentration* of all God's outward works and, to that extent, of God's inner being too, on the election of Jesus Christ in the beginning with God. To speak of God, on the *correlative* account, we always have to do with the God in His relationship to the reality created by Him and distinct from Him. On the *concentrative* account, to speak of God's works in His relation to the created reality, we must always start from a determined disposition of God—that is, from His decision to be God in that relation in the election of Jesus Christ.³

In this light, section 6A will explore Barth's christocentric grounding of the election of Jesus Christ as the beginning of God's relation to the created reality. Section 6B will examine his conception of Jesus Christ as the electing God and its ontological consequences concerning both the being of Jesus Christ and the triune

¹ For a detailed analysis of the development of the doctrine of election in Barth's theology, see Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: a Systematic-theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), chs. 3-5.

² Barth, 'To Dr. Setsuro Osaki, Göttingen' (1967): 'in C.D. II, 2, which I wrote with a joy of discovery I experienced perhaps in no other volume, in a way that is understanding, vital, and, so far as I can see, correct', Karl Barth, *Letters, 1961-1968*, ed. by Jürgen Fangmeier, Hinrich Stoevesandt and G. W. Bromiley, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981), 237-242 (238).

³ *II/2*, 3-7; *KD II/2*, 1-5.

essence of God. Section 6C will draw on Barth's understanding of the election of Jesus Christ as both the *Urgeschichte* and the *Urentscheidung*, and propose a historical understanding of election and an elective understanding of history.

6A Christocentric Grounding of Election: Jesus Christ Electing and Elected

In *CD I*, whilst the epistemological starting-point was the revelation of Jesus Christ in history, the ontological end-point was the eternal Sonship. What could be potentially at stake in this formulation is a gap between the divine Son in eternity and the God-human Jesus Christ in history. The actualistic claim in *CD II/1* about God's being-in-act is crucial, but then the force of this claim was not brought back to Christ's eternal being and His action in history. The gap between the two still remained largely unbridged.

In *CD II/2* Barth directly addresses this gap by the forceful christocentric assertion that Jesus Christ in His election is in the beginning with God. In the unity of the divine nature and human nature present in Jesus Christ, the Elector and the elect come at one in the pre-temporal eternity, thereby dissolving the gap. Barth's christological concentration in the doctrine of election consists of two propositions: first, Jesus Christ is the beginning of all God's works *ad extra* and, second, Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected human being.

6A.1 Jesus Christ: the Beginning of All God's Ways and Works

When Barth asserts that the election of Jesus Christ is the beginning of all God's ways and works, he brings the divine-eternal and the human-temporal to the closest possible connection. It should be noted that this move is not merely about the two poles as such, but primarily about the unity of the God-human Jesus Christ. If Jesus

Christ, the incarnate Word of God in history, is in the beginning with God Himself in eternity, then in Him the human-temporal, too, is already present or anticipated in eternity.

Following this line of thought, we first notice Barth's understanding of the eternal Word from the viewpoint of the incarnate Word Jesus Christ. According to the opening verses of John 1, on Barth's account, the claim that the Word was *in the beginning* declares its eternity, that the Word was *with God* asserts its status as belonging to God Himself, and that the Word *was God*, affirms the same being and dignity which the Son shares with the Father.⁴ But exactly who is this Word? To this question Barth gives an answer of great significance when he contends that the concept of the Word has a mere preliminary, provisional and even veiling function. What is intended by John is the designation of the attributes of the Word to the God-human Jesus Christ:

It is *His* place which, by means of the predicates given to the Logos, is simultaneously marked off, cleared away and secured. He, Jesus, in the beginning, is with God, is by nature God. That is what is being secured in John 1:1.⁵

Eternity and time converge on this point where the God-human Jesus Christ is reckoned to be properly in the beginning with God. This is not a human projection of the temporal into the eternal, for the incarnation described in the prologue, as Barth sees it, refers to a happening [*Geschehensein*]⁶ which has eternity as its content

⁴ II/2, 95f.

⁵ II/2, 96; *KD* II/2, 103. Translation McCormack's, 'Karl Barth's Historicized Christology', *Orthodox and Modern*, 221n49. That is why Barth can argue that John did not honour Jesus by ascribing to Him the title 'Logos'; instead, he 'honoured the title itself by applying it a few lines later as a predicate of Jesus', II/2, 97.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 97; *KD* II/2, 105.

and time as its form and therefore is both eternal *and* temporal.⁷

Second, we observe that Barth defines this beginning, which is Jesus Christ, as the beginning of all God's ways and works.⁸ According to him, this beginning is that 'of what we have to say concerning God's dealings with His creation',⁹ that is, that of God's works *ad extra*. But so eminent is the beginning that it is placed 'indeed *before* the beginning'¹⁰ as 'the eternal beginning',¹¹ one that is so 'beyond time and beyond the nexus of the created world and its history' that is 'the sphere where God is with Himself'.¹² At this point, what was traditionally considered God's works *ad extra* seems to be linked with God's being in Jesus Christ as the beginning.

Third, at some other points, however, this does not seem to be the case. Barth would still speak of a different beginning in God Himself which is not Jesus Christ:

⁷ Barth's equation of the eternal Word with the incarnate/to-be-incarnate Word has been charged with a confusion of the divine and the human, a misconception of the Logos *asarkos* as the Logos *ensarkos/incarnandus*, and an intrusion upon God's freedom by the world. For example, Pannenberg remarks that 'Barth distinctively doubled the concept of preexistence, referring to the deity of Jesus Christ, the eternal Son, in I/1, 414, and to the human reality of Jesus in II/2'. In Pannenberg's view, our understanding of the incarnation should be derived 'from the eternal relation of the Son to the Father and not by the detour of the doctrine of predestination', for 'the act of the election is part and parcel of the freedom of God's relation to the world, so that its content cannot be constitutive for the eternal identity of his divine essence. If it were, the world itself would be the correlate of this essence.' Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 368n127. Pannenberg's view is clearly based on an understanding of God's freedom as freedom from what is not God. If one starts, as Barth does, with God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ, one will see that God's freedom revealed to us is His freedom for us. For this reason, we propose in response to Pannenberg that Barth does not so much '[double] the concept of preexistence' as accords to it what he views as its proper content, by pointing out the provisionality of the concept of Logos on the one hand and the togetherness of the eternal essentiality of the historical existence of Jesus Christ in the divine election on the other.

⁸ II/2, 3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹² *Ibid.*, 100.

[Jesus Christ] is God's beginning before which there is no other beginning except for the beginning which God has in Himself, so that, except for God Himself, nobody and nothing can derive from elsewhere or look back to a different beginning.¹³

Sometimes he would simply deny God a beginning:

He was not at the beginning of God, for God has indeed no beginning. But He was at the beginning of all things, at the beginning of God's dealings with the reality which is distinct from Himself.¹⁴

It has been suggested that passages like these are moments of inconsistency as they appear to be contradictory to basic logic of Barth's overall scheme to make Jesus Christ the only starting-point and the ultimate destination of our human knowledge of election.¹⁵ But even with the alleged problem of individual passages in opposition to the general project set aside, one still easily finds these passages at least in tension with each other.¹⁶ They could be considered consistent only in their common indication that beyond Jesus Christ there is something else ('the beginning which God has in Himself') or someone else (God Himself who 'has indeed no beginning'), and that, to that extent, Jesus Christ is 'merely' the beginning of all 'things'. At such moments, it can be argued, Barth is plainly not at his best.

But this distinction of Jesus Christ as the beginning from the God who has no beginning, of God's works *ad extra* from God's inner being—and even the seeming subordination of the former to the latter—appears to be no more than a logically

¹³ Ibid., 94, translation revised per *KD* II/2, 101.

¹⁴ II/2, 102.

¹⁵ McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Historicised Christology', 217n45. In this regard Hector suggests that '[t]hat which McCormack identifies as inconsistencies in Barth's theology, Molnar sees as evidence that Barth was primarily concerned with affirming God's independence.' Molnar, on the other hand, contests that he does not equate God's freedom with His independence, but rather grounds God's free actions *ad extra* in His independent existence. See Hector, 'God's Trinity and Self-Determination', 252; Molnar, 'The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom', 303.

¹⁶ For instance, how could the God who 'has indeed no beginning' also have a beginning in Himself?

necessary presupposition. Despite some ‘inconsistent moments’ mentioned above, Barth is unequivocal in his attempt to root this beginning of God’s works *ad extra* in the necessity of God’s inner being.¹⁷ These two are so closely connected that:

it is *not of any importance* whether the mention of [this will and decree of God] preceding [all] history ... are meant to refer to the eternity of God in itself, or ‘only’ to the beginning of the creation, and therefore of the [world] and time. What is certain is that ... the reference is to the beginning of all God’s ways and works [*ad extra*].¹⁸

In other words, what we do know for certain is that as the beginning, at the beginning, Jesus Christ is ‘not content simply to remain identical with the inward and eternal being of God, but [operates] *ad extra* in the ways and works of God’, ‘enclosing within Himself the autonomy of all other words, decrees and beginnings.’¹⁹ What is not as certain, in contrast, is whether or to what extent this beginning points also to God’s inner being. Barth not only reserves his answer to this question, judging the distinction between *ad extra* and *ad intra* as merely provisional if not questionable,²⁰ but also determines it as ‘not of any importance’. Resolved to hold firmly only to what is certain, Barth does not allow himself to be detained by what is uncertain.

In summary, in Barth’s positing Jesus Christ at the beginning of all God’s ways and works, the historical God-human is brought into the eternal with God

¹⁷ ‘[God’s self-committal to the created reality] is characterised (no matter what time-concepts may be presupposed) as a relationship which is not haphazard and transitory, but which derives its necessity from God Himself’, II/2, 102.

¹⁸ II/2, 103; *KD*, II/2, 110. Emphasis mine.

¹⁹ II/2, 95.

²⁰ This is indicated by the two sets of quotation marks, ‘only’ and ‘*ad extra*’. Note the quotation marks for ‘*ad extra*’ is neglected in the English translation. See also: ‘For what [*“extra”*] is there that the ways and works could serve, or necessitate, or evoke? There is no [*“extra”*] except that which is first willed and posited by God in the presupposing of all His ways and works. There is no [*“extra”*] except that which has its basis and meaning as such in the divine election of grace’, II/2 95; *KD* II/2, 102.

Himself by way of anticipation. We recall that, in both the 1922 *Römerbrief* and his dogmatic teaching on the Word of God which began to unfold in the mid-1920s, what Barth had to offer was a downward movement ‘from above’. Here, in placing Jesus Christ as the eternal Word or Son at the beginning with God, he has conceived another form of ‘from above’. In both conceptions the divine-eternal comes down from above, based on a divine-eternal decision, with the intention to take up the human-historical from below. But the later, more radically christocentric conception is distinctive in its unequivocal claim that the divine-eternal decision is made specifically by the God-human Jesus Christ (as will be demonstrated shortly). If the *Subject* of God’s eternal decision to be for the human-historical is this God-*human*, then the taking-up of the human-historical is not a mere outcome which follows the decision, awaiting its realisation, but a reality already determined in the decision, awaiting its actualisation. Therefore, Jesus Christ not only enters into a special history in the incarnation, creating for Himself a particular history amidst general history, but also already includes that history in Himself in His election.

6A.2 Jesus Christ: the Subject and Object of Election

The notion of Jesus Christ as the beginning of God’s works *ad extra* is elevated to a new level when Barth equates this beginning with the election of Jesus Christ.²¹ To speak of this beginning as an election means for Barth that it is a deliberate act of will: in the beginning God according to His will ‘elects man, ... determines man for Himself, having first determined Himself for man’.²² And adhering strictly to the principle of ‘christological reference’ in the doctrine of election,²³ Barth focuses the

²¹ II/2, 89, 99.

²² *Ibid.*, 91.

²³ *Ibid.*, 63.

whole of the God-human relation solely on Jesus Christ, in whom God stands before the human being and the human being stands before God.²⁴

In this connection Barth innovatively views Jesus Christ as not merely the object of election (the elected human being) but primarily its subject (the electing God). Both notions carry heavy theological weight and each in its own way throws significant light on our current investigation.

6A.2.1 The Elector

On the whole, Barth's doctrine of election serves to achieve one end, i.e. 'to overcome and set aside the Calvinistic *decretum absolutum* (the notion that the true basis of election is an indeterminate and abstract good-pleasure of God), and to attain to a genuinely Christian understanding of the doctrine of predestination.'²⁵ For that purpose, he contends that the Subject of election is not a God hidden or unknown to us, but Jesus Christ, in whom God Himself is revealed to us. For the notion that Jesus Christ is in the beginning of all things, this current notion that He is the electing God means two things.

First, it furthers Barth's thesis that the election of Jesus Christ is the beginning of all things. If the Subject of election were not Jesus Christ but rather God the Father or the triune God as such, we would have a decision of a hidden God which 'precedes the being [*Sein*] and will and word of Christ',²⁶ and Christ would then be reduced to an instrument or 'serving organ'²⁷ of the electing God, only later executing the decree or, at best, making the formal or technical decree. This

²⁴ Ibid., 94.

²⁵ Ibid., 115.

²⁶ Ibid., 64; emphasis restored per *KD* II/2, 68.

²⁷ II/2, 65; *KD* II/2, 70.

depreciatory understanding of Jesus Christ, in Barth's view, would clearly contradict the determination of Him as the beginning of all things. On the contrary, with Jesus Christ defined as the acting Subject of election, His position as the beginning of God's relation to the created reality is strengthened and finalised. On the ground of the notion of Jesus Christ as the Subject of the divine election, therefore, His status as the beginning of all things is more firmly established as one that must not and cannot be preceded.

Second, the conception of Jesus Christ as the electing God also effectively distinguishes Jesus Christ as the beginning of all things from all created things without separating Him from them. To be sure, 'in view of God's eternal knowing and willing all things may be said to have been in the beginning with God, in His plan and decree.'²⁸ But this is not the proper sense in which Jesus Christ is the beginning. Instead, He was in the beginning *as the electing God*, thus distinguishing Himself transcendentally as the Subject of election from all the objects elected, willed and known by God. But this does not 'separate' Jesus Christ from the created reality,²⁹ as in Him and for Him as the electing God the latter, too, is elected. Furthermore, for this very reason, the created reality is also related to Jesus Christ in that He is the one determination of God in which everything else is determined:

We can and must say that *Jesus Christ was in the beginning with God [just as] all creation* and its [entire] history was in God's plan and decree with God. *But He was so not merely in that way.* He was ... in the beginning with God [also] as 'the first-born of every

²⁸ II/2, 104.

²⁹ The phrase 'these are two separate things' in the English translation can be misleading, for what Barth refers to is simply the distinction between the electing and the elected. II/2, 104; *KD* II/2, 111f.

creature' ... Himself the plan and decree of God, Himself the divine decision with respect to all creation and its [entire] history whose content is already determined [*die inhaltlich bestimmte göttliche Entscheidung hinsichtlich aller Kreatur und ihrer ganzen Geschichte*].³⁰

In addition to its implications for the notion of Jesus Christ as the beginning, the conception of Jesus Christ as the Elector has christological ramifications also. In particular, a dispute has arisen over the relationship between the 'eternal' election on the one hand, and the 'historical' incarnation in two natures on the other. In one of the most hotly debated and controversial paragraphs in *CD II/2*, Barth begins a discussion on Thomas Aquinas' teaching that election concerns Jesus Christ only in regard to His human nature, and that Jesus Christ as the Son of God, in His deity, has nothing to do with election. Barth agrees with Thomas in that:

Of course, the fact that Jesus Christ *is* the Son of God does not rest on ... election [*Erwählung*]. What does rest on it is the fact that as such He also becomes man, that as such ... He is 'sent', that as such He is the bearer of the divine name of the Father in the *world*.³¹

But he also deems this conception as 'not sufficient',³² expressly criticising its limitation of election solely on Christ's humanity as unsustainable:

Between the eternal Godhead of Christ which needs no election and His elected humanity, there is a third ... which was overlooked by Thomas. And that is the being [*Sein*] of Christ in the beginning with God, the act of the good-pleasure of God ..., the covenant which God made with Himself and which is for that reason eternal, the oath

³⁰ II/2, 104; *KD II/2*, 112. The phrase 'its [entire] history whose content is already determined' seems to indicate a deterministic character of election. But the German original unmistakably shows that it is the 'divine decision' and not the entire history of the creature whose content is determined.

³¹ II/2, 107; *KD II/2*, 114.

³² II/1, 106.

which God swore by Himself in the interests of man. But this third possibility does not belong only passively to the *aeterna Dei praedestinatio* ... if He and the Father are one in this unity of the divine name and glory, a unity in which there can be no question of rivalry, then it is clear that the Son, too, is an active Subject of the *aeterna Dei praedestinatio* as [zum] Son of Man, that He is Himself the electing God, and that only in this way, and therefore in an unlimited divine sovereignty, is He [also] the Elect, the One who is subjected to the divine predestination ... If we say only what Thomas would say, then we have knowledge only of the election [*die Erwählung*] of the man Jesus as such, and not of the election and personal electing [*das Erwähltwerden und eigene Erwählen*] of the Son of God which precedes this election [*jener Erwählung*].³³

Three points need to be noted. First, what is at issue for Barth here is not Jesus Christ's deity or humanity as such, but a third: the being [*Sein*] of Jesus Christ in the beginning with God. Thomas' concept of election is insufficient (according to Barth), knowing of only Christ's elected humanity and not of His electing deity, precisely because he did not see this third. For Barth, this being is both the electing (as the Son of God) and the elected (as the Son of Man), first the active electing and then the passive elected. So 'the fact that Jesus Christ *is* the Son of God does not rest on ... election [*Erwählung*]', because His deity is not passively elected (only His humanity is). But Jesus Christ as the Son of God still has to do with election in that He is the active Subject of election.

Second, is there a sense in which Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the active Elector, is also elected [*erwählt*]? There is, according to Barth, for in the act of His own electing [*eigene Erwählen*] to become the Son of human,³⁴ the Son of God also

³³ Ibid.; *KD* II/2, 114f.

³⁴ In his exposition of this passage, Paul Molnar takes the 'personal electing [*eigene Erwählen*] of the Son of God' to literally refer to the 'person' of Jesus Christ, thereby claiming that election is to be attached to 'the person of Jesus Christ', 'the divine/human person' which Jesus Christ is (Molnar, 'Can the Electing God be God without us?', 206). What Barth clearly and carefully ties with

becomes elected [*Erwähltwerden*] in the being [*Sein*] of Jesus Christ. It is then clear that in this passage Barth is not upholding Christ's deity (which 'does not rest on ... election') over against His humanity (which is elected) in election. Instead, by calling special attention to 'a third' which was unduly overlooked, i.e. Jesus Christ as the electing God in the beginning, he is virtually relating His humanity to His deity (in the one divine act of election of Jesus Christ). Third, Jesus Christ's electing deity and His elected humanity, although bound together in the unity of His being [*Sein*], is not equal in order. Primacy is to Jesus Christ the Elector over the Elect. Jesus Christ is the electing; only in this way and for this reason, with His due and full divine sovereignty, is He also the elected human being. In the election of Jesus Christ, His own divine electing and becoming-elected precede, and then His human election or electedness follows. We are then not allowed to set these two in rivalry; on the contrary:

we can only believe this if we can find in that election [*dieser Erwählung*, that of the human Jesus] the eternal election [*Erwählung*] (both passive *and* also active) of the Son of God Himself, if we can be absolutely certain that *in Jesus Christ we have to do immediately and directly with the electing God.*³⁵

6A.2.2 The Elect

The thesis that Jesus is first and primary the electing God in the beginning functions as a crucial qualification of the other thesis that He is the elected human being.

election is 'the being [*Sein*] of Christ' (the third), which is in some way distinct from 'the eternal Godhead of Christ' (the first). For him election is made not so much by 'the triune God ... in himself in pre-temporal eternity' as Molnar asserts (ibid.), but by this being of Christ who in making this decision in pre-temporal eternity is already having regard for temporal history which is not merely preceded by God's pre-temporal eternity but also surrounded and accompanied by His supra-temporal (*überzeitlich*) eternity and succeeded by His post-temporal eternity.

³⁵ II/2, 107f.; *KD* II/2, 115.

According to it, Jesus Christ is not an elect but the Elect, and thus ‘[t]he election of Jesus Christ is *the* eternal choice and decision of God’.³⁶ The proper content of election is no one and nothing other than ‘the existence of this one created being [*Geschöpf*], the man Jesus of Nazareth, and the work of this man in His life and death, His humiliation and exaltation, His obedience and merit.’³⁷ ‘[W]e can never be too comprehensive as we attempt to understand the election [*Erwähltsein*] of Jesus as the beginning of all things.’³⁸

If the divine election or electedness of Jesus Christ is all-inclusive or even exhaustive, it then follows that the election of humanity and creature takes place only in His. Since He is the Elect from the beginning, no one and nothing that is elected is elected alongside Him, let alone outside Him—it is only in Him that we, too, with the created reality are elected. And this means for Barth a relation-in-distinction between the divine and the human. In the light of the divine act of election, these two are related in that, just as the becoming-elected [*Gewähltwerden*] of Jesus Christ corresponds as closely as possible to His electing [*Wählen*],³⁹ so in Jesus Christ as the sole Elect God brings the human, the creaturely into ‘the closest possible union’ with Himself.⁴⁰ They are nevertheless distinct, however, in that His election takes place in eternity, in the beginning, whilst the actualisation of our election, which took place in His in eternity, occurs in time and history, following His.

³⁶ II/2, 115; *KD* II/2, 123.

³⁷ II/2, 116; *KD* II/2, 125.

³⁸ II/2, 126; *KD* II/2, 135.

³⁹ II/2, 105; *KD* II/2, 112.

⁴⁰ II/2, 121.

6A.3 Brief Summary: Jesus Christ as God's Self-Determination and as the Determination that Determines Everything

This section has explored Barth's twofold definition of Jesus Christ as both the electing God and the elected human being in the beginning of God's relation to the created world. What is demonstrated is a particular model of the eternal 'double predestination'.⁴¹ Regarding the active definition if, on Barth's account, there is no 'Godhead' in and for itself which is abstracted from or can be found prior to Jesus Christ as the Elector in the beginning,⁴² then Jesus Christ's act of electing must function effectively as God's self-determination to be God-for-other. Concerning the passive definition, if there is no absolute decree on the created reality as such which is abstracted from or can be found prior to Jesus Christ as the Elect in the beginning,⁴³ then the election of Jesus Christ must function effectively as the one and only divine determination concerning all that is created.⁴⁴ As Barth puts it, Jesus Christ is both 'God's self-determination and the resultant determination of man'.⁴⁵

6B Ontological Consequences of Election

At the beginning of his doctrine of election, Barth makes it plain that it is insufficient to simply say 'God', the Subject of theology, 'for itself and as such' [*für sich und als solches*], for such theological talk would inevitably be abstract, reduced and

⁴¹ Ibid., 161f.

⁴² Ibid., 115: 'In no depth of the Godhead shall we encounter any other but Him. There is no such thing as Godhead in itself. Godhead is always the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Jesus Christ.'

⁴³ Ibid.: 'There is no such thing as a *decretum absolutum*. There is no such thing as a will of God apart from the will of Jesus Christ.'

⁴⁴ Christ's election [*Erwähltsein*], being original and unique, is comprehensive, 'universally meaningful and efficacious'. II/2, 117; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 125.

⁴⁵ II/2, 52.

flattened.⁴⁶ For him, human talks about God must begin with Jesus Christ, or rather, the Jesus Christ who is the Subject of election. In placing the doctrine of election in the doctrine of God,⁴⁷ Barth takes the election of Jesus to be ‘the eternal self-determination of God’:⁴⁸

In this matter of election [we are] *noetically* to hold by Christ and Christ alone because *ontically* there is no election and no electing God outside Him.⁴⁹

This strict epistemological adherence to Jesus Christ brings enormous ontological consequences.⁵⁰ Its immediate ontological consequence falls in the *christological* connection, raising the question whether the Subject of the eternal election is ‘only’ the divine-eternal Christ or Word, or the God-human Jesus Christ and therefore also the human-historical Jesus. On the other hand, as Jesus Christ is ‘the revelation of the triune God’ in history, and also the electing God ‘with the Father and the Holy Spirit’ in eternity,⁵¹ the strict reckoning with Him has ontological consequence also in the *trinitarian* connection, raising the question whether in election as God’s eternal self-determination God determines Himself not only for humanity but also to be triune.⁵² In what follows we will focus on Barth’s

⁴⁶ II/2, 5; *KD* II/2, 3.

⁴⁷ II/2, 76ff.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁰ McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 187f.

⁵¹ II/2, 24, 105.

⁵² Common to these two connections is the question whether God’s inner being should be conceived as first and necessarily in and for itself and only then and contingently as also for another (world and humanity), or whether it is in itself never not for another. Or differently put: whether the *reality* of God’s determination concerning us as revealed in Jesus Christ is a *possibility* which God freely chooses to realise but which God could have decided not to, or whether that reality belongs at the outset in God’s self-determination and therefore is, to that extent, also a *necessity* which God freely decides to bear. In the final analysis the foregoing questions amount to one question: whether God should be construed as so free as to be independent from all that which is not God, or as so free as to determine Himself to be never not for another. But if one thinks through these questions in line with

conception of the being of Jesus Christ and of the 'essence' of the triune God, discerning his position regarding the aforementioned nexus of questions and what it means for our construction of his concept of history.

6B.1 The Being of Jesus Christ

In his doctrine of election Barth is very restrained from speaking of the eternal Word of God in a mode prior to His incarnation in history. An important reason is his conviction that Jesus Christ, 'the Son of God incarnate', not only represents but also is Himself the divine election of God.⁵³ If we are to be fully confident in holding onto 'the *Deus incarnatus*', it has to be presupposed that there is no higher or deeper divine being behind Jesus Christ the incarnate Word.⁵⁴ Employing John 1:1-2 as an exegetic ground, he makes the Logos predicated upon Jesus Christ and not the opposite.⁵⁵ The (epistemological) starting-point and (ontological) end-point both converge on the Logos *ensarkos* or Logos *incarnandus*.

There is only one point in his doctrine of election at which Barth goes beyond, so to speak, the incarnate Word to the Word to be incarnate.⁵⁶ Even there, the discussion does not occupy a significant space but merely appears in a rather brief engagement with Augustine. In Barth's view, Augustine was right in identifying of 'the incarnation, the reality of the divine-human person of Jesus Christ' with 'the

Barth's actualistic ontology, one will agree with John Webster that a term like 'freedom' is for Barth 'to be filled out by depiction of the events of the history of the covenant rather than by formal or by abstract considerations (we might call this Barth's "actualism"). Freedom is always "the event of freedom". Therefore, '[w]hat Barth offers ... is not a better *theory* of God's freedom but an example of sustained attention to the mysterious and utterly specific history of the covenant and to the partners in that covenant.' John B. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 102, 106. For relevant literature see footnotes 55 and 58 in Introduction to this thesis.

⁵³ II/2, 163.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 95-99.

⁵⁶ All quotes in this paragraph are from II/2, 108; *KD* II/2, 116.

eternal purpose of the good-pleasure of God'. In the decision in which these two are identical, 'the eternal God not only foresees and foreordains this person, but ... He Himself, as the presupposition of its revelation in time, actually is this person.'⁵⁷ On Augustine's account, what is later to be in time is already established in the eternity of God Himself and in His co-eternal Word. In doing so, Augustine was 'defining [the] temporal existence [*Sein*] [of Jesus Christ] as something [eternally] pre-existent [*vorherexistierend*] in God'. Then Barth qualifies Augustine's position by claiming that the latter's notion of an eternal Word is 'understandable, and valid and important' if it is identified with the Word 'in the beginning with God as maintained in Jn. 1:1-2', with 'Jesus', and with 'in *Verbo eius incarnando*'. In other words, in Barth's view, talk of an eternal or 'pre-existent' Word are legitimate only if we reckon with either the incarnate Word or the Logos *incarnandus*, but we can go no further back than that.⁵⁸

In this connection, one of those who makes every endeavour to uphold the notion of the eternal or pre-existent Word is George Hunsinger. In a detailed interpretation of the relationship between election and the Trinity in Barth's theology, he first provides a conceptual framework by distinguishing 'the incarnate Son' (Jesus Christ), 'the eternal Son qua eternal' (contingent, *incarnandus* and not *incarnatus*) and 'the eternal Son qua Son' (necessary, neither *incarnandus* nor *incarnatus*).⁵⁹

And then, resorting to a 'numerical sameness' of the different modes of being of the

⁵⁷ II/2, 108; emphasis restored per *KD* II/2, 116.

⁵⁸ For a detailed explication of the notions of Logos *asarkos*, Logos *ensarkos*, Logos *incarnatus*, and Logos *incarnandus*, see McCormack, 'Grace and Being', *Orthodox and Modern*, 184-186. He concludes that for Barth 'the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity' (186). Cf. Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Vol. 1, 141, where he maintains that '[w]hat in eternity precedes the Son's birth to Mary is not an *unincarnate state* of the Son, but a pattern of movement within the event of the Incarnation, the *movement to incarnation*', emphasis mine.

⁵⁹ Hunsinger, 'Election and the Trinity', 182f.

one Son,⁶⁰ and to what he calls ‘the grammar of *perichoresis*’ and ‘a unity-in-distinction and distinction-in-unity’,⁶¹ he concedes that ‘the Son *incarnatus*, or Jesus Christ, is the subject of election’, but only in the sense that this ‘Son *incarnatus* is not external but internal to the pre-existing eternal Son’.⁶² Even if we put aside his rather unconventional employment of the trinitarian category (‘modes of being’) in Christology, as well as the clear scarcity of concept tools which he tries to appropriate from Barth’s theology,⁶³ it is still not difficult to see that his argument is conducted along a line which is counter to Barth’s. As shown in his engagement with Augustine, Barth starts from the incarnate Word and is willing to go only as far as God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ takes him, i.e. the Word to be incarnate, and refuses to go any further. Hunsinger, on the contrary, starts from what he assumes to be ontologically prior, i.e. the eternal Word neither *incarnandus* nor *incarnatus*, and makes the incarnate Word in history in conformity to it (at least conceptually).⁶⁴

We therefore agree in this regard with McCormack’s reading that ‘at the beginning of all ways of God with the world stood not a *Logos asarkos* ... but the God-human, Jesus Christ’.⁶⁵ As he rightly remarks, out of his worries over

⁶⁰ Ibid., 182.

⁶¹ Ibid., 183.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Hunsinger is not unaware of this point, as he too admits that what he terms the ‘trinitarian shape of eternity as simultaneity-in-distinction and distinction-in-simultaneity’ is a concept which ‘Barth rarely makes ... explicit ... [A]nd even when he does, it is only in a more or less piecemeal fashion’. Hunsinger’s explanation for this scarcity is that this notion is ‘presupposed as a background belief’ (ibid.). In contrast to this scarcity, what Barth *does* resort to explicitly and frequently in his teaching on God’s eternity as well as elsewhere is God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ to us. See section 5B.3 for our contention against Roberts that Barth’s teaching of God’s eternity has revelation as its starting-point and only ends with a brief mention of the concept of *perichoresis*.

⁶⁴ For McCormack’s response to this part of Hunsinger’s argument, see McCormack, ‘Election and the Trinity’, 208-210. For those who, like Hunsinger, uphold an ontological priority of an ‘eternal Word’, see van Driel, ‘Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ’, and Molnar, ‘Can Jesus’ Divinity be Recognized as “Definitive, Authentic and Essential” if it is Grounded in Election?’.

⁶⁵ McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 184.

speculation into an indeterminate Logos, Barth ‘must deny to the Logos a mode or state of being above and prior to the eternal decision to be incarnate in time. ... he must ... say that there is no Logos in and for himself in distinction from God’s act of turning towards the world and humanity in predestination ... the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity.’⁶⁶ For Barth’s explicit, revelation-based argument is the identification of the incarnate Word with the eternal Word in the beginning, and the identification of the eternal Word with the electing God.

6B.2 The Essence of the Triune God

The second dimension of the ontological significance which Barth attributes to the election of Jesus Christ has to do with the triune essence of God. Because Jesus Christ is God’s *self*-revelation:

Without the form of Jesus Christ, the triune God too has no face and no speech for us; He too is and remains to us the unknown God.⁶⁷

It was inevitable that precisely in revelation one has to do not merely with a relative truth but, without reservation or hidden agenda, with the *proper*, the *inner* truth of God.⁶⁸

From the viewpoint of Jesus Christ, Barth writes that the Father ‘is not only the Father of the eternal Son, but as such He is the eternal Father of this temporal man’,⁶⁹ and he tells us that Jesus Christ as the eternal Son is also the Subject of election with the Father and the Spirit.⁷⁰ In his view our human ‘confident turning

⁶⁶ Ibid., 186. See section 8B.1 for further treatment of this aspect of Barth’s Christology in the context of *CD IV*.

⁶⁷ II/2, 150; translation revised per *KD II/2*, 162.

⁶⁸ II/2, 67; *KD II/2*, 72.

⁶⁹ II/2, 8.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 100, 107.

to the *Deus incarnatus*' is possible only when there is not another will of another God lying behind or above that of Jesus Christ.⁷¹ If there is no election and no electing God outside or deeper than Jesus Christ, if we mean by election God's eternal election, and by electing God the God who elects from all eternity, then according to the unreserved knowledge of God revealed to us in Christ we are compelled to acknowledge that 'God wills to be God solely in Jesus Christ.'⁷²

Perhaps nowhere in *CD II/2* is this ontological import brought closer to the surface than in the following passage:

we maintain of God that in Himself, in the primal and basic decision in which He *wills* to be and actually *is* God, in the mystery of what has *happened* [*geschehen ist*] from all eternity and in all eternity in Himself, in His triune being [*Wesen*], God is none other than the One who in His Son or Word elects Himself, and in and with Himself elects His people.⁷³

There is little doubt that the aforementioned 'proper' and 'inner' truth of God refers to who God is in His triune essence. It then becomes clear that, in that the election of Jesus Christ takes place in the eternal triune God Himself, the being of the electing God is no other than the essence of the triune God. In this light, Barth speaks of the 'Godhead' that:

There is no such thing as Godhead in itself. Godhead is always the Godhead of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. But the Father is the Father of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of Jesus Christ.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Ibid., 66.

⁷² Ibid., 91.

⁷³ II/2, 76; translation slightly revised per *KD II/2*, 82.

⁷⁴ II/2, 115.

Again, this line of thinking starts strictly with Jesus Christ as God's self-revelation in history. From this starting-point Barth determines the eternal Word at no point to differ from the Logos *incarnandus*; from it he also determines that the triune relationship proper to and within Godself is a relationship with and not without Jesus Christ.

We now continue the discussion about Barth's claim that 'Of course, the fact that Jesus Christ *is* the Son of God does not rest on ... election',⁷⁵ which was briefly mentioned in section 6A.2. Clearly indicated in its immediate context, Barth's 'of course' appears as the prelude and not conclusion of his engagement with Thomas on the role of Jesus Christ in election. Following this prelude, Barth criticises Thomas' all-too-easy differentiation between the Sonship of Christ (which was said to have nothing to do with election) and Jesus' humanity (which alone was said to be related to election as its object), and he concludes that we have to understand Jesus Christ as the electing God. Judging from the whole picture of its context, it is clear that Barth's 'of course' claim does not set the eternal Son over against election, nor gives precedence to the eternal Son over election as if the eternal Son so preceded election that He were independent from it or had nothing to do with it. His claim that Christ's Sonship does not rest on election simply means that His Sonship is not passively 'elected', that He is not 'sent' to be the Son. But to the extent that He is primarily and properly the electing God who becomes elected on His own account, Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, has everything to do with the divine act of election, which is His own act of electing.

In summary, with Jesus Christ being the electing God, the Subject of election,

⁷⁵ Ibid., 107; *KD* II/2, 114.

the decision of election is to be properly sought, not in ‘the mystery of God’s essence [*Wesen*] which exists *for itself* [*für sich*]’, but in ‘the being [*Sein*] and will and word of Christ’ which must not and cannot be preceded.⁷⁶ Restrained from attempting to give a precise approximation to that ‘mystery’, perhaps even further from doing so by subordinating God’s triune being to His elective act in Christ,⁷⁷ Barth is simply maintaining that, in terms of election, Jesus Christ is not only the beginning of all things (in His passive determination) but also in the beginning with God as God (in His active determination). The proper sense in which this determination is God’s *self-determination* is that God from all eternity has determined Himself for humanity in Jesus Christ; it is God’s self-determination because it is His fundamental disposition to turn towards the humanity. On this basis, ‘God wills to be God solely in Jesus Christ.’⁷⁸ And for our purposes, we should add that it is only on this basis that all God’s ways and works in and as history are what they are; or rather, that it is only on this basis that they are what they must be, because their happening in and as history is in no way an accident but derives from of that sole decision deeply rooted in God’s very inner essence.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ II/1, 64; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 68: ‘jenem Geheimnis des **für sich** existierenden Wesens Gottes’.

⁷⁷ See section 8D for an analysis of McCormack’s claim that God determines Himself to be triune in His act of election, a comparison between his position and Hector’s, and a delimitation of the position of this thesis.

⁷⁸ II/2, 91. For this reason, Barth urges that we must not conceive a God ‘as not yet in the determinedness and form of His temporal act, as separated from that name and that person—that is, as not identical with Jesus Christ’, II/2, 149; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 162. See also: ‘Apart from the relation between God and man such as it exists in Jesus Christ, all that we said would be equivocal and dangerous and even false’; Karl Barth, *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles’ Creed*, ed. by Jean-Louis Leuba, trans. by Gabriel Vahanian (London: Collins, 1960), 26f.

⁷⁹ See also IV/2, 31f.

6C Historical Understanding of Election and Elective Understanding of History

Viewing Jesus Christ as in the beginning the electing God and the elected human being, Barth terms His election as God's primal decision [*Urentscheidung*].⁸⁰ This designation is to be understood in two major senses. First, to do full justice to the determination of Jesus Christ as the electing God, it means that prior to, beyond and alongside His act of electing there is no other decision. This notion bears significant implications for Christian knowledge of Christ's being, and of God's 'essence' in the light of Christ's being, as explored in section 6B. Second, to do full justice to Jesus Christ's determination to be the elected human being, the designation of *Urentscheidung* also means that all other decisions subsequent to it can be seen only as following that of His election, included in it. In this section we take up the task to investigate with more clarity and precision Barth's conception of history as determined in the divine *Urentscheidung*, which is the election of Jesus Christ.

6C.1 *Urgeschichte* and *Urentscheidung*

Right at the beginning of his doctrine of election, Barth resorts to the notion of primal history [*Urgeschichte*] to explain the particular history of the particular relationship between God and humanity. This particular history, in the midst of history in general, is said to be inaugurated by the election of Jesus Christ, which is God's 'primal and basic decision [*Urentscheidung*]',⁸¹ at the beginning. Therefore we begin this section by examining Barth's conception of *Urgeschichte* and *Urentscheidung* in the light of each other.

⁸⁰ See for instance *KD* II/2, 8, 53, 55, 98-99, 184-185; II/2, 9, 50, 51, 91-92, 168-169.

⁸¹ II/2, 76; *KD* II/2, 82.

The notion of *Urgeschichte* has played different roles in different stages in Barth's theology.⁸² Despite the renouncement of this notion in *CD I/2*, one need not be surprised to find this notion, mentioned only once in *CD II/1*,⁸³ taken up again at the very outset of *CD II/2*.⁸⁴ Here in the doctrine of election, Barth no longer considers it as so dangerous as to carry the inevitable result of rendering revelation a predicate of history. Hence he more generously re-employs it, not to indicate the particular historicity of revelation, but to mean the particular history between God and human as determined in the election of Jesus Christ. It highlights the fact that the 'other' to which God elects to relate Himself in Jesus Christ is not primarily the general history of world and humanity as such, but the particular history between God and human in which God's eternal decision is enacted.

Barth's re-employment of the notion of *Urgeschichte* in the doctrine of election is significant in two ways. First, if we view *Urentscheidung* in the light of *Urgeschichte*, we see that Barth is bringing the historical realisation of the eternal election into the election as such, thus adding historicity to election. Second and conversely, if we view *Urgeschichte* in the light of *Urentscheidung*, we see that Barth is construing *Urgeschichte* as directly willed by God in the election of Jesus Christ at the beginning, thus strengthening the originality of *Urgeschichte*, adding intentionality to history. These two lines will be pursued in the following

⁸² See sections 2C.1, 2D.2, 3A.3.1, 3C, 4C.2.

⁸³ II/1, 600, where Barth takes the Old Testament history as 'the primal history of the covenant between God and man', and as the revelation of God.

⁸⁴ II/2, 7-9. Cf. Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 90n57: 'it is surprising that in his doctrine of election Barth takes up the concept of "primal history" again. Is he rejecting his own rejection? Or does the concept acquire a new meaning? Where is its theological place? Primal history is now the history which is played out between God and the one man Jesus (cf. *CD II/2*, p. 8), in that the Son of God takes the humanity of the man Jesus upon himself (cf. *ibid.*, p. 124). Primal history refers to the incarnation but precedes this event (cf. *ibid.*, p. 105). It is "the attitude and relation in which by virtue of the decision of His free love God wills to be and is God" (*ibid.*, p. 9) and therefore (in contrast to *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*), has its place in the trinitarian being of God.'

subsections.

6C.2 Historical Understanding of Election

Barth's attribution of historicity to election opens a possibility of perception of election from the viewpoint of history. This can be understood in two ways.

6C.2.1 The Concept of Election 'Upstream' Disclosed by Revelation

First, a historical understanding of election means the recognition that our concept of the eternal election is 'upstream' disclosed by God's self-revelation in history. For Barth, Christian concept or knowledge of election is strictly *a posteriori*. Because the fact that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election is revealed also by Him,⁸⁵ human conception of the divine election is no mere human invention or speculation, but rather derives strictly from the divine revelation in Jesus Christ.

This fact can be understood from two propositions. First, it is *through Jesus Christ* that we know of election. We as human beings in time have no access to the eternal election as such; it may be revealed to us only through Jesus Christ as the execution and fulfilment of that election.⁸⁶ Second, through Jesus Christ we *know* of election. By virtue of Jesus Christ as both the Subject of election and its revealer, Barth maintains, God's eternal will of election is not a distant mystery hidden from us, but a *revealed* truth to us in time. This 'positive understanding' of election is the departing point where Barth distinguishes himself from what he views as the traditional understanding of predestination. On Barth's positive view, although we as human beings in time have no direct access to God's eternal will of election, yet

⁸⁵ Ibid., 59f., 63f.

⁸⁶ Cf. II/2, 181: 'For us, then, who exist in time, the living God is perceptible and meaningful and active only in the execution and fulfilment of His predestination, not in predestination itself'.

assurance is give in the fact that ‘what was at the beginning of all things as the eternal divine plan and decree was precisely what is made known to us in time as the revelation of God and therefore as the revelation of the truth about all things.’⁸⁷ Taking place in time, revelation makes manifest to us not only the temporal but also the eternal, i.e. God’s eternal decree concerning all things. For this reason, ‘[even] in respect of predestination we must not and need not separate ourselves from the revelation of God as such’.⁸⁸ As ‘the *light* of the divine good-pleasure’,⁸⁹ revelation discloses to us the content of election, which would otherwise be undetermined or empty.

At the core of this positive understanding is Barth’s insistence that the eternal election and the historical revelation must never be separated:

We have to recognise [*erkennen*] in this one also the other. And precisely in this one is actually the other, too, recognisable [*erkennbar*] to us.⁹⁰

And in their inseparable relationship, insofar as in ‘this one’ ‘the other’ too is made manifest, there can be no unrecognisable background (of election) lurking behind the recognisable foreground (of revelation). Rather, as Barth puts it, ‘in this matter background and foreground are one and the same, and ... in the foreground recognisable to us, we may recognise the background too.’⁹¹ We in our historical

⁸⁷ II/2, 156; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 169.

⁸⁸ II/2, 156; *KD* II/2, 170.

⁸⁹ II/2, 156.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 156; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 170.

⁹¹ II/2, 159; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 173. See also II/2, 115; *KD* II/2, 123: ‘In the ... foreground of our [historical existence] we can and should cleave wholly and with full assurance to Him because in the eternal background of [all] history [too], in the beginning with God [too], the only decree which was passed, the only Word which was spoken and which prevails, was the decision which was executed by Him.’

existence can have assured knowledge of the eternal election because, as we cleave to Him, what we know of is nothing less than the actual reality of election. In that our understanding of the eternal election is made possible and substantiated by nothing else than the historical revelation, then, it must be acknowledged that the concept election is positively ‘upstream’ disclosed by revelation.⁹²

Of course, that which makes possible and real this ‘upstream’ disclosure lies on the side of God. But the God whom we have at this point is the One who, being high above there in eternity, embraces what happens below here in time in His election of Jesus Christ. If we ask about the basis on which Barth binds the eternal election to the historical revelation, the answer is the unity of the one God and of His one eternity. Just as there is only one God, so He has but one eternal will, and it has been made visible through and in His revelation, which ‘has all [the] forms of eternity’.⁹³ Revelation reveals to us ‘not only what the will of God *is*, but also what it *was* and what it *will be*’, because ‘[t]he *pre*-temporally eternal will of God is no other than His supra-temporally eternal will, which reveals itself as such in time and is effective in it.’⁹⁴ Therefore, in virtue of the unity of the one God and of His all-embracing one eternal will, Barth is able to push the recognisability, factualness and completeness of the historical revelation ‘upstream’ into the sphere of eternity, thus determining our human recognition of the divine election.⁹⁵

⁹² Already in II/1 Barth maintained of the identity of the divine decree with Jesus Christ that the will revealed in Jesus Christ is none other than the revelation of the decreed will. II/1, 519-522.

⁹³ *KD* II/2, 170, translation missing from II/2, 156.

⁹⁴ II/2, 156; *KD* II/2, 170.

⁹⁵ In relation to Barth’s doctrine of election, Roberts holds that ‘[t]he tension between eternal work and temporal realization is still problematic ... so long as all the interpretative categories are grounded in and derived from the divine and eternal being of God’ (Roberts, ‘Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Time’, *A Theology on Its Way?*, 34). On the contrary, the discussion up to this point in the chapter has made it clear that the ‘interpretative category’ employed by Barth is neither God in Himself nor humanity as such, but a ‘third’, the God-human Jesus Christ who, embracing time from all directions in eternity,

6C.2.2 Election as History

Second, Barth's historical understanding of election also consists in his claim that election itself is also history. Barth ends §33 of the *CD* by advocating an 'actualistic' [*aktuell*] or dynamic understanding of election⁹⁶ in contrast with an static or quietistic one. On his account, whilst election had been understood by others as the 'lifeless and timeless' *decretum absolutum* which rules over temporal life, in that Jesus Christ as the Elector is 'the living and eternal Lord of temporal life',⁹⁷ election should accordingly be construed as an 'living *act*', a 'divine *activity*', a '*present secret*' which 'takes place [eternally] in time'.⁹⁸ In that it never ceases to take place election, 'notwithstanding its eternity, ... is history [as] the self-attestation of eternity',⁹⁹ in the same way in which the Word is an eternal happening in the form of time as well as a temporal happening with the content of eternity.¹⁰⁰ On the basis of this actualistic understanding of the reality of the divine as divine acts set in motion in history,¹⁰¹ election cannot be thought of as a dead system once fixed in the pre-temporal eternity, belonging only to the past as the schema of history. It is rather a divine act eternally happening as '[a] history [once] determined in God's

discloses in history what the eternal election must be like. In Him the alleged 'tension' does not exist.

⁹⁶ *KD* II/2, 205; II/2, 187: 'activist'.

⁹⁷ II/2, 187f.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 180, 184, 185, 186; *KD* II/2, 198, 202, 204.

⁹⁹ II/2, 160; *KD* II/2, 175.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 97. Once again the conception of the threefold temporality of God's eternity is operative here: 'If it [i.e. this history] is the content of the eternity before time, then this eternity cannot remain back before time, then it is *per se* in time as well as before time, then it can only be history also in time.' II/2, 188; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 206.

¹⁰¹ As Barth explains elsewhere, 'It is a question of a history, or something which has come to pass in time, of a relationship of will and love: God loves, God wills—this is how Calvin explains himself. There is will, there is love—that is how a philosopher would express himself. With the latter, truth is abstract; with the former it is an historical reality' (Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 31). For him, to talk about the reality of God has nothing to do with abstract ideas it but everything to do with the reality of God's action in history.

own will and decree' as well as determining 'all other temporal histories, encounters and decisions within the sphere of creaturely reality'.¹⁰² Being the presupposition of all history, it never ceases to happen but remains unbroken and lasting; it 'does not only stand but also moves'.¹⁰³ And it takes place and moves in history as the eternal election:

For what took place in Jesus Christ—and we shall have to take this further step if we are to see and confess in God's revelation God's eternal decree [too]—was not merely a temporal event, but the eternal will of God temporally actualised [*gewordene*] and revealed in that event.¹⁰⁴

Furthermore, in Barth's historical understanding of election, election *is* history because it *becomes* history, or rather, *must become* history. For the actualisation of election in history is God's victory over sin. In deciding Himself for humanity, God has in the eternal election decided of suffering and death for Himself, which were alien to God and so had to become event in history. Also, in deciding humanity for Himself, God has in the eternal election chosen glory and victory for humanity, which are innate to God from all eternity but has to be actualised in time as the history between God and humanity for the sake of humanity.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, in that it is the actualisation of God's victory and glory,

¹⁰² II/2, 184; *KD*, II/2, 202f.

¹⁰³ II/2, 184.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 179; *KD* II/2, 197.

¹⁰⁵ For instance: 'What is in God Himself the simple, immediate victory of light over darkness—a victory which never stands in question—must have the form of this history in the creaturely sphere and therefore for the human (as God willed to have the human to be the witness to His glory); it had to become [an] *event* on that way in time', II/2, 141; *KD* II/2, 152f. Similarly, God's inner glory, inner life and inner activity, too, have to overflow outward to become event in history. See for instance II/2, 126, 169, 175.

election must become an event taking place in history.¹⁰⁶

In short, as the eternal God of election is living, the eternal election is also living, i.e., eternally happening as the history between God and humanity. It has to happen as history in history. This notion will play a crucial role in Barth's conception of history as determined by election, to which we now turn.

6C.3 Elective Understanding of History

In connecting *Urgeschichte* and *Urentscheidung*, Barth not only ascribes historicity to election but also attributes intentionality to *Urgeschichte* and thus in it to all history. We term this attribution an elective understanding of history.

6C.3.1 Election 'Downstream' Determining History

Its notion 'upstream' disclosed by the historical revelation, itself also history, the eternal election is also the sole factor stretching 'downstream' to determine all that is included in the created reality and its history. As argued in section 6A.2.2, primarily as the Elector and then also as the Elect, Jesus Christ's election [*Erwähltsein*] is all-inclusive and even exhaustive. It is only in His determinedness [*Bestimmtheit*] as God's self-determination that all the ways and works in history is determined to be God's ways and works.¹⁰⁷ And, according to Barth, we 'must be aware of the determinedness of these ways and works from their beginning, and ... must *bring to expression* the determinedness of these ways and works at all times and

¹⁰⁶ The conception of *election* as history is further developed in IV/1 into the conception of *atonement* as history: 'The atonement is history. To know it, we must know it as such. To think of it, we must think of it as such. To speak of it, we must [recount] it as history. To try to grasp it as supra-historical or [a-historical] truth is not to grasp it at all. It is indeed truth, but truth [coming to pass] in a history and [becoming manifest] in this history as such—[manifest], therefore, as history.' IV/1, 157; *KD* IV/1, 171.

¹⁰⁷ II/2, 19: 'His decision precedes every creaturely decision. Over against all creaturely self-determination it is pre-determination-prae-destinatio.'

in all places.’¹⁰⁸

Now when we take notice of this determinedness, we find that it consists first of all, again, in a constant differentiation of a particular history from the general history. It is true that God’s determination applies to the whole of the history of the created reality. But in view of the fact that revelation becomes and is history as the centre of a particular history,¹⁰⁹ and that election, taking place in eternity, becomes and is a history determining all history,¹¹⁰ it becomes clear that ‘history’ cannot be viewed as an indiscriminative whole. Because God’s will concerns primarily and properly the election of Jesus Christ and only then those elected in Him, history, too, is originally about the *Urgeschichte*, a highly particular history, of Jesus Christ, and derivatively about the particular history His people, and only then and more derivatively about the general history of the world and humanity. Discrimination was already made from the very beginning, and is always being made and manifested all along the way.

6C.3.2 The History of Jesus Christ and the History of His People

The determination of history by election, or the intentionality of all history, consists of two facts. To begin with, the history of Jesus Christ’s people exists because God wills to give it life in Jesus Christ:

It is God’s choice that under the name of Jesus Christ He wills to give life to the substance of His people’s history and to that people itself ...

It is God’s choice that in this specific form, in one age, in the very midst of that people’s [time], He acts on behalf of all ages, thus giving to all created time, becoming indeed, its meaning and content. ... It is

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 93; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 99, emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁹ See section 4C.3.

¹¹⁰ See section 6A.2.

God's choice that in every stage in its history He deals with this people with that purpose in view.¹¹¹

God gives His life to, or rather Himself becomes the life of, this particular history of His people to such an extent that the being of Jesus Christ is inseparable from the history of His people. Barth continues:

To put it the other way round: If we [want to] know who God is, and what ... the meaning and purpose of His election [is], and in what respect He is the electing God, then we must look away from all others, and excluding all side-glances or secondary thoughts, we must look only upon and to the name of Jesus Christ, and the existence and history of the people of God [decided in] Him. We must look only upon the divine mystery of this name and this history, of this Head and this body.¹¹²

We have already made clear Barth's insistence on understanding the being of God Himself only from Jesus Christ so as not to conceive wrongly of an abstract God in general. Now the foregoing passage further suggests that the existence of Jesus Christ (which itself would be conceived as consisting of a twofold history in Barth's mature Christology in *CD IV*)¹¹³ has been so interwoven with the existence of His people (which is itself nothing other than a history) that it is simply impossible to look at the former without also looking at the latter. It then follows that the existence of God's people in history can no longer be construed as accidental or external to the existence of Jesus Christ Himself in history. On the contrary, it must be regarded as necessary and internal. It is *necessary*, in the sense that this particular existence in history is not to be dismissed as 'side-glances [and] second

¹¹¹ II/2, 54; *KD* II/2, 57f.

¹¹² *Ibid.* See also II/2, 58f.; *KD* II/2, 63.

¹¹³ §59.1, IV/1, 157ff.; §64.2, IV/2, 20ff. See Chapter Eight.

thoughts', but is rather the only proper object upon and to which we are to look, alongside the name of Jesus Christ, in order that we may in truth know God. And to that extent, it is also *internal* to the existence of Jesus Christ in history, in the sense that it is firstly determined in Jesus Christ in God's pre-temporal eternity, and then given in time 'its meaning and content' which is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

Second, the determination of history by election, or the intentionality of all history, consists also in the fact that, gaining life and substance from the human-historical event of the incarnation, 'all the preceding history of Israel' and 'all the succeeding history of the Church' must keep referring to Jesus Christ in order to attain their meaning.¹¹⁴ This is what it means to denote Jesus Christ as the centre of history: it is by keeping referring to Him that the history of God's people becomes particular. And in a quite figurative manner, Barth interprets this ongoing process of referring as a process of 'narrowing down' [*Sonderung*],¹¹⁵ for he takes the history recorded in the Bible as demonstrating that the 'whole generations and whole sections of the people'¹¹⁶ were cut off so as to make manifest the history of particular figures such as Jacob-Israel, David, and Zerubbabel. Moreover, even these particular figures did not make known themselves but rather prepared for and pointed to *the* particular One, i.e. God's Son as the King of His people. Through the long process of 'narrowing down', the history of the existence of God's people finds its meaning and necessity only in preparing for and making visible 'the existence of a

¹¹⁴ II/2, 53; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 56f. Cf. Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 47: 'And the Christians are members of the cast of that history. And their small stories exist only as referring to that great history'.

¹¹⁵ II/2, 55; *KD*, II/2, 59.

¹¹⁶ It is precisely the process of narrowing down, argues Barth, that made this people a people: 'It had, in fact, hardly existed as a people in this sense before there began a further narrowing down within itself', *ibid.*

special case'¹¹⁷ which is its King who is to come.¹¹⁸ It is true that there are times when some are called into the formation of God's people,¹¹⁹ but it is more often the case that in the historical sequence 'countless members are continually cut off and falling away [*dauernden Abgeschnittenwerden und Herausfallen Unzähliger*]'.¹²⁰ In Barth's words again, '[Precisely, *eben*] [t]he dissolution [*Abbauen*] of the historical existence of the people as such ... [becomes] the true and proper [theme] of [its] history and its record.'¹²¹

In short, the being of Jesus Christ and the existence of His people are inseparable. As both are identical with their respective histories, the history of Jesus Christ and that of His people are also inseparable. The former history gives life and meaning to the latter by becoming its life and meaning, thus making it necessary and internal. And the latter history, in its turn, bears witness to the former by being constantly going through the process of separating the particular from the general.

6C.3.3 The History of Jesus Christ's People and the 'Remaining' Histories

If Barth's elective understanding of the particular history of Jesus Christ's people holds true, it then has to be asked, how does it account for the general history of the world and humanity? What place does he give to this general history in the nexus of the two particular histories? Two interconnected sets of points are to be mentioned and put under scrutiny.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 56.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 58: 'This is the man who is the fulfilment of the promise and hope of His people, and the meaning ... of its existence and history'.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.: 'Those who are called by this King, and hear this King, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, constitute the people whose existence was envisaged throughout the whole of that long history'.

¹²⁰ Ibid.; *KD* II/2, 62.

¹²¹ II/2, 56; *KD* II/2, 60.

First, the general history of the world and humanity is said to be located under the framework of the particular history of Jesus Christ's people, with its meaning thus consisting only in bearing witness to the latter. Involved here is a complete reversal of the framework under which the two kinds of histories are often related. Instead of placing the particular history (of Jesus Christ's people) within a framework of general history (of the world and humanity), Barth insists that:

this is not the biblical picture of world and of history: that it is somewhere in the framework of a history of nature and world, a history that is in operation beforehand and in itself, that the history of Israel, Jesus Christ and the Church, too, acts out. According to the Bible, the framework and basis of all temporal occurrences is the history of the covenant between God and humanity, from Adam to Noah and Abraham, from Abraham and Jacob to David, from David to Jesus Christ and believers in Him. It is within this framework that the whole history of nature and world, too, plays its determined role, and not the reverse, although logically and empirically the course of things ought to have been the reverse.¹²²

In this passage Barth not only draws a distinction between general history and the particular history of Jesus Christ's people, but also gives priority to the latter over the former in setting the former as the framework of the latter.¹²³

With primacy given to that particular history, Barth takes the general history to have no independent meaning, a basic feature observed since the 1922 *Römerbrief*, depending totally on that particular history for meaning. It serves as the sphere or theatre where *Urgeschichte* is acted out;¹²⁴ it exists only for the sake of pointing to

¹²² II/2, 136; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 146.

¹²³ This reversal of framework is made even more radical in his lectures on the Apostle's Creed, given in 1940-1943, around the same time of II/2 (1942). See Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, 84f.

¹²⁴ This topic will be unfolded in Barth's doctrine of creation in *CD* III/1, which will be treated in Chapter Seven.

the latter, which is acted out in the midst of it; it reaches its goal as the latter does so.¹²⁵ In this set of statements, the general history is subsumed to the particular history of Jesus Christ's people. It functions as a signal to the latter in the latter's function as a signal to the history of Jesus Christ.

The second set of points bears a quite different feature from the first. According to it, the general history of the world and humanity is also said to be separated from the particular history of Jesus Christ's people, and is therefore almost veiling in nature for the manifestation of *Urgeschichte*, which is Jesus Christ. The general history, according to Barth, is under the sway of the 'narrowing down' mentioned above. Different from the particular history, which has to go through a long process of division and distinction, the general history is said to have been cut off and fallen away 'right from the beginning of the history of this race [of Israel]',¹²⁶ for the Bible on Barth's account is not concerned with universal world history or its problems as such but has its focus only on that particular history.¹²⁷ As that particular history is distinguished from the general history, the general is also excluded from that particular. Those histories cut off and left behind from that particular history then become 'remaining' histories.

This line of thinking leads Barth to the conception that the reality of election, which is Jesus Christ's history, is always hidden in the general history, and may

¹²⁵ II/2, 7f., 94. In the same vein, '[the event of incarnation] divides time itself into *ante Christum natum* and *post Christum natum*. This does not mean simply all time before Christ and all time after Him, but it is *qualified* time before Him and after Him. ... What is described here is not time in general, not the history of the world, but the time of the Covenant of God which is fulfilled in the appearance of Jesus Christ'. Karl Barth, 'The Christian Understanding of Revelation', Karl Barth, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings, 1946-52*, ed. by Ronald G. Smith, trans. by E. M. Delacour and Stanley Goodman (London: SCM Press, 1954), 205-240 (218).

¹²⁶ II/2, 217.

¹²⁷ Seen in this light, Adam is important, 'not because he is the father of the human race, but because he is the first of these special cases, the first in this succession of particular men', *ibid.*, 55.

become visible only in the particular history of His people. In this respect the general history is veiling by nature. Refusing to ‘dissolve predestination into the stream of the general temporal world events’ or ‘into the particular salvation event, in which world events come to their meaning and goal’,¹²⁸ Barth maintains that:

It is, rather, the secret which is hidden in the general world events as such and becomes manifest in the particular salvation event as such. ... All other events in the world aim at the salvation event; they must take place for the sake of this: that this decision of God which precedes everything, the divine electing of human, the election of human by God, becomes visible and effective in time¹²⁹

This second set of statements, quite different from the first, tells us that the general history is separated from the particular history of Jesus Christ’s people. It might point to that particular history, but in no way does it as such unveil the election of Jesus Christ’s Himself as its ‘secret’, its hidden reality.

Two concerns should be raised at this point. For all their richness in clarity and sharpness in focus, these two sets of statements regarding the general history do not always seem coherent or sufficiently concrete. The first concern is about *coherence*. If the general history is subsumed under the framework of the particular history, as the first set of statements maintains, it is then included in the latter and connected with the latter. But then how are we to account for the second set of statements that the general history is separated from that particular history? Is it connected to it only by being cut off from it in its beginning? This is certainly a rather strained explanation. It is not an easy task, then, if we are to reconcile these two quite opposing views of the general history in its relation to or separation from

¹²⁸ II/2, 185; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 203.

¹²⁹ II/2, 185; translation revised per *KD* II/2, 203.

the particular history of Jesus Christ's people. The incoherence indicated here suggests that, even in Barth's mature doctrine of election, a certain degree of tension still exists, not between eternity and time as a whole, but between the general history of the world and humanity and the particular history of Jesus Christ's people.¹³⁰

The second concern is about *concreteness*. It is fair to say that, on the whole, Barth often gives an impression of depreciating of the general history or at least of showing disinterest to it. His conception of the general history can easily be interpreted as being subordinating the general to the particular, or even as excluding the former from the latter. Probably for this reason, whereas a lot is said in *CD II/2* in explanation of how that particular history concretely bears witness and makes manifest Jesus Christ as *Urgeschichte*, only little account is given, in a rather abstract way, how the general history may point to the history of Jesus Christ's people. And this problem is made more acute in view of his assertion that:

Because the eternal predestination becomes manifest to us in that salvation event, we will *accept* it also as the secret of all remaining happenings in the world, and at any rate we have to *consider and assess*—if not also understand—*all remaining happenings in the world on the whole and in detail* according to the instruction of our knowledge about that happening.¹³¹

There is no question that, according to our analysis thus far, Barth has always fully *accepted* the Jesus Christ—in the form of His resurrection (since *Römerbrief*), His incarnation as God's revelation (since *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*), His election (*CD II/2*), and His history (*CD IV*)—as the hidden reality of the whole

¹³⁰ This seems to remain the case even in Barth's mature Christology presented in *CD IV*. By virtue of his actualistic divine ontology, the divine-eternal and the human-historical are indeed joined in harmonious union in the history of Jesus Christ; what remains problematic is the persisting tension between His history and the 'remaining' histories which are not included in the history of His people.

¹³¹ *II/2*, 185; translation revised per *KD II/2*, 204. Emphasis all mine.

history therefore of the ‘remaining’ histories too. Not insisting on *understanding* how this is so, he maintains that we must at least *consider* and *assess* the general history both on the whole and in detail. The proposed ‘consideration’ and ‘assessment’ of the ‘remaining histories’, we should add, are not aimed to prove or even produce the acknowledgement of the divine election, but come as a consequence of it.¹³²

6C.4 Brief Summary: Historicity and Intentionality in Reciprocity

In short, according to Barth’s historical understanding of election and elective understanding of history, historicity is attributed to election and intentionality to history. In their asymmetrical reciprocity, election becomes and is history and history is the theatre of the actualisation of election; the two are brought into an inseparable relationship. Incoherence arises, as we have shown, when Barth gives two sets of statements, which suggest the subsumption of the general history under the particular history of Jesus Christ’s people *and* the exclusion of the former from the latter. Whichever the case, very few concrete accounts are provided as to how the general history may be of service to that particular history’s bearing witness to Jesus Christ Himself.

6D Concluding Remarks

This chapter has demonstrated how Barth in his doctrine of election in *CD II/2* convincingly argues for the centrality of the election of Jesus Christ which overcomes the divergence of the divine-eternal and the human-historical. In that He is the electing God, the human-historicity of Jesus Christ must be brought ‘upstream’

¹³² Later in Barth’s teaching on providence we will see how, for Barth, we know *that* history as a whole proceeds under God’s providence but we do not really know *how*. See footnote 35 in section 7B.2 for more detail.

into our conception of God's inner being; in that He is the elected human being, the divine-eternal-ness of the election of Jesus Christ must be extended 'downstream' throughout the human-historical. What this means for the purposes of this thesis is this: His history is brought into an unprecedented depth in the bosom of God Himself by virtue of the divine-eternal anticipation of the human-historical and, in that sense, the subsequent participation of the human-historical in the divine-eternal.

By virtue of the participation of the divine-eternal in the human-historical, as already demonstrated, 'history' is divided into two orders, at least conceptually. On the one hand, we have the general history of the world and humanity; on the other, the particular history of Jesus Christ and His people, *Urgeschichte*, or salvation history. In Chapter Seven we will turn to *CD III*, Barth's doctrine of creation, to examine his covenantal account of the general history in the framework of this particular history. Then in Chapter Eight, we will turn to *CD IV*, Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, to examine his christological account of the particular history of Jesus Christ as it is acted out in the general history but also as the prototype of all history.

Chapter Seven

Creator God Ruling History: *Church Dogmatics* III (1945-1951)

Introduction

This chapter will examine Barth's concept of history by looking at his doctrine of creation in *CD* III. Central to this volume is Barth's conviction that the divine act of creation is for the sake of reconciliation, as foreordained in the election of Jesus Christ. According to it, Barth posits that creation is the external basis of the covenant,¹ and that the covenant is the internal basis of creation.² In this scheme the whole process of history is understood as the development of this external-internal relationship between creation and covenant. Pursuing this line of thought, this chapter seeks to demonstrate 1) that history has its beginning in creation for the sake of the covenant; 2) that history in its proceeding is preserved by providence for the sake of covenant history; and 3) that history constitutes the essence of human being because the human Jesus exists in history. Whilst the first two sections focus on the history of the world, the final section highlights the history of human beings, with a view to shifting to the treatment of Barth's account of the history of Jesus Christ in *CD* IV in the next chapter.

¹ III/1, 94ff; *KD* III/1, 103ff.

² III/1, 228ff.; *KD* III/1, 258.

7A The Beginning of History in Creation

7A.1 Creation as History: Creation History

As ‘creation comes first in the series of works of the triune God’,³ history has its beginning in the act of creation. As the junction of pre-temporal eternity and time itself, creation is on the one hand genuine history, and has on the other hand a particular character in contrast with all its subsequent history. This subsection will examine how Barth defends the historicity of creation on the one hand, and safeguards it from historical research on the other hand.

7A.1.1 *Geschichte* and *Historie*

The relation and distinction between *Geschichte* and *Historie* play an important role in Barth’s doctrine of creation. The thesis of §41 in *CD* III/1 states of creation that ‘its historical [*geschichtlich*] reality eludes all historical [*historisch*] observation and account’.⁴ Throughout this paragraph God’s act of creation is construed as *unhistorische Geschichte*,⁵ and Barth defines the two notions as follows:

Objectively speaking, Historie, i.e. the Geschichte which is accessible to human because visible and perceptible to him and comprehensible for him, is creaturely Geschichte in the connection with other creaturely Geschichte—a happening prior to and alongside which there is also other happening principally of the same type with which it allows itself to be ordered together into one picture. And

³ III/1, 42.

⁴ Ibid., 42; *KD* III/, 44.

⁵ ‘[Creation] can only be *unhistorische Geschichte*, and there can only be *unhistorische Geschichte*-writing of it’, III/1, 78; translation revised per *KD* III/1, 84. We retain the German original where it is necessary, since phrases such as “non-historical” history’ in the English translation can be confusing.

subjectively speaking, *Historie* is the picture of such creaturely happening in its creaturely connection.⁶

According to this view, the two ‘histories’ are not mutually exclusive concepts; rather, one includes the other. Whilst all *Historie* is *Geschichte*, some *Geschichte* is not *Historie*. It is on this ground that Barth defines creation as *unhistorische Geschichte*.

7A.1.2 Unhistorische Geschichtlichkeit of Creation

In the doctrine of creation Barth is determined to establish the historicity [*Geschichtlichkeit*] of creation by resorting to its relation to covenant history:

Since the covenant of grace, and therefore [the] history, is the aim of creation, creation itself *belongs* to [the] history and therefore to [that] sequence of [*time-fulfilling*] events⁷

On this view, creation is history not because it belongs to time, but because it belongs to covenant history as *the* history, because it ‘aims at the history’.⁸ In this sense, it is primarily through its connection with covenant history, and not simply in virtue of its own temporality, that creation acquires its historicity.

Creation is history, also because neither its basis in God’s eternal decree nor its triune Creator is without history [*geschichtlos*]. As ‘the basis of creation’, ‘this eternal pre-truth itself obviously has a historical character in the bosom of eternity’.⁹

⁶ III/1, 78; translation revised per *KD* III/1, 84.

⁷ III/1, 60; *KD* III/1, 64.

⁸ III/1, 59; translation revised per *KD* III/1, 63. The German original reads: ‘Die Schöpfung zielt auf die Geschichte’, and this ‘die Geschichte’ is, as made clear in the immediate context, not history in general but ‘the history of the covenant of grace’. Similarly, von Balthasar’s remark concerning this passage that ‘[t]he concept of history is already immanent in creation’ does not hold true unless by ‘history’ it is meant *the* history, i.e. covenant history. See von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 123.

⁹ III/1, 66.

Moreover, even ‘the pure, eternal being [*Wesen*] of God as such’ is not without history [*geschichtlos*], ‘for being [*als*] triune it is ... historical even in its eternity’.¹⁰ Therefore, in that its basis and Creator are both historical, creation is also historical, itself becoming the historical basis of what follows it in history as history.¹¹

Because creation derives its *Geschichtlichkeit* from *the* history, the ‘historical’ decree of the ‘historical’ God, it then does not depend on a correspondence to the external criteria set up by the historical science. As the ‘*Geschichte* which we are not able to see and comprehend’,¹² creation is to be recognised as *unhistorische Geschichte*.

7A.2 Creation History and Covenant History

Having established the *unhistorische Geschichtlichkeit* of creation, Barth seeks to explore the relationship between creation history and covenant history. The key notion is that covenant history follows [*folgen*] creation without deriving from [*folgen aus*] it. Although creation history precedes covenant history chronologically, the latter precedes the former ‘intentionally’ as the implementation of the gracious covenant.¹³ It is proposed that in the connection between the two histories lies ‘Barth’s profound theology of history’.¹⁴ In what follows we seek to formulate this connection by way of three propositions.

¹⁰ Ibid., 66; *KD* III/1, 71.

¹¹ III/1, 66.

¹² Ibid., 78; *KD* III/1, 84. Also III/1, 79; *KD* III/1, 86. At this point Barth makes it clear that with his conception of *unhistorisch Geschichte* he has in mind theologians such as Bultmann who, based on historical science, claim all biblical stories (including the creation-*Geschichte*) which are *unhistorisch* to be not *Geschichte* but rather myth. In an attempt to undermine their dismissal of biblical accounts, Barth employs the terms of *Sage* and *Legende* to denote *Geschichte* which is *unhistorisch* or *prähistorisch*, in distinction from *Geschichte* which is *historisch*. The point he advances is that *Geschichte* can be not *historisch*. For more detail see III/1, 80ff.; *KD* III/1, 87ff.

¹³ As Gunton puts it, ‘Covenant is prior in intention, creation is first in execution.’ Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, 244.

¹⁴ Gorringer, *Karl Barth*, 185.

7A.2.1 Creation and Covenant as History

First, for Barth, creation is an event taking place as history initiating history, and the covenant is an event made first in eternity and then actualised in history as history. Just as the revelation of Jesus Christ, as the centre of the grace-covenant, really becomes and is history, so creation, as the chronological beginning of the grace-covenant, really constitutes the beginning of history. Precisely in that revelation, creation and covenant are all actual events taking place in history, it can be maintained that vis-à-vis these three divine moments the reality of human history is not overwhelmed but rather affirmed.¹⁵

7A.2.2 Creation History Deriving from Covenant History

Second, it is for the sake of the covenant that there is creation, and it is for the sake of covenant history that there is the creation of history. The relation between covenant, creation and history thus conceived is clearly the outworking of Barth's doctrine of election, according to which election becomes and is history and history is the theatre of the actualisation of election in their asymmetrical reciprocity. In that God's will of election is predominant but remains in the background, it 'requires a stage [*Raum*]'¹⁶ for covenant history to be played out in the foreground, in the sphere of the creation history as its theatre. In other words, 'the time of creation is ... to be understood as the counterpart [*Gegenbild*] of that of grace, and therefore

¹⁵ Barth speaks of covenant history that '[t]o attack its temporality would be to attack its reality.' (III/1, 72) Conversely speaking, to affirm its reality one has to affirm its temporality, and therefore the reality of time and history too. The same holds true of the historicity and thus temporality of revelation and creation, too.

¹⁶ III/1, 44; *KD* III/1, 46. See also: 'in the Christian concept of the creation of all things the question is concretely one of man and his whole universe as the theatre of the history of the covenant of grace' (III/1, 44), 'creation consists in the establishment of the ground and sphere and object and instrument of this other work' (ibid., 47), and '[c]reation as history fashions the world as a [the] sphere for man who is to be a participant in this grace' (ibid., 67).

the *time of grace* as the true *prototype* [*das eigentliche Urbild*] of all time.’¹⁷ Therefore, because the covenant is the external basis of creation, because ‘creation does *not precede* reconciliation but, *follows it*’,¹⁸ creation history follows covenant history as its internal or material presupposition.

7A.2.3 Covenant History Following Creation History

Third, in ascribing priority to covenant history over creation history, Barth’s does not undervalue the significance of the latter. On the contrary, in that the connection between creation history and covenant history is affirmed as necessary, the necessity of history as *the* stage of covenant history is also affirmed.¹⁹ Balance in the connection between creation and covenant is indeed maintained in Barth’s doctrine of creation. On the one hand, it is true that *covenant history* is directly willed by God and indeed from God Himself, and that the whole history that follows the creation history is determined to participate *in that definite history*. Creation history not only exists, but exists *for this specific purpose*. This being the case, on the other hand, God’s gracious covenant is by nature not to be kept high above there without or over against the creature; rather, the covenant is determined to take place as a history *in history*, i.e. in the history that begins with the *creation history*. Differently put, ‘if the time of creation is ultimately the reflection and counterpart of the time of grace, then it too, precisely because and as it is the beginning of all time, must be no less than that real *time*—real in the potentiated sense.’²⁰ Therefore,

¹⁷ III/1, 75; *KD* III/1, 82.

¹⁸ III/1, 75; *KD* III/1, 82.

¹⁹ Since time is the sphere of covenant history, ‘since the covenant and its history are the ratification and renewal of creation on the one hand, and creation is the presupposition of the covenant on the other, it follows from this that the temporality of creation and its history is a necessity’, III/1, 72.

²⁰ III/1, 75; translation slightly revised per *KD* III/1, 82.

because creation is the external basis of the covenant, because creation prepares for the covenant, covenant history follows creation history as its external or formal presupposition.²¹

7B The Proceeding of History under the Providence of the Lord of History

Based on election and for the sake of covenant history, creation takes place, and there begins history. After the act of creation, creaturely history still proceeds, under the divine providence. In what follows we will first position these two histories in the nexus of the doctrines of election, creation and providence, and see how these three doctrines are related in view of the two histories. We will then demonstrate that, according to Barth's doctrine of providence, creaturely history is set in a positive relationship with covenant history on the one hand, but also set under certain limitations on the other hand.

7B.1 Covenant History and Creaturely History: Positioning in Doctrinal Nexus

7B.1.1 Covenant History: Rooted in Election, Commenced in Creation, Sustained by Providence

Proceeding from the creation history, according to Barth, there begins 'first and decisively' *the* history, i.e. covenant history as the 'meaning, basis and goal' of creation.²² What also follows the creation history is 'the rule of divine providence

²¹ III/1, 46: 'God's first work, the positing of the distinct reality of man and his world, is indelibly marked off from every other source or beginning by the fact that it precedes and prepares for the second work, God's gracious dealing within the sphere of this reality.'

²² Ibid., 6.

which accompanies, surrounds and sustains the history of the covenant, the fulfilment of divine predestination, as what we may and must call a second history strictly related to the first and determined by it.²³ Therefore both creation and providence occur for the sake of covenant history, as determined in election.

7B.1.2 Creaturely History Commenced in Creation, Sustained by Providence

Besides covenant history and providence, with creation there also begins ‘the history of creaturely existence’,²⁴ ‘the history of the ... encounter and co-existence of God the Creator with the reality [in general and as such] created by Him’.²⁵ Creaturely history serves as the external basis of covenant history.²⁶ Like covenant history, creaturely history also stands in need of sustaining by providence.

In short, Barth’s doctrinal positioning of the two histories is clearly the theological-logical outcome of what he achieved in his doctrine of election.²⁷ In that it is rooted in *election*, covenant history is the unquestionable centre of *creation* and *providence*. For the sake of covenant history, there also begins creaturely history.

7B.1.3 Continuity between Election, Creation and Providence, and the Relation between God and Creaturely History

Barth’s doctrinal positioning of the two histories also tells of a continuity and a relationship. First, it indicates the *continuity* between the three doctrinal moments,

²³ Ibid., *KD* III/3, 5.

²⁴ III/3, 8.

²⁵ Ibid., 8; *KD* III/3, 7.

²⁶ See III/3, 45; *KD* III/3, 53.

²⁷ By contrast, his doctrine of providence in Göttingen had nearly no reference to election or covenant, and only very limited mention of Jesus Christ, the notion of whose two natures were employed as an analogy, as the prototype of the teaching on the *concursum* of God in world history. See §20, Die Vorhersehung, in *Unt2*, 245ff., especially 269.

i.e. election, creation and providence. To be sure, each of them has a distinctive characteristic: election is an eternal event, creation a one-time unrepeatable historical event, and providence a continuing series of moments in the proceeding of history.²⁸ But they are clearly connected in the beginning and proceeding of covenant history. This continuity bears witness to the fact that ‘the One who sees and cares for the creature is also its *Creator*’²⁹, and that the Creator God is also the electing God. And this continuity is ordered, having election as its origin: God creates for the sake of election; God sustains for the sake first of election and therefore also of the created reality.

Second, from this continuity there follows a *relationship* in which God stands to the creaturely existence in history. This relationship is consistent, guaranteed by God the Elector and Creator, and therefore is even ‘necessary’, not in the sense that He needs it, but that He wills it.³⁰ In this relationship, God remains faithful to Himself and therefore to His creature and, for this reason, co-exists with His creature in such a way that ‘He [allows] the history of the creature to be [at the same time] the history of His own glory’.³¹ In the doctrine of providence, therefore, we know in faith that the faithful God is the glorious Lord of history,³² whose rule over history extends in its every aspect and its whole span.

²⁸ Cf. ‘Creation and providence are not identical. In creation it is a matter of the *establishment*, the incomparable *beginning* of the relationship between Creator and creature; in providence of its *continuation* and *history* in a series of different but comparable moments.’ III/3, 8; *KD* III/3, 7.

²⁹ III/3, 9; *KD* III/3, 8.

³⁰ ‘This God, who stands over against His creature in such transcendence, stands to the continuation and history of His creature manifestly in a *relationship*; such a relationship could only be *accidental* to some “highest being” or a mere demiurge, and might *not* be peculiar to him, but it is *necessary* to Him, this Creator. Precisely the eternity of God is the pledge of the fact that He is always for His creature, that is, it will have *time* too as long as He wills.’ III/3, 10; translation revised per *KD* III/3, 9.

³¹ III/3, 12; *KD* III/3, 12.

³² See for instance III/3, 12, 13, 34, 38, 41, and 43. Cf. 26: ‘That *God Himself* is known as Lord is the decisive difference between the belief in providence and every philosophy of history’.

The foregoing discussion can be summed up in the following:

It is because God wills this history [i.e. covenant history] for this reason that He willed the creation and that He wills also the preservation of the creature. *Because servatio, therefore creatio and therefore conservatio.* For this history to take place the creature must have space and time and permanence [*Raum, Dauer, Bestand*]. Because God wills the history He creates and gives it these things, and thus *preserves* the creature.³³

To be sure, the axiom '[b]ecause *servatio*, therefore *creatio* and therefore *conservatio*' properly expresses the *order* of election, creation and providence. But we should also notice in it the *continuity* of the three, and therefore the 'necessary' *relationship* in which the one God stands with even creaturely history.

7B.2 Creaturely History Set in Positive Relationship to Covenant History

In view of the relationship between God and creaturely history, we argue that there is also a *positive* relationship between covenant history and creaturely history. By exploring this *positive* relationship between the two histories, we seek to further clarify the question with which the last chapter came to an end, i.e. the question of a seeming cutting-off of the general history of the world and humanity (i.e. creaturely history) from the particular history of Jesus Christ and His people (i.e. covenant history).

The positive relationship between the two histories is one of the core themes running through Barth's doctrines of election, creation and providence. On the one hand, covenant history is the internal basis and presupposition of creaturely history: it is the latter's purpose, meaning and goal. On the other hand, creaturely history is

³³ III/3, 80; *KD* III/3, 91.

the external basis and presupposition of covenant history: it is the necessary sphere, theatre or stage on which covenant history is acted out. In this sense, the two histories are positively related in that they presuppose and establish each other.

In addition, the positive relation between the two histories also consists in the fact in their proceeding creaturely history is not separated from but is rather included in covenant history. We recall that in the doctrine of election Barth spoke of a continuous ‘narrowing down’ [*Sonderung*]³⁴ of the general history from the particular history, the very process through which covenant history is said to be formed. By contrast, in the doctrine of providence Barth speaks of the co-proceeding of the two histories. Differently put, whilst in the doctrine of election the proceeding of covenant history was conceived as entailing *separating from* itself creaturely history, in the doctrine of providence it is construed as *proceeding with* creaturely history.

Knowing *that* creaturely history stands in a positive relationship to covenant history under the providence of the Lord God, Barth does not give a comprehensive explication as to *how* exactly this is so.³⁵ He does, however, draw several

³⁴ II/2, 55; *KD*, II/2, 59.

³⁵ This, I believe, is the reason of Barth’s language of ‘in some sense’ and ‘something of God’s rule’. See III/3, 13; *KD* III/3, 13: ‘In this history, therefore, we need not expect turns and events which have nothing to do with His lordship and are not ... in some sense [*in irgend einem Sinn*] [directly] acts of His lordship [too]’ (cf. also *ibid.*, 38) and III/3, 24; *KD* III/3, 26: ‘... the Word of God[,] in which he believes, and which he believes, can as such cause him to see something of God’s rule [*etwas ... von Gottes Walten*], not His universal plan or total view, but God Himself at work at various points’. The reserved tone can be taken to suggest Barth’s ‘correction towards a more personal, and less *deterministic*, providence’ (Darren M. Kennedy, ‘A Personalist Doctrine of Providence: Karl Barth’s Church Dogmatics III.3 in Conversation with Philosophical Theology’ [PhD thesis submitted to the University of Edinburgh, 2007], 145); it can also mean his endeavour not to say too much whilst avoiding saying too little about creaturely history as the external basis of covenant history. See III/3, 45f. This notion recalls a question mentioned in the last chapter about the proposed ‘consideration’ and ‘assessment’ of general history according to our knowledge of particular history (II/2, 185; *KD* II/2, 204). Here in the context of the teaching on providence, we are told that what we can know for sure is the particular history of the covenant, which culminates in the history of Jesus Christ, because it is this history that is directly revealed to us. How exactly the ‘remaining’ histories are related to that particular history, by contrast, cannot be known in detail. In this connection cf. Tanner, ‘Creation and Providence’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, 117f.

‘permissible’ [*erlaubt*] but also ‘imperfect’ analogies³⁶ in an attempt to describe *what* the distinction-in-relation of the two histories is like. He mentions Luther’s metaphor of mask and face, focusing on the dialectic relation of them.³⁷ He likens the two histories to the original [*Urbild*] and its reflection [*Abbild*] in a mirror, focusing on the two counterparts [*Gegenbild*] being in complete likeness but dialectically also complete reverse.³⁸ He also compares the two to the centre and its circumference relating to and defining each other.³⁹ But above all, it is the analogy of one line versus many lines that most illustratively explains the positive relationship between the two histories.

With the analogy of one line and many lines, Barth first admits that within the many more obvious lines of the world history covenant history is but ‘one narrow line’, ‘an astonishingly thin line’.⁴⁰ But he still insists that general history belongs to that particular covenant history, in that the latter is the former’s ‘ontic and [also] noetic basis’ [*Realgrund und auch ihren Erkenntnisgrund*].⁴¹ It is posited in the doctrine of providence that, for all its inconspicuousness, covenant history is one

This being the case, we still see that Barth identifies four ‘special elements’ which ‘in the midst of world-occurrence generally ... do testify and confirm and demonstrate ... from where and by whom that occurrence is ruled’ (and not how) (III/3, 199). And he makes a special effort to examine Jewish history (ibid., 210ff.), concluding that it is as ‘no people’ that the Jews are the people of God, and that it is because they have ‘no history’ that they have ‘the only truly human history, the history of man with God’ (ibid., 218). Schröder terms these special elements as ‘a middle ground ... between the history of the covenant and general creaturely occurrence’, thus suggesting that the two histories at issue are separated and mutually excluded. But our investigation (as will be seen shortly) will make it clear that for Barth the two histories are neither separated nor exclusive, but positively connected with one ordered to the other. See Schröder, “‘I see Something You Don’t See’”, in *For the Sake of the World*, 133.

³⁶ III/3, 51; *KD* III/3, 59.

³⁷ III/3, 19f.

³⁸ Ibid., 49f. Also III/1, 75, 154.

³⁹ III/3, 50, 183ff.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁴¹ III/3, 37; *KD* III/3, 42.

particular line ‘*exalted* above all other history’.⁴²

Second, exalted above many other lines, covenant history is still one line that is situated in many. Because as covenant history takes place, ‘there [also takes place] simply ... the history of the creature as such’,⁴³ this ‘exaltation’ of covenant history must not be taken to mean a mutual exclusiveness of the two histories.

Furthermore and most importantly, the one thin line of covenant history is not an alien element simply embedded in the many lines of creaturely history; it is rather inseparably intertwined with the latter. In Barth’s words:

the *special* occurrence in Israel, in Jesus Christ and in His community is not merely embedded in this *general* occurrence, but so inextricably woven into it [*bis zur Ununterscheidbarkeit verwoben*] that everything that happens there *particularly* bears the character of this *general*, too; everything must be seen and understood also under the aspect of this general, as a part of the history of the creature.⁴⁴

If the two histories are ‘inextricably woven’ together, then we can no longer think of the general history as being cut off from the particular history, or of the particular history as merely added to the general history. At one point in *CD* III/3 it is even at least implied that the covenant and creation share one and the same history of theirs.⁴⁵

In summary, seen in the light of Barth’s doctrine of providence, covenant history and creaturely history are not two unrelated, parallel, or exclusive histories

⁴² III/3, 37; *KD* III/3, 42.

⁴³ III/3, 37; *KD* III/3, 43.

⁴⁴ III/3, 37; translation revised per *KD* III/3, 43.

⁴⁵ III/3, 38; *KD* III/3, 44: ‘the covenant of its external basis and creation of its internal are *connected* to each other also here in their history, and stand in a *positive* relationship to each other also in their history’.

standing '[side by side] and [then] continually contradict one another'.⁴⁶ On the contrary, in that the two presuppose and establish each other, the latter stands to the former in a relationship which is 'not merely ... factual but ... materially positive and inner'.⁴⁷

7B.3 Creaturely History Set under Limitations

Now we aim to demonstrate that the doctrine of providence also places necessary *limitations* to the concept of creaturely history. We argue that, for all its reality derived from its positive connection with covenant history, creaturely history is still kept in check by the God of providence who, not only the Lord of covenant history but also 'the Lord of this general history',⁴⁸ is 'the Lord of the whole'.⁴⁹

The limitations put to creaturely history by its Lord can be concluded in the statement that both the basis of its reality and that of its recognition lie in God and not in itself.

7B.3.1 The Ontic Basis [*Realgrund*] of Creaturely History

The reality of creaturely history is not self-evident; it derives from its co-operation with covenant history. It is real only insofar as it becomes real, as it is assigned and integrated into the co-operation with covenant history, in the divine providence:

The faithfulness of God is that He *assigns* and *subordinates* the creaturely occurrence under His lordship to the occurrence of the covenant, grace, and salvation, causing it to *serve* the latter, that He '*integrates*' it into the coming of His kingdom, in which the whole of the reality distinct from Himself has its meaning and historical

⁴⁶ III/3, 40; *KD* III/3, 46.

⁴⁷ III/3, 40.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 38. Cf. 196.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

substance, that He causes it to ‘*co-operate*’ precisely in this occurrence.⁵⁰

Moreover, the ‘integration’ and ‘co-operation’ at issue consist in the fact that creaturely history may, must and does indeed *serve* covenant history when and as it is *used* by God.⁵¹ Whilst Barth’s language of assigning, integration and co-operation highlights creaturely history’s close, positive relationship to covenant history, the language of service and utilisation makes clear that creaturely history’s reality is not self-evident but *dependent* on God’s making use of it, not absolute but *relative*. Again, the fact that creaturely history depends for its reality on God’s making use of it affirms God as the Lord of history.⁵²

7B.3.2 The Noetic Basis [*Erkenntnisgrund*] of Creaturely History

In addition to its ontic basis, creaturely history has another limitation put on its noetic

⁵⁰ Ibid.; translation revised per *KD* III/3, 47. Concerning this passage, two things are to be noted. First, from this point onward till the end of §48, whilst the concepts of assigning, ‘integration’ and ‘co-operation’ are all retained and rigorously employed, the language of subordination never appears again, leaving the impression that Barth prefers the concept of assigning or ordering [*zuordnen*] to that of subordination [*unterordnen*] to describe the relationship of creaturely history to covenant history. Second, as seen in the German original, Barth makes a clear contrast between the concept of assigning on the one hand and that of ‘integration’ and ‘co-operation’ on the other by adding quotation marks to the latter—and this remains the case in many of the subsequent passages, see III/3, 41, 44, 45, 51, 52; *KD* III/3, 47, 51, 52, 59, 60. The implication would be that his employment of these two concepts are cautious and qualified.

⁵¹ III/3, 43.

⁵² At this point it is important to notice that, on Barth’s account, God does rule over history as its Lord, but He does not do so in a deterministic sense. God is the divine Ruler and not some overruling ‘fate’ in that ‘His rule is *determined* and *limited*: self-determined and self-limited, but determined and limited none the less’ (II/2, 50; *KD* II/2, 53). Because the God who puts limitations to creaturely is also the self-limiting God, He as the sole Subject of covenant history ‘is undoubtedly *not alone* in this history, but has a partner in man, and to that extent in the cosmos’ (III/3, 45; *KD* III/3, 52). For this reason, His rule over history is confirmed not by ruling out but by including human beings who has ‘relative freedom and autonomy’ (ibid., 42) in their creaturely history: ‘Again there is no doubt that, in that covenant history takes place, the creature is present as subject of a history of its own [*eigen*]; not in vain, not as passive spectator, not as mere object, it is rather *present* as a *meaningful part*’ (III/3, 45; translation revised per *KD* III/3, 53). For this reason, too, there will be little question of the instrumentalisation of creaturely history in God’s making use of it. For comparison, one is referred to §20, Die Vorhersehung in *Unt2*, where Barth so emphatically claims God to be conclusively the only Subject of creaturely history, which is the object of the divine providence. For instance: ‘God is not here but there, that precisely as the God who is immanent in the world preserving everything He is the *Subject* over against the objectivity’ of the creaturely world’, *Unt2*, 273.

basis. For Barth, the foregoing accounts of the positive relationship between the two histories can only be knowledge of faith.⁵³ This means, firstly, that faith in providence is not blind faith but rather knowing faith⁵⁴ and, secondly, that knowledge of providence is different in kind, and does not derive, from knowledge of history. It is *knowledge* of faith, because it is faith 'objectively grounded' in revelation as 'an objective fact';⁵⁵ it is also knowledge of *faith*, because it belongs to the category of 'axiomatic knowledge' of its own kind, a kind which is not attained through the formation, or rather invention, of the human thinking subject.

Now the second point made above means two things for Barth. First, there is a sharp distinction between the faith-knowledge of providence and human conception of history. Second, human conception of history does not establish the faith-knowledge of providence; rather this faith-knowledge is based on and derives from the acknowledgement of revelation, election, creation and therefore providence. To be sure, Barth grants that human conceptions of history are 'necessary, right and good'.⁵⁶ But he still makes it clear that:

The belief in providence embraces these conceptions, but it also limits them. ... it is faith in God and His dominion and judgment to which all history, even [all intellectual history], even [all history] of human conceptions of human history, is wholly subject.⁵⁷

Thus, both 'the *reality* of history' and 'the *true* knowledge of this reality' rely totally on the God of providence.⁵⁸

⁵³ III/3, 15ff.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 23, 40.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 16, 40.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁵⁷ III/3, 21; *KD* III/3, 23.

⁵⁸ III/3, 22; *KD* III/3, 24.

In summary, we have demonstrated three things in this section. First, for Barth, election precedes creation, and creation precedes providence. With this doctrinal ordering, the three are in a continuity guaranteed by the one God. And this means that, for the sake of covenant history, which is rooted in election, creaturely history is commenced in creation and sustained by providence, thus standing in a positive relationship to God. Second, the positive relationship of creaturely history to God is in fact the positive relationship between it and covenant history. Special attention was given to the analogy of one line and many lines, employed to explain that the two histories are so positively and closely related that they are ‘inextricably woven’ together. Third, to this positive and materially inseparable relationship Barth adds necessary limitations: that both the ontic basis of history and the epistemological basis of providence in history depend completely upon the God who, according to His eternal election, sustains creaturely history in its reality and reveals the truth about it to us.

7C The Being of Humanity as History after Jesus as the Lord of Time

In this section the focus shifts from the world to human beings. It will be pointed out that, in Barth’s theological anthropology, the being of humanity, or of the human person, is construed as history after the human Jesus as the Lord of time.

7C.1 The Being of Humanity as History

Barth’s notion that ‘the being [*Sein*] of man is a *history*’⁵⁹ can be understood from three aspects. First, from a general-anthropological viewpoint, the designation of

⁵⁹ III/2, 157; *KD* III/2, 188.

the being of humanity as history signifies that it is not a 'state' [*Zustand*].⁶⁰ We recall that God's election, as history too, 'does not only stand but also *moves*'.⁶¹ But in the context of the historicity of the being of humanity, emphasis is laid not simply on its being in motion, but also on its confrontation with new *possibilities* from without:

History, therefore, does not occur when the being is involved in changes or different modes of behaviour intrinsic to itself, but when something takes place upon and to the being as it is. The history of a being [*Wesen*] begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor. The history of a being occurs when it is caught up in *this* movement, [*this*] change and [*this*] relation, when its circular movement [*in itself*] is broken from without by a movement *towards it* and the corresponding movement *from it*, when it is transcended from without so that it must and can transcend itself outwards.⁶²

In this sense, a being *is* only to the extent that it responds to new possibilities *happening* to it. And this can only happen in a history, with the being being a history.⁶³

Second, following this general possibility-responsive understanding, Barth furthers a Christian-theological account of the historicity of the human being. Just as the historicity of creation is founded on a covenantal basis, so the historicity of the

⁶⁰ III/2, 157; *KD* III/2, 188.

⁶¹ II/2, 184; *KD* II/2, 202f.

⁶² III/2, 158; *KD* III/2, 189.

⁶³ Cf. 'A being with a history *is* as this history occurs, and its nature is therefore located wholly within the history.' Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry Into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 33.

being of humanity is founded on a christological basis. This means that we know what it means to be human only by looking at the human Jesus; by doing so we know that we are human beings in that we are in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the being of humanity is history, not simply because it is temporal, but also because it essentially corresponds to the existence of the human Jesus. The historicity of the human Jesus is the prototype of the historicity of all human beings. His existence is history, because He is the Creator and creature in one, because in Him we find ‘the otherness and newness of the Creator in relation to the creature’:

This creature is what it is as creature in a dynamic movement of the Creator to itself and itself to the Creator. It [is, in that it resides] in this movement from another to itself and itself to this other—a movement which, since God the Creator is this Other, it is quite impossible to describe as a movement within itself.⁶⁴

In that the existence of the human Jesus is the continuing encounter between the Creator and creature, ‘Jesus is, as this history takes place’.⁶⁵ In this sense, He is ‘the fulfilment of [that] strict concept of history’,⁶⁶ i.e. history understood as encounters with and responses to changes. Also here, ‘if anywhere, the use of the term “primal history” [*Urgeschichte*] is perhaps appropriate’,⁶⁷ for our human history consists in His human history.

Finally, the christological understanding of the being of humanity as history is brought back to the doctrine of election as its ultimate foundation. The Creator God becomes one with the creature human Jesus in His history, because it is

⁶⁴ III/2, 159; *KD* III/2, 190.

⁶⁵ III/2, 160.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

determined from all eternity that there will be history, i.e. *the* history between God and humanity:

The existence of the man Jesus is this history. It is nothing more. It has nothing behind it but the *eternal will and counsel of God*. It has no other foundation. Thus, apart from the *eternal will and counsel of God*, Jesus exists only in this history, i.e., in this history of the covenant and salvation and revelation inaugurated by God in and with the act of creation.⁶⁸

In summary, just as the creation of the world is history, and has its internal basis in covenant history, so the being of humanity is history, and its historicity has its basis in the historicity of the existence of the human Jesus. In both instances, the category of history constitutes the reality of the world and of humanity, although it should be added that it is not as if history in itself and as such had the ability or possibility to constitute the creation of the world or humanity, but that God has determined from all eternity to establish the covenantal relationship with humanity in history.

7C.2 Human Jesus as the Lord of Time

If Barth's mature theology of *history* reaches a climax in his doctrines of creation and providence, his mature theology of *time* is found in §47.1, 'Jesus, the Lord of Time'.⁶⁹ With a strong sense of christological orientation of theological anthropology, there Barth focuses on the time of Jesus as the ground of all human time, and holds 1) that Jesus as a human has His own history and therefore time,⁷⁰ 2) that the human Jesus also has the Easter history as His time and is thus manifested to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 160. My emphasis.

⁶⁹ III/2, 437ff.; *KD* III/2, 524ff.

⁷⁰ III/2, 439-441.

be God,⁷¹ 3) that the Easter history is the revelation of the mystery of Jesus' life history,⁷² and 4) that, by virtue of the Easter history, the time of the human Jesus is stripped off its limitedness, thereby acquiring new significance in all of its three temporal dimensions.⁷³

Although the foregoing points do not say much that is decisively new, significant contrasts are still observed. Whilst in §14 the time of Jesus Christ is posited as the centre of *convergence* to which the OT prophetic time of expectation looks forward and the NT apostolic time of recollection looks backward, in §47.1 we find that this time of His is made the point of *divergence* from which alone one can properly look backward and forward to understand the past and the future. Whilst in §31.3 it is the *eternity of God* that is defined as the *All-embracing* that is before time, above but with time, as well as after time, in §47.1 it is the *time of the human Jesus*, as the eternal time of God, that is portrayed as the *All-permeating* that is the present, past and future of all times.

With these continuities and developments, several important observations need to be made. First, the existence of the human Jesus in history is treated in a more explicitly positive tone. Perhaps due to worries over the Jesus-cult, the 'Life of Jesus Movement', and the quest for the historical Jesus, it was observed that Barth broadly refrained from speaking of the life of Jesus in a positive tone in his teaching on the incarnation in the doctrine of revelation.⁷⁴ Here in the context of the theological anthropology, however, an emphasis is placed on the historical life span

⁷¹ Ibid., 441f.

⁷² Ibid., 454f.

⁷³ Ibid., 464f.

⁷⁴ For instance I/2, 64, 110f., 136f. For Barth, because Jesus Christ is the human being whom *God* became, His *human* life as accessible to historical research does not itself constitute the *divine* revelation, nor does it lead automatically to the recognition of it.

of the human Jesus as a real event with real beginning, duration and end, together with ‘the temporal limitations to which Jesus was subject’.⁷⁵ The Easter history is the necessary revelation of Jesus’ earthly life in history,⁷⁶ but in this light:

It is in this *history* [of the man Jesus]—the history [from] which [His temporality] is inseparable ...—that the man Jesus [is] and is the eternal salvation of all men in their different times.⁷⁷

The human Jesus *is* only as His human history takes place, that is, the whole of His historical life span.

Second, on a more general level, history is given precedence over time; or rather, the particular concept of history precedes the general concept of time. Time as the form of all creaturely existence is not to be taken as an independent entity; ‘there is no such thing as absolute time ... [t]here is no time in itself, rivalling God and imposing conditions on Him.’⁷⁸ Rather, time is real only to the extent that God once took it to Himself, and this is made manifest first in creation history and ultimately in covenant history, which has Jesus as its centre. In that creation history began as the ‘primal- and pre- history of all history’,⁷⁹ time also began. Even Jesus’ temporality derives from His history.

Third, history takes precedence over time, precisely because it is Jesus Christ Himself, and thus covenant history, who is the object of God’s eternal election.

⁷⁵ III/2, 463f., and 441.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 454f.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 441; *KD* III/2, 528. Note that the phrase ‘the history which is inseparable from his temporality’ in the English translation suggests Jesus’ historicity rests on his temporality. What Barth writes indicates the opposite, that Jesus’ temporality rests on his historicity: ‘die Geschichte, von der sich seine Zeitlichkeit nicht trennen läßt’.

⁷⁸ III/2, 456.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 438; translation revised per *KD* III/2, 525: ‘mit dem Anheben dieser Ur- und Vorgeschichte aller Geschichte auch die Zeit’.

This is clearly seen when Barth traces the being [*Sein*] of the human Jesus in time from the Easter-time backward through His lifetime, via the Old Testament time of prefiguration and expectation, to the beginning of time in creation history;⁸⁰ all these times are properly His time because Jesus was. But the ultimate ground of all this is to be found further back in the election of grace:

if creation and *covenant* are so integral to one another ..., if finally—and this is the point on which everything else depends—the One who was to come as the appearing reality of the *covenant* has really come in the man Jesus, is it speculation to say that even the time of creation was His time? To the extent that it was the time when the Creator began to execute His *will*, it too was His time; the time when He was the primary, proper object of this divine *will*, foreseen and *foreordained* in [*bei*] the creation of all things.⁸¹

On this account, then, the oneness [*Einmaligkeit*] and the eternity of the existence of the human Jesus in time are not mutually excluded, because its oneness is pre-determined from all eternity:

At this last and highest stage, the *pre-existence* of the man Jesus coincides with His eternal *predestination* and election, which includes the election of Israel, of the Church, and of every individual member of His body.⁸²

7D Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have examined Barth's doctrine of creation and demonstrated three things: 1) that history begins with the Creator God's act of creation, in order

⁸⁰ III/2, 474ff., especially 477 (*KD* III/2, 572): 'Hence for the apostolic community the yesterday of Jesus extends beyond the prior yesterday of the Old Testament to the primal history and primal time which are beyond [all *Historie*], not only in practice, but in principle; to the history and time when being, history and time began as such.'

⁸¹ III/2, 477; translation slightly revised *KD* III/2, 572f.

⁸² III/2, 484f.; *KD* III/2, 582.

that the particular history of the covenant as the actualisation the eternal election of grace may begin (as in Barth's teaching on creation); 2) that history proceeds under the Lord God's preserving, accompanying and ruling providence, and is thereby set in a positive relation to and within the framework of covenant history (as in his teaching on providence); and 3) that a human being exists only in that his or her history takes place, that is, history strictly understood as a series of encounters with new factors which are different than the being itself; for a human being is only in that the human Jesus is—in that the whole life span of His history takes place as the encounter between God and humanity (as in his theological anthropology).

Chapter Eight

Reconciling God ‘Historicised’ and ‘Ontologising’ History: *Church Dogmatics IV (1953-)*

Introduction

This thesis now enters Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation *CD IV/1*. This volume has decisive bearings on our purposes for two reasons. First, regarding its external intention, *CD IV/1* is written as Barth’s conscious debate with Rudolf Bultmann, whose ‘subject [*Sache*] is always present’ in the writing of this volume.¹ Determined not to pay allegiance to ‘any philosophy, epistemology, or methodology’,² Barth recognised in Bultmann’s New Testament hermeneutics Martin Heidegger’s existentialism as its philosophical presupposition.³ In Barth’s view, a philosophical consequence of Bultmann’s existentialist hermeneutics is the removal of the subjective significance (meaning) from its objective basis (text); applied to the field of NT exegesis, existentialist principles has as its outcome that Christian kerygma can be abstracted from Christ as its actual content.⁴ For Barth, however, just as significance is inseparable and derivative from what is significant,⁵ kerygma,

¹ ‘Forward’ to *IV/1*; ‘Vorwort’ to *KD IV/1*. See also Barth, *How I Changed My Mind*, 68f; Busch, *Karl Barth*, 386f.; John B. Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 91f.

² Barth to Bultmann, Basel, 24 Dec 1952, Barth, *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966*, 105.

³ Karl Barth, ‘Rudolf Bultmann—An Attempt to Understand Him’, *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. by Hans-Werner Bartsch, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller, Vols. I and II combined (London: SPCK, 1972), Vol. II, 114f.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵ Barth insists that the New Testament kerygma can only have significance [*Bedeutsamkeit*] when it is based upon something significant [*Bedeutsame*]. *IV/1*, 223; *KD IV/1*, 245.

too, is inseparable and derivative from Christ;⁶ He is the ‘objective subject’⁷ who can exist in Christian preaching and individual faith because He existed antecedently in the past history with its objective existence.⁸ Not to cast doubt upon the importance of subjective faith but to accord it a proper ground so as to ensure that it does not become its own content,⁹ Christ must be posited prior to His benefit to us, or Christology prior to soteriology.¹⁰ For this reason, the historicity of the Christ event cannot be taken to mean the Christian transition from the old to the new made possible by the kerygma, as proposed by Bultmann. Instead, as Barth argues in *CD IV*, it should firstly mean the concrete, objective historicity of Jesus Christ in His historical existence.

On a more internal-material level, the whole of *CD IV*, as a full-scale outworking of the insight achieved in the doctrine of election, is a thoroughgoing reworking of Christology in the form of the doctrine of reconciliation.¹¹ From the two doctrines highlighted in *CD IV* our present research will receive great light. To begin with, *reconciliation* means for Barth the restoration of a reality in which God is with us, and that reality is a common history that God wills to share with humanity. On this account, the reconciliation of humanity to God cannot be viewed as a fixed status or two separated histories, but as a common history between the two: ‘He does

⁶ Barth, ‘Rudolf Bultmann—An Attempt to Understand Him’, 96.

⁷ Charlotte von Kirschbaum to W. Simpfendörfer, 16 May 1952, cited in Busch, *Karl Barth*, 389n243.

⁸ Cf. Barth, ‘Rudolf Bultmann—An Attempt to Understand Him’, *Kerygma and Myth*, 94.

⁹ Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 92.

¹⁰ Or, as Pannenberg asserts rather firmly, ‘Jesus Christ is the criterion in defining our understanding of salvation precisely in the sense of the subordinating of soteriology to christology’, Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, 398n1. See also Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968), 47f.

¹¹ For a detailed analysis of the contrast between Barth’s early and later Christology, see McCormack, ‘Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 201-233.

not allow His history to be His and ours ours, but causes them to take place as a common history.’¹² To the extent that it is a history that God shares with *humanity*, this common history does take place within the general history of humanity. Insofar as it is a history that *God* shares with us, this common history does not come from some possibility or necessity immanent in human history as such.¹³ It rather arises from without as ‘an invasion into our own history’¹⁴ so as to turn the general history of the world into ‘a qualified history peculiar to the humankind’ [*eine qualifizierte, seine eigentümliche Geschichte*].¹⁵ It is, then, in virtue of this common history between God and humanity that ‘the general history which is common to God and man, to God and all creation, becomes at its very heart and end [the] redemptive history.’¹⁶

Moreover, Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation, which has the covenant as its presupposition,¹⁷ consists materially of a comprehensive *Christology*, and must be understood strictly in the light of this Christology.¹⁸ On this view, the common history between God and humanity—the history of ‘God with us’ and therefore the salvation history for us—that reconciliation is has Jesus Christ as its beginning,

¹² IV/1, 7; *KD* IV/1, 5. On this view, Adam Neder remarks that by ‘including humanity in the history of the covenant’ God shares His being with humanity. Neder, *Participation in Christ*, 44.

¹³ IV/1, 49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/1, 5. Cf. ‘It is not an immanent, this-worldly revelation, but comes from outside man and the cosmos. It is a transcendent revelation’, in Barth, ‘The Christian Understanding of Revelation’, *Against the Stream*, 208.

¹⁵ IV/1, 8; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/1, 6.

¹⁶ IV/1, 8; *KD* IV/1, 7.

¹⁷ Cf. ‘The Covenant as the Presupposition of Reconciliation’, §57.2, IV/1, 22ff. Barth once planned to entitle this volume the doctrine of the covenant, see Busch, *Karl Barth*, 377.

¹⁸ On Christology replacing the doctrine of revelation to be posited as the epistemological ground of theology in Barth’s mature thinking, see McCormack, ‘God Is His Decision’, *Theology as Conversation*, 48-66, especially 65: ‘Christology is the epistemological ground of election and election is the ontological ground of Christology. That is the key to understanding the relation of the early volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* to the later.’

centre and aim, because it is He who inaugurates, implements and fulfils it. In answering the question concerning who Jesus Christ is, as we shall see shortly, Barth sets forth a actualistic reinterpretation of the classical doctrines of Christ's one person, two 'natures' and two 'states', integrating them into the one history of Jesus Christ. In this Christology, Barth sets aside what he views as metaphysical ideas, and places the history of Jesus Christ to the foreground to be the determining factor in its relationship to the former.

The preceding paragraphs indicate that the category of history is no longer a problem to be accounted for but rather the hermeneutical key—it is employed in *CD* IV as an integral part in Barth's christocentric doctrine of reconciliation in such a way that, on the one hand, a genuine relationship of God to humanity is allowed and, on the other, the objectivity and concreteness of Jesus Christ is secured. On this basis, this chapter goes on to argue that 1) in that the being, person and nature of Jesus Christ consist solely in His work, Jesus Christ is who He is in His history; 2) in that the two states of Jesus Christ consists in two movements or directions in His one history, His humiliation means the humiliation of God Himself and, to that extent, also the 'historicisation' of the being of God, and 3) His exaltation means the exaltation of humanity and, to that extent, also the 'ontologisation' of human history. Finally by way of an excursus, a proposition will be made regarding the relationship between election and the Trinity.

8A The Being of Jesus Christ as His History

Hans Küng once remarks on Barth's 'historical scepticism' that:

Karl Barth ..., as a result of the conclusions of the early liberal quest for the historical Jesus, took up an attitude of historical skepticism ...

and linked this up with Kierkegaard's conception of faith, defending a faith that is historically uncertain (or dogmatically insured against history) as true faith.¹⁹

For Küng, the Christian faith is historical because it has no other ground than the historical human Jesus Christ:

The Christ of the Christians is quite a concrete, human, historical person: the Christ of the Christians is no other than *Jesus of Nazareth*. And in this sense Christianity is essentially based on history, Christian faith is essentially historical faith.²⁰

Based on the findings of this thesis, however, it is to be maintained that Küng's first comment is valid only if it concerns the Barth of the *Römerbrief* period. As for the faith-history relation presented in the second comment—and this is what we seek to demonstrate in this section—Barth's position in his doctrine of reconciliation is more radical and concrete than Küng's: more radical, because for Barth the key is not only that Christ is Jesus but also that Jesus Christ is who He is in His history; more concrete, because Christianity is for him rooted in 'history' only insofar as it is rooted in 'a' history, i.e. 'the' history in which Jesus Christ is.

8A.1 Subject-Predicate Relationship Reconsidered

The Christology in *CD IV* presents a Jesus Christ who is no longer deemed as a predicate only passively and accidentally assumed by the divine Word; He is rather the proper Subject of the event of incarnation. This indicates a refinement of the subject-predicate relation of revelation to history advocated in *CD I/2* according to Barth's actualistic ontology.

¹⁹ Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, trans. by Edward Quinn (London: Collins, 1977), 154.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 146.

This refinement can be explained first from the viewpoint of the essentialist ontology. Whilst in Barth's Christology prior to *CD II/2* it is the predicate (history) that is not to be abstracted from the *Subject* (the Word or revelation), in his mature Christology it is the Subject (the Word or revelation as Jesus Christ) that is not to be abstracted from its predicate (history). This is not a reversal of the subject-predicate relationship at issue, because both elements remain in their respective places. The Word or revelation, as Jesus Christ, still remains the sole Subject of His relationship to history, but just as the predicate is not without its Subject, the Subject, too, is not and never without His predicate.²¹ From the perspective of an essentialist ontology, what has taken place is a significant shift in tone: a shift from the predicate in need of its *Subject* to be concrete, to the Subject self-determining and therefore determined to be concretely with His *predicate*.

But if one views the matter from the viewpoint of Barth's actualistic ontology, it becomes clear that that 'shift in tone' is in truth a new, actualistic understanding of the 'subject'. The 'subject' to which Barth assigns 'an absolutely controlling position and function'²² regarding *every* other aspect of our understanding of God and human, is now identified as nothing other than Jesus Christ's history. This history is the subject away from which the humanity of Jesus Christ as such would become an 'empty predicate'.²³ This history is the subject of which even the Word

²¹ Cf. III/2, 56; *KD III/2*, 65 where Barth maintains that Jesus Christ 'is wholly and utterly who and what He is in the continuity of this *history*'.

²² IV/2, 19.

²³ Barth states that without its subject, in itself and as such the humanity of Jesus Christ is a 'predicate suspended in empty space', an 'empty predicate' (*ibid.*, 102). 'The decisive thing', i.e. the subject, is to be sought, first of all, not horizontally but vertically. However, it is to be sought vertically not in a still status but a dynamic movement, not, moreover, in a one-way imposition but a two-way, reciprocal participation—i.e. in the history in which Jesus Christ is true God and true human being (*ibid.*, 102f.).

or revelation, the dominating notion in *CD I/2*, is a predicate.²⁴ Either in that it accentuates the need for the Subject to adhere to its predicates in its actual existence (essentialistically viewed), or in that it empties the concept of ‘subject’ of abstractly formed ideas and refills it with the concrete history of Jesus Christ (actualistically viewed), Barth’s mature Christology in *CD IV* is rightly recognised to be characterised by an actualistic ontology.

8A.2 Unity of Being and Act: One History in its Two Movements

On the basis of his ‘actualised’ Christology, Barth argues that the being of Jesus Christ is nothing more or less than His history. This proposition can and must be sharpened into the further statement that the being of Jesus Christ is the one history of His earthly acts, in terms of its two-directional movement. Before we unfold this claim shortly, two decisive quotes in this connection merit immediate mention:

It is in the particular fact and the particular way that Jesus Christ is very God, very man, and very God-man that He *works*, and He *works* in the fact and only in the fact that He *is* this One and not another. His being as this One is His *history*, and His history is this His *being*. This is the truth which must light up the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology.²⁵

And also:

We hasten to explain that the being of Jesus Christ, the unity of being of the living God and this living man, takes place in the *event* of the concrete existence [of God and the concrete existence] of this man.

²⁴ For Barth’s idea that Jesus Christ’s history is the content of the *Word* of God, see IV/1, 48: ‘We only need to hear the word of His historical existence and we shall hear the Word of God’. In IV/3 Barth goes on to say that *revelation* is the predicate of reconciliation, i.e. a predicate which ‘has no independent being [*Wesen*]’ over against its subject. (IV/3, 9; *KD IV/3*, 7) On this view, revelation is the manifestation of nothing other than reconciliation, and reconciliation is nothing other than what is accomplished in the history of Jesus Christ.

²⁵ IV/1, 128; *KD IV/1*, 140.

It is a *being*, but a being in a *history*. The gracious *God* is in this history, [and] so is [the] reconciled *man*, [and] so are both in their *unity*. And what takes place in this history, and therefore in the being of Jesus Christ as such, is atonement. Jesus Christ is not what He is—very God, very man, very God-man—in order [then] as such to mean and do and accomplish something else which is atonement. But His being as God and man and God-man consists in the completed act of the reconciliation of man with God.²⁶

In the light of these quotes, our statement is broken down into three parts. First, in that we are presented with a radical integration of Christ's being and act, His person and work, into one history, the history of Jesus Christ functions as the embracing unity that resolves the seemingly irreconcilable being-act or person-work antithesis. Negatively stated, Jesus Christ never is without also *working*, and He never works as someone who He Himself *is* not. Positively stated, who Jesus is consists always in the work that He does, and He does the work that He does always as the One who He is. Insofar as Jesus Christ is so and does so always in His history, 'His being as this One is His *history*, and His history is this His *being*',²⁷ 'this history in its *unity* and [*entirety*]',²⁸ Leaving '*no place* for anything *static* at the broad centre of the traditional doctrine of the person of Christ ... or in the traditional doctrine of the two states',²⁹ then, the history of Jesus Christ claims to be the sole basis on which His

²⁶ IV/1, 126f.; *KD* IV/1, 138f.

²⁷ IV/1, 128; *KD* IV/1, 140. In McCormack's formulation: 'For Barth, Jesus Christ *is* his history. He *is* the history set in motion by an eternal act of self-determination; hence, the history that he is finds its root in election. This is what he is "essentially". Jesus Christ is what he is in his eternal act of self-determination and in its outworking in time.' McCormack, 'The Actuality of God', *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, 222.

²⁸ IV/1, 136; *KD* IV/1, 149. It is worth noting at this point that in II/1, having just asserted that 'God is who He is in the act of revelation', Barth goes on to say that 'God is who He is in His works. He is the same even in Himself, even before and after and over His works, and without them. ... He is not, therefore, who He is *only* in His works.' II/1, 257, 260. This is a clear example of what McCormack terms Barth's 'earlier "metaphysical moments" which is greatly at odds with Barth's later, actualistic ontology. McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Historicized Christology', *Orthodox and Modern*, 217n45. Also McCormack, 'The Actuality of God', *Engaging the Doctrine of God*, 213.

²⁹ IV/1, 106; *KD* IV/1, 117.

being and act are united and can ever be talked about.

Second, concerning the *act* or *work* of Jesus Christ, it is clear from the first quote that Barth not only equates Jesus Christ's being with His history, but also makes this identification the decisive light to 'the doctrine of reconciliation as Christology'. The act in which the being of Jesus Christ consists, then, is nothing other than the work of reconciliation, i.e. *the* work for which Jesus Christ is elected from all eternity, and which He accomplishes and reveals in history. On this account, not only the work of God is given the concrete form of history, but also the Subject of that work receives greater concreteness and specificity. Barth's call for a concrete understanding of the Subject from the viewpoint of the predicate derives not from an abstract metaphysical commitment but from the concrete work of reconciliation, which Jesus Christ accomplishes in history. Transcending his earlier, relatively abstract insistence on the divine Word as the Subject, Barth is now advancing the thesis that '[t]he Subject Jesus Christ is this history.'³⁰ The history of Jesus Christ, then, is made the sole *and* supremely concrete subject by which reconciliation as *the* work of God is done.

Third, that the *being* of Jesus Christ, which is inseparable from reconciliation as the act of God, consists in His history means that this history, albeit unifying His being and act, is not unitary but has two forms. For the One who completes the work of reconciliation is neither God in Himself nor the human as such, but the God-human; and this God-human exists not in a uniform history but in the history of His two states. Differently put, just as the one person of Jesus Christ has true divinity and true humanity as His two natures, so His one history has what is

³⁰ IV/1, 107; *KD* IV/1, 118. Also IV/3, 179; *KD* IV/3 205: 'To say "*Jesus*" is necessarily to say "*history*", His history, the history in which He is what He is and does what He does.'

traditionally called the condescension and the exaltation as its two forms [*Gestalten*], two directions, or two lines of movements,³¹ which as Barth views them take place not successively but simultaneously in this one history.³² In this connection, if the category of ‘nature’ is replaced by that of ‘history’,³³ then the category of ‘states’, too, is integrated in that of history and expressed in concrete terms.

The above analysis denotes that the one history and being of Jesus Christ is the one history (which unites being and action, deity and humanity) in its two forms of humiliation and of exaltation. It also spells out the axiomatic claim that Barth makes in the opening paragraph of §59 that ‘the atonement is history’: it is not supra-historical or ahistorical truth but truth ‘coming to pass in a history and becoming manifest in this history’,³⁴ because it is in the history of Jesus Christ, in which He the reconciling God condescends and we human beings are exalted and reconciled in Him, that reconciliation is accomplished. By way of this ‘*right and necessary*’ move of bringing together the doctrines of the two natures and the two states into the one history of Jesus Christ,³⁵ Barth redefines the meanings of true deity, true humanity, humiliation and exaltation. This has great ontological and epistemological significance for our present concerns,³⁶ for from the being-as-history

³¹ See for instance, ‘The concrete views of God and man ... cannot be mixed but can only be seen together as the forms [*Gestalten*] of a history: the reconciling God and the man reconciled by Him’, IV/1, 136; *KD* IV/1, 149.

³² IV/1, 132; *KD* IV/1, 145.

³³ McCormack, ‘Karl Barth’s Historicized Christology’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 222. As Barth explains, the notion of ‘nature’ presupposes ‘a generally known or knowable essence of deity, and ... a [generally] known or knowable essence of man’, thus easily leading to ‘a general concept of deity’ and ‘a general anthropology’. Christian theology and theological anthropology, by contrast, ‘can be learned only with and from [*bei und von*] Him’, i.e. with and from Jesus Christ as He is and acts in His history. IV/2, 26; *KD* IV/2, 27.

³⁴ IV/1, 157; translation revised per *KD* IV/1, 171.

³⁵ IV/1, 132ff.; *KD* IV/1, 145ff.

³⁶ As regards Barth’s statement that ‘the atonement is history’ being a theological, ontological and epistemological claim, see Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation*, 84f.

of Jesus Christ one can 1) look ‘upward’ and see the true deity, and 2) look ‘downward’ and see the true humanity; both of these ‘natures’ are, according to Barth, not only revealed but also constituted in the being-as-history of Jesus Christ. Two statements can then be formulated. First, looking ‘upward’, one sees the *humiliation* of the true God, and understands that in the ‘from above downwards’ movement in the one history of Jesus Christ, the Subject of Jesus Christ’s condescending and of His suffering in it is God Himself.³⁷ In this sense, the divine being is ‘historicised’ or actualised in such a way that it can no longer be regarded as a static being in and for itself alone but rather, in the most proper sense, as a historical being-in-act for us. Second, looking ‘downward’, one sees the *exaltation* of the true human being, and understands that in the ‘from below upwards’ movement in the one history of Jesus Christ, the One who ascended and participates in the divine being is the true human being Jesus Christ.³⁸ In that the human history that Jesus is is taken up to have a part in the divine being itself, this human history is ‘ontologised’ or accredited with an ontic status in the sense that it can no longer be regarded as accidental (secondary in the divine will) or improper (unsuitable for the divine being) but rather, in the most proper sense, as legitimate reality included in the divine being. These will be the two lines along which the following sections unfold.

³⁷ In what way the suffering human Jesus is identified with the second person of the Trinity, and how well this identification upholds both differentiation and unity in God’s triune life, although important, cannot be discussed here. For more detail see McCormack, ‘Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism’, especially 247f.

³⁸ The ‘participation’ at issue here is *in concreto* primarily Jesus Christ’s elevation back to God, secondarily our inclusion in His elevation, and therefore in no way some deification, either of the human Jesus nor of us, *in abstracto*. For detail see section 8C.2.2.

8B 'Historicisation' of the Divine Being in the Being of Jesus Christ

In this section we argue that God's being is 'historicised' in the being of Jesus Christ, which is in His self-humiliation in history. Two steps will be taken: first, Barth identifies the Word with Jesus Christ; and then he identifies Jesus Christ as God in His second mode of being. At the end of this section we will attempt to formulate the relationship between God's history in Himself and Jesus Christ's history in the world according to our proposal of the 'historicisation' of God's being.

8B.1 The Word as Jesus Christ

Ever since his theological breakthrough in 1915/16, one central concern of Barth's theology has revolved the question of the impossible obligation for incapable human beings to speak God's Word.³⁹ It is fair and correct to state that it is on the fact of *Deus dixit*,⁴⁰ on the Word of God as 'the criterion of dogmatics',⁴¹ that Barth's theology as a whole is established. In his detailed elaboration of the threefold form of the Word of God, Jesus Christ as the revealed Word of God in history is indeed 'held up on high' and made the governing factor of the other two forms (written, and preached) of the Word.⁴² But at some crucial points in his earlier work an impression was left that the Word reserves a formal priority over its incarnation as Jesus Christ.⁴³

³⁹ See for instance Barth, 'The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry' (1922) in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, 183-217.

⁴⁰ *GD*, 45ff.

⁴¹ *I/1*, 45.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 111f., especially 117.

⁴³ For instance, 'True enough, He is the incarnate Word, i.e., the Word not without flesh, but the Word in the flesh and through the flesh—but nevertheless the Word and not the flesh. The Word is what He is even *before* and *apart from* His being flesh.' *I/2*, 136, my emphasis.

It is not until Barth's christological revision made in *CD II/2* that a conspicuous turning point is made: that it is the eternal Word of God that is the provisional 'stopgap' or 'place-holder' [*Platzhalter*] for Jesus Christ, who was to become incarnate in history as the definitive fulfilment of that place, and not the opposite.⁴⁴ This christocentric particularism and realism, to use Joseph Mangina's term,⁴⁵ has since then led Barth to the conviction that 'the whole conception of the Logos *asarkos*, the "second person" of the Trinity as such, is an abstraction.'⁴⁶

Now, especially in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation, 'we must not refer to the second "person" of the Trinity as such, to the eternal Son or the eternal Word of God *in abstracto*'; instead, '[a]ccording to the free and gracious will of God the eternal Son of God is Jesus Christ as He lived and died and rose again in time, and none other.'⁴⁷ In that God has indeed sent His Son to the world for the sake of our reconciliation with Him, the largely formal-logical assumptions of the pre-existence of an indeterminate Logos *asarkos*,⁴⁸ of a God not yet revealed to us,⁴⁹ and therefore of a God who in Himself and as such is not yet for us, not yet God the Reconciler, can and must be set aside.⁵⁰ If in 'His action as the Reconciler of the

⁴⁴ *II/2*, 96f.; *KD II/2*, 103f. See also Jüngel, 'The Royal Man: A Christological Reflection on Human Dignity in Barth's Theology', Jüngel, *Karl Barth*, 127-138 (130); McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Historicised Christology', 221n49.

⁴⁵ Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 116.

⁴⁶ *III/1*, 54.

⁴⁷ *IV/1*, 52.

⁴⁸ Barth could in his earlier Christology certainly sympathise with the Reformed concern to affirm the reality of the Logos *asarkos*: 'They did not want the reality of the Logos *asarkos* abolished or suppressed in the reality of the Logos *ensarkos*. On the contrary, they wished the Logos *asarkos* to be regarded equally seriously as the *terminus a quo*, as the Logos *ensarkos* was regarded as the *terminus ad quem* of the incarnation.' *I/2*, 169.

⁴⁹ Barth, too, conceives in his doctrine of the Trinity of God the Father, the Subject of revelation, as 'the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to men', *I/1*, 320.

⁵⁰ Cf. Barth's slightly less sympathetic remark on the *Extra Calvinisticum* that 'right up to our own day it has led to fatal speculation about the being and work of the Logos *arsarkos*, or a God whom we think we can know elsewhere, and whose divine being we can define from elsewhere than in and from the contemplation of His presence and activity as the Word made flesh', *IV/1*, 181. But it is crucial

world' God does not contradict but precisely confirms Himself,⁵¹ and if '[t]here is no moment in which Jesus Christ does not stand before *God*' as the Reconciler between God and humanity,⁵² then it is most proper for God to always be the Reconciler. And once it is established that God is always the reconciling God, it then follows that the Word of God is always the reconciling Word. For this reason, to hear the Word of God Himself, 'We only need to hear the word of His historical existence'.⁵³ Moreover, that the Word is always reconciling can only mean that the eternal Word of God always has Jesus as its determined form and concrete content, i.e. the human Jesus, whose 'history ... is the event of atonement'.⁵⁴ That is why Barth could later, in his simple but pregnant introduction to 'evangelical theology', conclude this radical christocentric identification of the Word of God with the Word of the history of Jesus Christ by saying:

The Word of God, therefore, is not the appearance of an *idea* [*Idee*] of such a covenant and communion. It is the Logos of this *history*, [and thus] the Logos, or Word, of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who, as such, is the Father of Jesus Christ. This Word, the Word of this history, is what evangelical theology must always hear, understand, and speak of anew.⁵⁵

to recognise that, even in his mature Christology, Barth never denies the existence of Logos *asarkos* if the notion is taken to mean God's aseity. Rather, he rejects it as 'fatal speculation' only insofar as it is understood as a Logos *asarkos* which is not yet the Logos *incarnandus*, a notion which in his view posits the existence of an indeterminate Logos. In McCormack's words, 'the Logos is *incarnandus* in and for himself, in eternity', McCormack, 'Grace and Being', *Orthodox and Modern*, 186.

⁵¹ IV/1, 194.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 315, emphasis mine. Cf. *ibid.*: 'The moment of this particular "contingent fact of history" was the moment of all moments.'

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁵ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. by Grover Foley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1963), 20f.; translation slightly revised per Karl Barth, *Einführung in die Evangelische Theologie* (Zürich: EVZ, 1962), 28f.

8B.2 Jesus Christ as God

Identifying the Word with Jesus Christ is the first step of Barth's 'historicisation' of the divine being in the doctrine of reconciliation. The next step is to identify the God-human Jesus Christ as God in His second mode of being.⁵⁶

At first sight this move seems insignificant and even too trivial to be mentioned. But once we take into account the general motif throughout *CD IV* that Jesus Christ is who He is in His history, and the particular proposition made in *CD IV/1* that in His history of humiliation Jesus Christ is the Lord as Servant, a corollary of this move immediately becomes clear: that the humiliation of Jesus Christ in His historical life is essentially the humiliation of God Himself. This can be explicated in the two following lines.

The first concerns suffering: in the history of the humiliation of Jesus Christ, in that Jesus Christ really suffers, God too really suffers. In Barth's view, although Jesus Christ is and never ceases to be the majestic Lord God, suffering and humility are not something unfitting to Him. Or rather, it is precisely because Jesus Christ is and never ceases to be the majestic Lord God that suffering and humility are most fitting to Him, for it is precisely in accordance to His own sovereign will and divine nature that He suffers as the Lord.⁵⁷ Furthermore, if in His deity Jesus Christ is capable of suffering and does actually suffers, and most properly so, then God Himself, too, in His second mode of being is capable of suffering and does actually

⁵⁶ With our statement thus formulated, we differ ourselves from 'Hegel's philosophical theology (i.e., the direct identification of the second person of the Trinity with a human being'. Cf. McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Christology', 245.

⁵⁷ *IV/1*, 160ff., especially 165: 'the *whole* history of the man Jesus [is] a history of suffering' (translation revised per *KD IV/1*, 181) and 168: 'the history of redemption [is] the history of the passion'.

suffers, and most properly so.⁵⁸ The suffering that Jesus Christ underwent in the history of His humiliation is nothing new to God; it is proper to Him in His Godhead.

The second concerns the actuality of God's becoming human-historical: in the history of the humiliation of Jesus Christ, in that God the Son really became human, God Himself too really became human.⁵⁹ This does not have so much to do with the historical reality or actuality of God's becoming human. It is beyond dispute that Barth unequivocally affirms God's becoming human as a historical reality.⁶⁰ But given our present concern, i.e. the 'historicisation' of the divine being in Jesus Christ, the question is more about the extent to which God in His Godhead is involved in this historical reality. And this question relies on the extent to which God was in Christ. In other words, the extent to which God was in Christ will decide that to which God allows Himself to be involved in the historical reality that the incarnation is. Now for Barth, it is clear that God has to be construed as '*truly and altogether* in Christ' in order for reconciliation to be effective.⁶¹ That 'God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself'—the most 'exalted' and 'profound' word that dogmatics has—,⁶² means that 'it is God Himself who intervened to act and work and reveal',⁶³ that the incarnation, 'far from being against Himself, or at disunity with Himself', '*corresponds* to His divine nature',⁶⁴ and that 'all that God is ... is characterised by the fact that He is everything divine, not for Himself only,

⁵⁸ Ibid., 192f. See also IV/2, 357 for Barth's remark on the mystery of the 'fatherly fellow-suffering of God' that God the Father does suffer in the suffering of His Son.

⁵⁹ IV/1, 179f.

⁶⁰ E.g. Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 69.

⁶¹ IV/1, 183, emphasis mine. Cf. 193: 'The One who reconciles the world with God is *necessarily* the one God Himself in His true Godhead', emphasis mine.

⁶² II/2, 88.

⁶³ IV/1, 74.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 186, 187; *KD* IV/1, 204.

but also, in His Son, for the sake of man and for him.’⁶⁵ Just as it is only in His complete humiliation that Christ is completely the true Christ who is for all,⁶⁶ so God, too, is nowhere truer God than in the humiliation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. From this arises the conclusion that, in totally becoming human condescendingly, God Himself is totally involved in the historical reality that Jesus Christ in His incarnation is.⁶⁷

8B.3 The Incarnation History and the Inner-Triune History

That God really suffers in Jesus Christ, and that He becomes and is totally human in Jesus Christ, presuppose that God is entirely involved in the history that Jesus Christ is. To this extent, we argue, the divine being is ‘historicised’ in the being of Jesus Christ.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ IV/2, 86.

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. by Thomas A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956), 20.

⁶⁷ In Barth’s words, ‘the existence of the man Jesus (as the beginning of this history, which includes already the fulness of the whole) coincides with the [existence] of *God Himself*’, IV/2, 336; *KD* IV/2, 375.

⁶⁸ It seems proper here to make a few points concerning the debate over Barth’s self-declared fondness for ‘a bit of “Hegeling”’ (Busch, *Karl Barth*, 387) in his later theology. There was indeed a certain kind of ‘historicisation’ of God’s being starting in Barth’s doctrine of election and taking full shape in his doctrine of reconciliation. And Barth’s version of ‘historicisation’ seems to bear some formal similarities to Hegel’s. For example, Adam Eitel examines the roles which resurrection plays in the theologies of Hegel and of Barth and draws the conclusion that ‘the similitude of Barth’s view and Hegel’s is not so much in Barth’s divinization of history but rather in his historicization of the divine’ (Adam Eitel, ‘The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Karl Barth and the Historicization of God’s Being’, *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 10 [2008], 36-53 [53]). But ‘historicisation’ for Barth differs materially from that for Hegel at more than a few crucial points. First, whilst Hegel brings into God’s being the general history of the world, Barth integrates into it the concrete history of Jesus Christ. Second, whilst the inclusion of world history in God’s being is for Hegel based on a necessity imposed from without, i.e. God’s being (thesis) in need of world process (antithesis) to develop into completion (a third, superior synthesis), the inclusion of Jesus Christ’s history and ours in His is for Barth based on a free decision, i.e. God’s self-determination to be for us and with us. Third, consequently, whilst ‘historicisation’ is for Hegel the necessary realisation and completion of God’s being in and through history, it is for Barth the free actualisation of God’s being, which is already real and complete in itself. In the final analysis, whilst Hegel posits a God conditioned upon and perhaps even imprisoned by history in general, Barth’s God, for all His freedom from worldly necessity, is so divinely free as to be able to determine Himself to be for us and with us, and therefore us to be for Him and with Him, in the history of Jesus Christ. For the above and related discussions see Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 406; IV/2, 53f.; McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 353f.; McCormack, ‘Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective’, 29f.;

This proposition brings us back to the abiding concern of those who interpret Barth from an essentialist-ontological viewpoint as preserving a certain freedom of God from the created-reality even in His love towards it.⁶⁹ Questions which they raise to actualistic-ontological interpreters of Barth include: Is not every aspect of God's outward relationships with the world supposed to be in constant need of a basis in God's innermost being so as both to ground the *ultimate reality* of the relationships *in God* and to reserve for God the *freedom* and therefore *possibility* to have chosen not to build and enter them? Ought not 'God for us' to be preceded by and subordinate to 'God in Himself'? In the final analysis, ought not the economic Trinity to always have the immanent Trinity as its basis? In our present connection, they would posit an absolute priority to what one may call the *inner-triune history of God* over the *incarnation history of God*.

By the 'incarnation history of God' I mean the history of Jesus Christ, preordained from all eternity and actualised in time in fulfilment of God's gracious covenant with humanity, in which Jesus Christ is who He is and, to that extent, in which God too is. By contrast, the 'inner-triune history of God' refers to the eternal history, as it were, in which the Father, the Son and the Spirit share their intra-trinitarian relationships. Whilst the former is often supposed to highlight

McCormack, 'Grace and Being', 190f.; Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 198ff.; David W. Congdon, 'Hegel: A Great Problem, A Great Promise', 2007 <<http://derevth.blogspot.com/2007/06/karl-barth-blog-conference-2007-hegel.html>> [accessed 18 June 2007]; Halden Doerge, 'A Still Greater Historicity: Hegel, Jüngel, and the Historicization of God's Being', 2008 <<http://derevth.blogspot.com/2008/06/still-greater-historicity-hegel-jngel.html>> [accessed 15 July 2008].

One final remark. Paul Jones' observation is illuminating in pointing out that, whilst for Hegel Christ (incarnation) only has meaning in world history as the Spirit's self-realisation, for Barth '*Geschichte* draws meaning exclusively from the concrete person of Christ'. See Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 199. It only needs to be added that, as has been made clear, in Barth's mature Christology 'the concrete person of Christ' is the *Geschichte* of Jesus Christ to the extent that it is concrete. It is His history that gives meaning to all history.

⁶⁹ Prominent among these scholars are Paul Molnar and George Hunsinger. See footnote 58 in Introduction to this thesis.

God's gracious love to humanity, the latter can be employed to preserve God's sovereign freedom in Himself. Set in this frame of reference, our designation of 'historicisation' of the divine being would seem to presuppose a certain lack of history—the 'inner-triune history'—in God. Conversely, one would ask, if from all eternity and therefore in the pre-temporal eternity God has always been in His 'inner-triune history', what sense can we possibly make in speaking of the 'incarnation history of God' as the 'historicisation' of the divine being in the being of Jesus Christ?

In posing this question we acknowledge two things: that already in *CD I/1* priority is given to the 'eternal history of God' over 'His temporal acts',⁷⁰ and that even in *CD IV* Barth still upholds the intra-trinitarian relationships and their history as the basis or prototype of God's relationship with the created world and humanity and of its history.⁷¹ But this emphasis on the Godhead consisting in God's inner-triune history does not downplay the 'incarnation history of God'. There are two reasons for this. First, Barth applies the category of history to God's triune life mainly in an attempt to underscore the dynamic and interactive character of God's one being:

He does not exist otherwise than as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He exists in their mutual interconnexion and relationship. He exists in their difference, not in their identity ... His being [*Sein*] as God is His being in [the happening of this history of] His own'.⁷²

In other words, for its indissoluble unity, God's one being is not an abstract, static or monistic 'Godhead', but consists in 'the happening of this history of His own'. The

⁷⁰ I/1, 172.

⁷¹ Cf. IV/1, 203; *KD IV/1*, 222.

⁷² IV/1, 205; *KD IV/1*, 224.

category of history, then, is utilised by Barth as a proper description of the living relationship in God Himself.

Second, it is not the ‘incarnation history of God’ as such, but the history of God’s work *ad extra*, that is contrasted with and perhaps underplayed by the ‘inner-triune history of God’. To be sure, God’s relation to the world and humanity and its history are based on His triune self-relatedness and its history, and are therefore essentially a reflection of the latter.⁷³ But distinct from the history of the creature, what we call the ‘incarnation history of God’ belongs to another rank, the rank of the being of God as such, in that it is the execution of God’s eternal election in time.⁷⁴ Its importance, therefore, *cannot* be undermined even when put in contrast with the ‘inner-triune history of God’, just as the significance of the incarnation is in no way overshadowed but rather confirmed by the eternal election of Jesus Christ.

To clarify the relationship between the two histories at issue, we may consider the characteristic of the incarnation as God’s self-humiliation in history. Barth claims that in this self-condescending history:

God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away. He does not give up being God [*Gott gibt sich hin, aber nicht weg und nicht auf*] in becoming a creature, in becoming man. He does not cease to be God.⁷⁵

In that God does give Himself, the world and humanity may be reconciled to Him; in

⁷³ IV/1, 203: ‘His speaking and activity and work *ad extra* consist in the fact that He gives to the world created by Him, to man, a part in the history in which He is God’.

⁷⁴ E.g. II/2, 116 (*KD* II/2, 125): ‘*in and with* the existence of this man the eternal divine decision has as its object and content the execution of the divine covenant with man, the salvation of all men.’

⁷⁵ IV/1, 185; *KD* IV/1, 202. An alternative way of putting this would be that God does give Himself away, but in giving Himself away He does not lose Himself, He does not give up being Himself.

that God does so without giving Himself away, He remains and even confirms Himself in His ‘incarnation history’. Therefore we refute any subordination of the ‘incarnation history of God’ to His ‘inner-triune history’, because it runs the risk of construing the God in the former history as less divine than that in the latter. And if the God in ‘the incarnation history’ were less essential than in the ‘inner-triune history’, it would mean that God not only gives Himself but also gives Himself *away* in the incarnation. By contrast, our proposition is that, for Barth, the ‘incarnation history of God’ most fittingly derives from His ‘inner-triune history’ without being subordinated to or subsumed in it. This proposition finds support back in Barth’s doctrine of election too when he asserts that Jesus Christ is also and primarily the Subject—in addition to the object—of election. On this view, it is not simply the case that Jesus Christ is *chosen* by God to suffer; instead He also *chooses* to be chosen by God to suffer. Again, a subordinative view of the ‘incarnation history of God’ would diminish the status of Jesus Christ as the proper *Subject* of His own election.

The origin-derivative relationship between the ‘inner-triune history of God’ and His ‘incarnation history’ does not invalidate our proposal of the ‘historicisation’ of the divine being in the history of Jesus Christ. The designation of ‘historicisation’ is appropriate because, deriving originally from His ‘inner-triune history’, God’s ‘incarnation history’ still possesses a certain kind of *historical novelty* that is proper to, characteristic of and even endemic to the revelation of the Son. In Barth’s words, ‘God is *historical* even in Himself, and much more so in His relationship to the reality which is distinct from Himself[!]’⁷⁶ Because of this ‘much more so’, Barth

⁷⁶ IV/1, 112; exclamation mark restored per *KD* IV/1, 122, expressing the ‘newness and strangeness’.

speaks of the incarnation that its

newness and strangeness [*Neuheit und tiefste Erstaunlichkeit*] ... as the content of this free divine decree ought not to be put into the shade or weakened by this reference to its inter-trinitarian background.⁷⁷

The historical novelty of revelation, of the incarnation, when taken in all seriousness due to it, means that God's 'incarnation history' is to be construed as somehow distinct from His 'inner-triune history', although corresponding to it. The novelty of God's 'incarnation history', or its distinctness vis-à-vis the other history, consists in the fact that God's 'incarnation history', based on His will and the overflow of His love, is inclusive and for others. And this tells us that His 'inner-triune history' is not self-contained but rather already for each other (i.e. each of the three modes of being of God) and—like His 'incarnation history'—ready for others, that is, for us, for our reconciliation with Him. In other words, according to His free will to be together with us, God actualises Himself in the event of incarnation.⁷⁸ By doing so, God causes His history and human history to take place as one common history,⁷⁹ and to that extent, allows His divine being to be 'historicised' in the 'incarnation history'.

⁷⁷ IV/2, 42; *KD* IV/2, 45. Cf. Barth's discussion of God becoming an alter ego whilst remaining Himself in the event of revelation, I/1, 316f.

⁷⁸ In this regard one might venture to say that, to the extent that the event of incarnation is God's self-actualisation, it is also His self-historicisation. For how it is that God's being, which is already actual and real, becomes actual in incarnation, see IV/2, 113f. Cf. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. II, 389ff.

It is worth emphasising here that God's self-historicisation does not violate His freedom. On the contrary, it is in *this* way that *God's* freedom is affirmed and revealed. If it is true that the history of Jesus Christ, and especially of His humiliation, makes manifest the fact that God's freedom is not from but rather for humanity in Jesus Christ, then '[w]e may not speak of God's own freedom apart from the history of God's dealings with man.' See Karl Barth, 'The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics', Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. by John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 69-96 (70). In view of God's freedom *thus* revealed, one has to ask with von Balthasar: 'what could be more free, more completely unconditioned and grace-given, than the plan of the incarnation and its accomplishment?' Hans Urs von Balthasar, *A Theology of History* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 70.

⁷⁹ IV/1, 7.

For this reason, we give consent to Mangina's remark on the agreement between Barth and Jenson that '[b]ecause Jesus is the Son, this act of utter self-giving is itself an inner-triune event, an event in God's life',⁸⁰ only with the qualification that in really giving Himself in the history of Jesus Christ this 'inner-triune event in God's life' acquires a different kind of historicity, one that originates from and therefore corresponds to the historicity of God's inner-triune life, but differs from it nonetheless. For the same reason, for all the force of Eberhard Jüngel's convincing argument to ground the historicity of the incarnation in the historicity of God's being itself,⁸¹ it still needs to be added that the incarnation establishes its own location as a historical location, its own reality as an earthly reality, 'seeking to be historically real and effective for us'.⁸²

8C 'Ontologisation' of Human History in the History of Jesus Christ

One central motif of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation, as should be clear by now, is that God humbles Himself in Jesus Christ's—the true God's—history of suffering, obedience and death, in order that humanity may be elevated to participate in Jesus Christ's—the true human being's—history of exaltation and glorification.⁸³ Set in

⁸⁰ Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 137.

⁸¹ Cf. 'Does not the *being* of God which becomes manifest in and as history compel us to think of God's being, in its power which makes revelation possible, as *already* historical being? And can we think historically of God's being in its potency which makes possible historical revelation in any other way than as trinitarian being? ... Even in readiness for the powerlessness of death ... the historical power of God's revelation must already be grounded in the historical potency of the being of God as Father, Son and Spirit.' Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming*, 6. Cf. 83, 103n118, 109f.

⁸² Jüngel, 'The Royal Man', *Karl Barth*, 129.

⁸³ Cf. 'In Him humanity is *exalted* humanity, just as Godhead is *humiliated* Godhead. And humanity is exalted in Him by the humiliation of Godhead.' IV/1, 131; *KD* IV/1, 144. On the basis of the one history of Jesus Christ as true God and true human being, Barth is able to proclaim his 'the-anthropology', stating that '[i]t is precisely God's *deity* which, rightly understood, includes *humanity*.' See Barth, 'Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century' and 'The Humanity of God', *The Humanity of God*, 11, 46.

this framework, our interpretations about the theological conception of history is to be thus formulated: In becoming human God allows His being to be ‘historicised’ in the being of Jesus Christ (which is His history) with the consequence that, in being elevated to participate in the history of Jesus Christ (which is His being), human history as such is accorded the ontological reality that is elected for it and thus proper to it and, to that extent, fully ‘ontologised’. In the last section we looked upward and saw the ‘historicisation’ of God’s being in the humiliation as one moment in Jesus Christ’s history; in this section we will look downward to see the ‘ontologisation’ of human history in the exaltation as the other moment in the same history of Jesus Christ.⁸⁴

For Barth, both the humanity of Jesus Christ and its exaltation take place and indeed consist in His human history; to speak of them, then, means for him to speak of this history.⁸⁵ This history will be explored in this section.

8C.1 High Anticipation and Deep Actualisation

The human history of Jesus Christ, although fully human, is nonetheless the actualisation in time of what is antecedently determined and anticipated in eternity. The anticipation of this human history is *high*, in that it takes place right at the heart of the eternal will of God; its actualisation is *deep*, in that it takes place right in the midst of our human-temporal sphere. Before we speak of the ‘ontologisation’ of

⁸⁴ In that the two directions are always coexisting and interlocked in the life and work of Jesus Christ (cf. IV/1, 136, IV/2, 19, 32f.), Pannenberg’s complaint that Barth’s Christology is dominated by a one-sided ‘from above to below’ movement seems to miss the other, secondary but equally important moment in the whole picture of Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation. Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, 314f.

⁸⁵ To be more precise, the true humanity of Jesus Christ consists in ‘the particularity of the history which /took place when He became man, and still takes place as He, the Son of God, is man’ (IV/2, 27; *KD* IV/2, 28). Similarly, exaltation ‘means the history of the placing of the humanity common to Him and us on[to] a higher level ... the *history* in which this movement takes place, in which this man is man’ (IV/2, 28f.; *KD* IV/2, 29f.).

human history, we need to first speak of the divine height and of the human depth of the human history of Jesus Christ as its presuppositions.

8C.1.1 His Human History Anticipated in Eternity

In Barth's view, the human history of Jesus Christ is rooted in God's very being, because the ground of its being or reality [*Seinsgrund* or *Realsgrund*] lies in the eternal event of election. This construal then gives rise to the conception that the human history of Jesus Christ already exists in eternity, and that it does so in the form of anticipation.

This deep grounding of a human-historical in the divine-eternal is the ontological basis on which Barth's mature Christology is established. By virtue of it, on the one hand, Barth is able to construe the incarnation as a *sui generis* event taking place in the sequence of world history but not as its consequence,⁸⁶ or, in history but not of history. On the other hand, it allows Barth to hold the human history of Jesus Christ to be not accidental but necessary:

It dispenses the last appearance of contingency, externality, incidentality and dispensability which can so easily seem to surround the historical aspect of the Christ-event in its narrower sense. It is *essential* [*wesentlich*] and *integral* [*Substanz*] to this event that it is not only 'act of God' but that as such it includes a human history, the history of the true man, which means the existence of the man Jesus. This is what we learn from our glance back at God's eternal election of grace. It shows us that there can be no dissolving of the *unity* of this *human* history with the act of *God* with which we have, of course, to do in the Christ-event.⁸⁷

It will not escape our attention that it is on the basis of 'God's eternal election of

⁸⁶ IV/2, 37.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 35; punctuation ('act of God') restored per *KD* IV/2, 36.

grace' that the human history of Jesus Christ can be accorded 'essential' and 'integral' status. In view of its indissoluble unity with the divine act of election, this specific human history cannot be thought of as something to be distinguished or even separated from its anticipation in eternity; in Barth's words, there is not 'something higher, non-worldly, purely divine and eternal and spiritual' from which this history could '[withdraw] and finally [disappear] as a mere economy of only provisional and practical significance.'⁸⁸ As the human history of Jesus Christ is eternally anticipated in God's election of grace, its status is one that has an ontological significance determined and bestowed by God Himself. That is why '[t]here is no divine, eternal, spiritual level at which the Christ-event is not *also* "worldly" and [*also*] this human history.'⁸⁹

8C.1.2 His Human History Actualised in Time

The human history of Jesus Christ, having been eternally anticipated on high in election and thus endowed with divine necessity and ontological significance, then comes to pass deep into time to become historically actualised in the event of the incarnation.

At a number of points in this connection, the category of history plays a crucial role in Barth's interpretation of ancient christological doctrine in the light of his actualistic ontology. To begin with, 'historicity' is one important aspect that Jesus Christ shares with all other human beings, one that, one may go on to say, constitutes Him as fully human. The existence of the human Jesus is in history; His genuine humanity consists in His *genuine* historicity. But this genuine humanity of

⁸⁸ IV/2, 35; *KD* IV/2, 37.

⁸⁹ IV/2, 35; *KD* IV/2, 37.

His consists also in His *particular* historicity, since as the history of God's becoming human 'His temporal history is not a *realisation* of one of the possibilities immanent in the created cosmos' but 'the final and supreme *actualisation*' as 'an absolutely new event' transcending the creaturely sphere and the historical series.⁹⁰ For all its particularity, however, Jesus Christ's history is still genuinely *human*; as the actualisation not of an idea but of a 'concrete *possibility*', it 'will be *like* the *concrete* possibility of the existence of *all* men'.⁹¹

Second, Barth applies the category of history also to his explanation of how it takes place that the divine and human 'essence' became and are one. By virtue of the actualistic nature of Jesus Christ's history, what is actualised in the incarnation according to the divine election is not a static unity but a dynamic *union*. In it no identity or identification is involved, so that the characteristics distinctive to either side are not dissolved but preserved.⁹² For our concerns, the unconfounded character of this union means that what is actualised in time, as is anticipated in eternity, is not only a divine history but also a genuine *human* history. Differently stated, in that it is the actualisation of the divine anticipation, this history of the true *human* being Jesus Christ, unlike all other humanly accidental history, is divinely necessary.

Third, it is in the human history of Jesus Christ that what Barth terms 'the *common actualisation* [*Verwirklichung*] of divine and human essence' takes place.⁹³ Largely along the lines of the Reformed tradition yet without completely following them, Barth understands and interprets the doctrine of the *communicatio*

⁹⁰ IV/2, 37; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/2, 39. Emphasis mine.

⁹¹ IV/2, 48; *KD* IV/2, 52.

⁹² IV/2, 63.

⁹³ IV/2, 73; *KD* IV/2, 79.

*operationum*⁹⁴ ‘historically, actually [*geschichtlich, aktuell*], as an *operatio* between God and man, fulfilled in Jesus Christ as a union of God with man.’⁹⁵ More specifically, sharing the Reformed concern to secure the sovereignty of God and therefore to preserve the ‘integrity and essentiality’ of each ‘nature’,⁹⁶ Barth insists that the union between the two must be thought of, not as an accomplished static status, but as an operation taking place in an ‘*ongoing process [in Fluß begriffenen Vorgang]*’,⁹⁷ i.e. in the reality of Jesus Christ as it takes place as a genuine human history in human history.

In summary, when it comes to the integrity of Jesus Christ’s human ‘nature’, and to how it comes about that the two ‘natures’ become conjoined and actualised whilst retaining their respective distinctiveness, much depends—as we have demonstrated—on safeguarding the genuine ‘historicity of the Subject ... and especially ... the historicity of the relationship of His two predicates’,⁹⁸ that is, their common actualisation in a genuine human history. The actualisation of Jesus Christ’s human history, having its basis in ‘a *divine* necessity and ordination’,⁹⁹ serves in turn as the basis for the actualisation of the two ‘natures’.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁴ According to McCormack, this doctrine was ‘originally designed to suggest that in every act of the God-human, both “natures” are fully active, working together to produce a single effect’, McCormack, ‘Karl Barth’s Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism’, 249. Cf. IV/2, 104ff.; Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 445f.

⁹⁵ IV/2, 105; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/2, 116.

⁹⁶ Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 446.

⁹⁷ IV/2, 105; *KD* IV/2, 116.

⁹⁸ IV/2, 115; *KD* IV/2, 128.

⁹⁹ IV/2, 290; *KD* IV/2, 322.

¹⁰⁰ The ‘high anticipation’ and ‘deep actualisation’ of Jesus Christ’s human history for which we have been arguing based on *CD* IV find a slightly more essentialistic-ontological but refined and pregnant expression back in II/1, 345: ‘What He is there in the height for us and for our sakes, here in the depths He is also in Himself’.

8C.2 Full Representation and Participation

Upon the foundation of *Jesus Christ's* human history as laid in section 8C.1, we are now in the position to build the argument concerning *our* human history: from the high anticipation and deep actualisation of His human history, it comes about that our human history is fully represented by, participating in and, to that extent, 'ontologised' or realised in His history.

8C.2.1 His Human History Representative for Ours

Jesus Christ as the Reconciler between God and humanity is 'the One who vouches [*einsteht*] and stands well for *God* before us all, before the world, and for us *all*, the *world*, before God',¹⁰¹ thus representing God to humanity and humanity God. In that 'He becomes a man and as this man the Representative [*Stellvertreter*] of all men',¹⁰² His human history also represents the history of us all.

Barth's conception of Jesus Christ's human history as the representation of our human history is a clear corollary of his understanding in *CD III* of covenant history as the inner presupposition and basis of creaturely history on the one hand, and of creaturely history as the external presupposition and basis of covenant history on the other. And this arrangement in turn finds its doctrinal root in *CD II*, because it is for the actualisation of the eternal election of God's gracious covenant that covenant history comes to pass. This line of thinking reaches an apex when Barth makes the rather unconventional but unequivocal claim in *CD III* that covenant history is *the* history,¹⁰³ and the consequent statement that the being of the human Jesus is history in that it is a being in a movement in which 'God is for Him and He

¹⁰¹ IV/2, 98; translation slightly revised per *KD IV/2*, 108.

¹⁰² IV/1, 551; *KD IV/1*, 615. Cf. IV/2, 48; *KD IV/2*, 51.

¹⁰³ Cf. III/1, 59; *KD III/1*, 63

for God'.¹⁰⁴

This insight is carried into *CD IV*, with the emphasis now laid on Jesus Christ's history as the event in which God reconciles the world and humanity to Himself. Here the basic logic is: in that reconciliation is Jesus Christ, in that the reconciliatory event takes place in His history, this history is our salvation history, for it fully represents our history before God. Two remarks are to be made in this connection. First, in that He does represent us in His act to save *us*,¹⁰⁵ Jesus Christ's human history, being particular [*besonder*], is not a private or even isolated history [*Sondergeschichte*]:

But for all its singularity [*Einzigartigkeit*], as His history it was not and is not a private history, but a representative and therefore a public, His history which occurred in the place of all *other* men and in accomplishment of *their* atonement: the history of their Head, in which they all participate. Therefore, in the most concrete sense of the term, precisely the particular history of this *One* is *world* history. When God was in Christ He reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19), and therefore us, each one of us. In this One humanity itself, *our* human essence [*Wesen*] as such, was and is elevated and exalted.¹⁰⁶

For the sake of the reconciliation of the world and humanity to God, then, Jesus Christ's history fully represents the history not only of us all but also of us in all times.¹⁰⁷

Second, we hasten to add, in that He represents us in His act to *save* us, this

¹⁰⁴ III/2, 159.

¹⁰⁵ In speaking of 'representation' in the context of the doctrine of reconciliation, we are fully aware that Jesus Christ saves us by not simply by representing us but ultimately by an ontological elevation of us in the exaltation of Jesus Christ.

¹⁰⁶ IV/2, 269; translation slightly revised per *KD IV/2*, 298f.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. IV/1, 315: 'There is no moment in which He does not stand before God as our Representative who there suffered and died for us and therefore speaks for us'.

history does not forfeit its distinctiveness to become simply one history among other histories. For as the Representative for us, Jesus Christ is not only one but *the* true human being, and He is therefore not a mere example [*Beispiel*] but the *head* [*Haupt*] of all humanity.¹⁰⁸ In *the* humanity, i.e. that of Jesus Christ, we see particularity concretely united with universality. In that Jesus Christ is the true human being, He represents us all to God by being our head, and for this reason His human history can be and is indeed the salvation history of us all.¹⁰⁹

8C.2.2 Our Human History Participating in His

The foregoing discussion has prepared us for a final step. In being fully represented by His human history, what becomes of our human history as such? Our contention is that our human history is fully ‘ontologised’ as it is elevated to participate in Jesus Christ’s human history. This contention has at its heart a participation which affirms the reality or ontological status of human history. As we shall see, it arises from Barth’s argument about the participation of *our* humanity in the divine, which in turn results from the participation of *Jesus Christ’s* humanity in God’s being in the hypostatic union accomplished in the event of incarnation.

In this connection Barth is extremely cautious about two things. The first is a potential confusion of the participation, elevation or exaltation of the human in the divine on the one hand, with deification or divinisation of the human on the other. In order to avoid the confusion, he places several strict preconditions to this

¹⁰⁸ This notion leads to the consideration whether designations such as Platonism and exemplarism do justice to Barth’s doctrine of reconciliation. See for instance Gunton, *The Barth Lecture*, 187ff. For Barth, it is *Jesus Christ*, not an ideal, principle, example or the like, that is the Subject of the reconciliation of humanity to God as accomplished in His history. Cf. IV/2, 58 (*KD* IV/2, 62) for Barth’s refusal to understand ‘Jesus Christ as the representation [*Darstellung*] and vehicle of a general divine-human (or divine-worldly) principle, and therefore as an exemplary “religious personality”.’

¹⁰⁹ IV/2, 36; *KD* IV/2, 38. Also IV/2, 51: ‘and His history is our history of salvation which changes the whole human situation’.

participation at issue. First, the *possibility* of human participation in the divine does not root in itself or some intrinsic human capability, but rather in the mutual participation among God's three modes of being.¹¹⁰ The divine-human union in Jesus Christ is possible because there is already in God Himself the triune unity. Second, human participation in the divine is not an already realised, readily made status accessible and available at all times, but becomes *actualised* in, with and through a history, i.e. that of Jesus Christ.¹¹¹ Moreover, its actualisation is by no means brought about by its human side but is 'achieved by the Son of God in the act of God'.¹¹² Jesus Christ alone is the *Subject* of the history in which it is actualised. Finally, the bringing about of the human participation at issue is not the only thing or even the primary thing that takes place in Jesus Christ's history. It is accompanied by, or rather, the consequence of a divine *humiliation* as the two take place not one after the other but simultaneously as two movements in the one history of Jesus Christ.

To be sure, Barth's scheme effectively forbids us to construe the participation of the human in the divine *in abstracto* as an independent category, autonomous in and with itself; rather, its possibility is rooted in the triune unity, and its actualisation is brought about through a divine act in the history of a divine Subject as a consequence of the divine humiliation. Negatively stated, where the history of Jesus Christ is followed through, there 'a deification of the creature' and a 'humanisation of the Creator' are decidedly avoided.¹¹³ Positively stated, however,

¹¹⁰ IV/2, 62f.

¹¹¹ The humanity of Jesus, urges Barth, must not be 'disconnected [*gelöst*] from the dynamic of the history in which it was and is one with the divine', *ibid.*, 80; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/2, 87.

¹¹² IV/2, 63.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 79, cf. 82.

when this history is indeed followed through and all the aforementioned provisos fulfilled, Barth's scheme not only allows for but also demands genuine *human* participation in the divine, without giving rise to worries about divinisation, humanisation, or human conditioning upon or even imprisonment of the divine.

The second thing which Barth is careful to avoid is the temptation to put the human participation in the divine (by way of being elevated) on a par with the divine participation in the human (by way of self-condescending). Barth is cautious of this, because for him the genuine human participation in the divine, taking place *in concreto* in the history of Jesus Christ, is characterised by its correspondence to the underlying divine initiative, by its happening as a response on the part of the human to its divine cause. This notion, again, points us back to Barth's conception of the one history of Jesus Christ as consisting of two directions or movements. Although these two movements are simultaneous, they are not therefore equal, interchangeable or reversible, because the exaltation of the human only takes place as a result of the condescension of God in the history of Jesus Christ. From this, we are led further back to the ontological cornerstone of Barth's theology: that the election of Jesus Christ is first and primarily God's self-determination and only then and secondarily God's determination of and to us. On these grounds, human participation in the divine is in essence human receiving of divine giving,¹¹⁴ human hearing of divine speaking, and human response to divine address. There indeed takes place a reciprocal relationship between the human and the divine in the history of Jesus Christ, but it must be qualified as asymmetrical. If the endeavour to avoid deification is one to ensure that the human participation in the divine does not

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 70.

confuse but preserves the distinctiveness on the both sides, the attempt to avoid ascribing equal weight to both sides is one to ensure that the human participation does not transgress the order to which it is appointed: it arises in sequence as a consequence of the divine self-determination and therefore of the divine initiative to elevate the human. In other words, there is no confusion or reversal of divine and human in view.¹¹⁵

Now when the two aforementioned conditions are fulfilled, that is, when there takes place this non-divinised, properly-ordered and therefore genuine human participation in the divine as a consequence of the divine initiative, there may and must also occur the participation of Jesus Christ's—and therefore our—human *history* in the divine, for His history fully represents ours. To the extent that Jesus Christ's human history is elevated into participation in the divine,¹¹⁶ so does our human history. And in being elevated into this participation, our human history is accorded the highest possible ontological status; that is why we term this attribution the 'ontologisation' of human history. It should be clear by now that in no way does the 'ontologisation' of human history in the history of Jesus Christ involve deification, because it is not brought about by way of 'an elevation of [human] nature above the limits proper to the human',¹¹⁷ but by God's gracious act of including our

¹¹⁵ This point is further elaborated in IV/3 when Barth explains the meaning of *unio cum Christo*. For him, the Christian's union with Christ 'does not mean the dissolution or disappearance of the one in the other, nor does it mean identification'; rather, it is 'their conjunction in which each has his own independence, uniqueness and activity' (IV/3, 540). For further elaboration on the difference between participation and deification, see McCormack, 'Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question', *Orthodox and Modern*, 235-260, esp. 236-247.

¹¹⁶ As Jüngel puts it, '[t]he history of the human Jesus is not only a history that moves the eternal being of God downward, but as such also a history that is moved upward by God ... If Jesus' history were not the history that is moved by God, then it would not also be the history of a human being that moves God's eternal being.' Jüngel, 'The Royal Man', *Karl Barth*, 133f.; translation revised per idem, *Barth-Studien* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1982), 240f.

¹¹⁷ McCormack, 'Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism', 246.

human history in His Son's as it takes place in and with the historical actualisation of a—or rather, *the*—divine anticipation. But it need be maintained with equal force and clarity that this ontological status thus and thus alone attributed to our human history must be conceived of as genuine and unreserved: *genuine*, because the history in which our human history is elevated to participate is Jesus Christ's *real* history in which the deep actualisation of God's high anticipation *truly* comes to pass; *unreserved*, because in that the *self*-actualisation of God's *own* being takes place in the history of Jesus Christ our human history too, *fully* represented in His, is elevated to *fully* participate in the divine being. In that the *entirety* of it is given a *real* share in God's being as the only source of *all reality*,¹¹⁸ our human history is 'ontologised'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Concerning God's reality as the source of all other realities, see Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 90: 'Christian existence is not the point at which the gospel of reconciliation first becomes "real". The "reality" of the gospel is not something of which it comes to be possessed by virtue of our existence and acts; our existence and acts come to possess 'reality' in so far as they share in the axiomatic reality of God with us, set forth in the gospel.' But the 'objective' reality of God does not simply take our 'subjective' reality by arbitrary force; instead, it elevates and includes the latter in a way that corresponds to itself. See for instance, 'What we have said about the objective content of truth of the reality of Jesus Christ, which includes our own reality, presses in upon us, from its objectivity to our subjectivity, in order that there should be in us a correspondence', IV/2, 303. In a real sense, then, the earthly reality of the God-human is 'of the first and supreme order' as 'the concrete limit and measure and criterion of all other earthly reality', *ibid.*, 166.

¹¹⁹ The 'ontologisation' of our human history finds a vivid illustration in Barth's exposition of the history of the apostle Paul. Despite taking place as a secondary moment compared to the history of Jesus Christ as the primary moment, this history is nonetheless described as 'an irresistible [*unaufhaltsamer*] consequence', as Paul's 'own history', and as 'the obvious history of all those who have discovered or will discover Jesus Christ, and themselves in Him'. From Paul's case Barth goes on to make a more general statement that: 'to be "with Christ" is to take part in His history, so that in His history that of the community and all its members has already happened, and has therefore to find in His history its model and pattern, to see itself again in it; the result being that the community and its members necessarily cease to be what they are if they are guilty of any arbitrary deviation from His history. This "with Christ" determines their past and present and future; their whole history' (IV/2, 277; *KD* IV/2, 307). Along this line, the 'ontologisation' of our human history, the maintaining of the true being of the Christian community, and our togetherness with Christ all rely on our participating in His history. But, again, all these are secondary moments dependent on the divine initiative: 'But this participation of the world in the being of God implies necessarily His participating in the being of the world, and therefore that *His being, His [own] history, is played out as world-history*' (IV/1, 215; *KD* IV/1, 236, emphasis mine).

8D Election and the Trinity: an Excursus

Given the affirmation that the self-determination of God to be for us and with us is the foundation of both the ‘historicisation’ and the ‘ontologisation’, it is still a matter of debate whether it is theologically tenable to take it to such an ontological height as the determination with which God constitutes Himself as triune. In McCormack’s view, if one is to think in strict accordance with Barth’s revised doctrine of election in *CD II/2* one must make (as Barth himself, too, should have made) the explicit claim that:

[t]he *decision* for the covenant of grace is the ground of God’s triunity and therefore the eternal generation of the Son and the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son. In other words, the works of God *ad intra* (the Trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz., election).¹²⁰

McCormack’s grounding of the Trinity in election should be understood at four sequential levels. First, both these notions are construed in actualistic-ontological and not essentialist-ontological terms. For McCormack as well as for Barth, no being is to be abstracted from its action. Second, McCormack affirms the *chronological* simultaneity between the two by stating that ‘both the works of God *ad intra* [i.e. the Trinity] and the first of God’s work *ad extra* [i.e. election] take place *simultaneously*, in one and the same eternal event’.¹²¹ In that the two are both eternal events, ‘neither precedes the other chronologically’.¹²² Third, McCormack gives *logical* priority to election over the Trinity, because for him it is not the case that a static triune being first exists and then decides to elect Jesus Christ in order to

¹²⁰ McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 194.

¹²¹ McCormack, ‘Seek God Where He May Be Found’, *ibid.*, 265.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 266.

be with humanity, but that the acting God, in electing Jesus Christ in order to be with humanity, constitutes Himself to be triune. It is in this logical sense that he grounds the Trinity in election.¹²³ Fourth, McCormack goes on from this logical priority to assert an *ontological* priority of election over the Trinity by saying that ‘the triunity of God is a function of the divine election’,¹²⁴ despite his explicit attempt to ‘abandon all talk of “ontological priority” where the relation of triunity to election is concerned’.¹²⁵

On the basis of its analysis of the notion ‘history’, however, this thesis: 1) is informed by Barth’s actualistic ontology, and 2) holds the position that the self-determination of God to be for us and with us does not violate but rather confirms His identity as the triune God, just as His triune identity does not exclude or hold back but rather contains His determination to be for us and with us in Jesus Christ, 3) whilst still giving logical priority to election over the Trinity 4) without engaging with debates over the ontological relationship between the two. In thus articulating its stance, this thesis, on the one hand, positions itself at a more *moderate* point than McCormack’s scheme, in that we agree with him up to the third (the logical) level identified above, but then strictly refrain from entering the fourth (the ontological), for reasons to be given shortly. On the other hand, our position is more *radical* than that of Kevin Hector. Although it seems similar to Hector’s argument that ‘we must speak of the simultaneity of election and triunity: Father, Son and Spirit subsist eternally in the movement of this decision, but this decision

¹²³ McCormack, ‘Election and the Trinity’, 208. Cf. idem, ‘Grace and Being’, *Orthodox and Modern*, 194.

¹²⁴ McCormack, ‘Grace and Being’, *ibid.*, 194; idem, ‘Seek God Where He May Be Found’, *ibid.*, 266. McCormack is fully aware that in doing this he is moving beyond Barth’s own position. See McCormack, ‘Election and Trinity’, 224.

¹²⁵ McCormack, ‘Election and Trinity’, 206.

subsists only in the relation of Father, Son and Spirit',¹²⁶ it actually differs from it in that, whereas Hector's 'simultaneity' seems to be defined more in terms of a logical equality (contra McCormack's 'logical priority') than of a chronological simultaneity,¹²⁷ we, whilst affirming the chronological simultaneity between election and the Trinity (with McCormack and Hector), still give logical priority to election over the Trinity (with McCormack and contra Hector) and are, to this extent, more radical than Hector.

Now the reasons for the aforementioned position will be given as followed, in reverse order of the four levels depicted above. First, this thesis refrains from making ontological claims about the relationship between election and the Trinity, simply because it deems it a transgression of the epistemological boundaries within which we as human beings are placed. It would be as equally 'abstract' and 'metaphysical' to claim an 'ontological priority' of election over the Trinity as to claim that of the Trinity over election.¹²⁸ Second, this thesis gives logical (but not ontological) priority to election. Compared to maintaining a logical equality between election and the Trinity (as Hector does), this scheme offers a better framework within which our two basic proposals in this chapter are accounted for and supported. On the one hand, it better preserves the novelty that we in section 8B.3 ascribed to the incarnation history vis-à-vis the inner-triune history, thus also better maintaining the integrity of 'historicisation' of God's being in Jesus Christ. On the other, it also enhances the sense in which the 'ontologisation' of human

¹²⁶ Hector, 'God's Triunity and Self-Determination', 261. See also 258: 'God's triune being coincides eternally with God's decision to be God-for-us'.

¹²⁷ That is why, despite the fact that McCormack maintains a *chronological* simultaneity, it is by asserting yet another simultaneity that Hector rejects McCormack's 'logical priority'.

¹²⁸ Hector poses the same challenge to McCormack by contending that 'McCormack's move appears to make God's self-determination into an abstraction'. Hector, 'God's Triunity and Self-Determination', 258.

history in Jesus Christ is articulated, because on this view the basic reality of our human history is already present, already anticipated, in election as the first work of God. Third, this thesis upholds the chronological simultaneity (but not logical equality) between election and the Trinity, not only because it would make no sense to envisage two eternal events in one temporal sequence, but also because of the basic fact that the electing God is always the triune God, and that the triune God is always the electing God. The insistence on the chronological simultaneity between election and the Trinity, then, ensures that the God of whom we speak is always *in concreto* the God who always works both *ad intra* (in trinitarian processions and in intra-triune relating) and *ad extra* (in electing). Finally, all three foregoing points are made on the basis of Barth's actualistic ontology, according to which Jesus Christ is His history, and therefore human knowing and speaking of Him is knowing and speaking of His history.

8E Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have demonstrated that in what Barth consciously terms as an actualisation of the doctrine of the incarnation,¹²⁹ the one history of Jesus Christ is made the decisive category in and through which God's being and action, as well as God and humanity, are united. We have further demonstrated that in the one being-as-act-in-history of the God-human Jesus Christ, there takes place first the 'historicisation' of the divine being in the humiliation of God and then, upon this firm basis, the 'ontologisation' of human history in the exaltation of humanity. Like Barth, we have carefully maintained the novelty of the incarnation history as God's self-historicisation without compromising the inner-triune history as its origin.

¹²⁹ IV/2, 105.

Equally carefully we have also affirmed the ontologisation of human history without confusing it with God's deity or upgrading it to the level of its divine initiative. Thus it is further confirmed that the 'historicisation' and the 'ontologisation' at issue have a relationship that is mutual and reciprocal, but asymmetrical and irreversible. For ultimately it is in determining Himself that God determines us and our history, and not the opposite.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the development of the concept of history in Barth's theology and offered a complete chronological account of it. It has also demonstrated clearly that, despite not being a dominant category in Barth's early thought, receiving consistent recognition or specific treatment, the concept of history nonetheless bears growing significance through the development of his increasingly christocentric theology. Only a few observations and comments remain to be made in this concluding chapter by way of summarising the conclusions reached in this thesis, and by way of marking out possible ground for further exploration.

First, this thesis has decidedly refuted the dominant criticism in the field that Barth ignores, evades, or even holds a strong antipathy towards history. Strictly speaking, the radically eschatological 'rejection' of human history is confined to *only* one stage in the development of Barth's theology, that is, the *Römerbrief* period, in which Barth placed the revelation of Jesus Christ in human history only at the beginning, on the verge, and at the end of it, as God's 'No' to it. Before this period, Barth the liberal theologian took history as the presence of divine reality in human consciousness and experience; after that, Barth the Reformed dogmatician came to take fuller account of the reality of revelation as God's speech-act not only to but also in human history. Ever since the beginning of his dogmatic enterprise in the mid-1920s, the central thrust of Barth's theology was how it is that God reveals Himself while remaining Himself. God *reveals* Himself: thus the conception of revelation as in history, not as supra-history but as genuine history;¹ God *remains*

¹ *GD*, 131ff.; *ChD*, 310f.

Himself in His self-revelation: thus the designation of revelation as qualified history,² the attribution of *Urgeschichtlichkeit*³ or particular historicity⁴ to it, and the axiom that ‘Revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation’.⁵ The latter aspect of this axiom prompted Barth, primarily during the 1930s, to take such great pains to maintain the Godness of God that he, granting that revelation is really in history, refrained from stating explicitly that revelation is history. But God does not simply remain Himself; He remains Himself precisely as He reveals Himself in history. This thesis has given close attention to both dimensions of this veiling-unveiling dialectic without allowing either to suppress the other, and has correspondingly argued that God’s self-revelation is for Barth in history but not of history.

Second, this thesis has provided a clear chronological account of how Barth’s concept of history developed in the course of his career as a Reformed dogmatist. It has been demonstrated that, initially organised around the doctrine of revelation, Barth’s concept of history became increasingly shaped by his developing Christology. Decisive steps along this development include: the commencement of Barth’s actualistic ontology with the equation of God’s being with His act of revelation (*CD* II/1); his construal of God’s eternity as not opposed to but including time through an all-embracing understanding of Jesus Christ (*CD* II/1); most crucially, his identification of Jesus Christ as the Subject of election in the beginning of God’s gracious covenantal relation with humanity (*CD* II/2); his consequent positioning of creation and creaturely history within the framework of covenant history (*CD* III/1);

² *GD*, 60.

³ *ChD*, 309ff.

⁴ I/1, 326; *KD* I/1, 345.

⁵ I/2, 58.

and ultimately his christologically grounded soteriology in which the eternally and graciously decreed covenantal relationship of ‘God with us’ is actualised in the one history of the God-human Jesus Christ (*CD IV*). Ultimately, the concept of history has taken centre stage, replacing the traditionally dominant christological category of ‘nature’ and reshaping the understanding of ‘person’.

Third, this thesis—informed by Barth’s actualistic ontology—has demonstrated that God’s being is ‘historicised’ to the extent that God actually became human in Jesus Christ or, conversely, that the event of incarnation is His self-actualisation in history. The notion of the Word of God, so predominant in Barth’s earlier theology, gave way increasingly to his concrete understanding of Jesus Christ, first in *CD II/2* as the eternal God of election (but no less ‘essentially’ human), and then in *CD IV* as the historical human person (but no less ‘essentially’ divine) to whom God condescends and in and through whom humanity is elevated to God. In registering the historicisation of God’s being, we have also proposed that the history of incarnation, whilst corresponding to the inner-triune history, still possesses a certain historical novelty vis-à-vis the latter, thereby constituting the ‘historicisation’ of God’s being in a real sense.

Fourth, this thesis—informed by Barth’s covenantal understanding of creation—has demonstrated that human history, originally coming into being with the creation of the world, acquires its reality ultimately from the divine act of election. Humanity is real only to the extent that it is included in the reality of the God-human Jesus Christ determined in this act in which God determines Himself from all eternity to be for and with humanity in His Son. This procedure seeks God

exclusively ‘where He Himself has given Himself to be found’⁶ and offers a radically christological and therefore reconciliatory account of history. By centring on *the* history of Jesus Christ in this way, it affirms both divine sovereignty and human dignity in their asymmetrical reciprocity instead of upholding only one of them at the expense of the other, or simply transforming one into the other.

The initial motive for this thesis was the wish to find a worthy location for the concept of human history in Christian theology. I began it in hopes of discovering in Barth’s theology evidence in support of his affirmation of human history. I was hoping that history as a human reality would be appreciated by Barth to possess a certain value that could not be overlooked. Indeed, I wished to locate a scheme in which God so recognises the reality and value of the human history that He created that He reveals Himself not as it but nevertheless in it and that He allows His Word to be transmitted not by it but certainly in it and even through it. These wishes have been fulfilled by the conclusions of this thesis, but not in the way initially envisaged.

Barth’s theology offers a vision that is neither theomonistic nor anti-human but christocentric,⁷ in which the reality and value of human history are indeed affirmed. But this is done not by way of a self-authenticating effort from within human history as such, but as human history becomes authenticated and elevated into participation in the history of Jesus Christ. Human history is authenticated, because God does not remain content to rest simply in and for Himself but first determines Himself to be for us and with us from all eternity and then actualises this self-determination in time. Human history is ‘ontologised’, because the

⁶ II/1, 197.

⁷ Cf. IV/4, 17-21.

actualisation of God's eternal self-determination *has to* be 'really a history';⁸ it is ontologised because, as a result of this actualisation, the movement of God from above to below, by virtue of its ontological and therefore logical precedence, really brings forth the movement of humanity and its history from below to above. It is precisely this condescension of divine sovereignty that ensures human dignity by elevating it.

The results of this thesis offer two particularly significant possibilities for further theological reflection. First, the recognition that theology itself is a historical task suggests that a theologian is also a *historian* of theology. It is legitimate and necessary for theological studies to be attentive to the history of theology. This is not to suggest that theology is nothing more than history, but to draw attention to the fact that theology has a history, and that theology is what it is only as it participates in the history of the ongoing debates over the identity of God, just as both divine essence and humanity are what they are as they become actualised in Jesus Christ's history as the history of the dealings of God with humanity. Theology as a whole benefits as dogmatic theology and historical theology progressively interact with each other, but would also benefit from the hitherto largely unattempted study of the history of historical theology.

Second, the recognition that the study of history in general (and church history in particular) is a theological task suggests that a theologian is also a theologian of *history*. It is legitimate and necessary for theological studies to be attentive to history, and not just to church history. It may not always be wise for theologians to attempt to offer theological accounts of the wide range of events in

⁸ IV/2, 71; translation slightly revised per *KD* IV/2, 76.

general history; such offers, even when made with good intentions can easily end up being naïve or strained. But the concentric nature of history demands an understanding of the history of Jesus Christ by way of the witnesses borne to Him in both the ecclesial and the universal spheres of history. Moreover, if '[t]he God whose identity is enacted in the history of Jesus and followed, explored and articulated in the Church's history cannot be reduced to the level of an agent within history among others [but] wills to be in communion with human agents in all times and all corners of the world',⁹ then the pluralist character of 'history'—and the ongoing theological imperative to attend to it—must be acknowledged.

⁹ Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005), 114.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

- Barth, Karl, *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-war Writings, 1946-52*, ed. by Ronald G. Smith, trans. by E. M. Delacour and Stanley Goodman (London: SCM Press, 1954).
- , *Anselm, Fides Quaerens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of His Theological Scheme*, The library of philosophy and theology, 2nd edn (London: SCM Press, 1960).
- , *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*, trans. by Thomas A. Smail (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1956).
- , *Credo: A Presentation of the Chief Problems of Dogmatics with Reference to the Apostles' Creed: Sixteen Lectures Delivered at the University of Utrecht in February and March, 1935* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1936).
- , 'Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom', *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 11 (1933), 297-314.
- , *Der Römerbrief 1922* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1940).
- , *Der Römerbrief: Erste Fassung, 1919* (Zürich: TVZ, 1985).
- , *Die Auferstehung der Toten: Eine akademische Vorlesung über I. Kor. 15* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1924).
- , *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: 1. Band: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes, Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik, 1927*, ed. by Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1982).
- , *Die Theologie Calvins 1922*, ed. by Hans Scholl (Zürich: TVZ, 1993).
- , *Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften 1923*, ed. by Eberhard Busch (Zürich: TVZ, 1998).
- , *Die Theologie Schleiermachers: Vorlesung Göttingen, Wintersemester 1923/1924*, ed. by Ritschl Dietrich (Zürich: TVZ, 1978).
- , 'Die Theologie und der heutige Mensch', *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 8 (1930), 374-396.
- , *Die Theologie Zwinglis, 1922/1923: Vorlesung, Göttingen, Wintersemester 1922/1923* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2004).
- , *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949).
- , *Einführung in die Evangelische Theologie* (Zürich: EVZ, 1962).
- , *Erklärung des Johannesevangeliums: Vorlesung Münster, Wintersemester*

- 1925/1926, *wiederholt in Bonn, Sommersemester 1930*, ed. by Walther Fürst (Zürich: TVZ, 1999).
- , *Evangelical Theology: an Introduction*, trans. by Grover Foley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1963).
- , *Gesamtausgabe* (Zürich: TVZ, 1990).
- , *Gespräche 1964-1968*, ed. by Eberhard Busch (Zürich: TVZ, 1996).
- , *How I Changed My Mind* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1966).
- , *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, *The Making of modern theology* (London: Collins, 1989).
- , *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. by John D. Godsey (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963).
- , *Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel, Band I: 1913-1921 (GA V.3)* (Zürich: TVZ, 1973).
- , *Karl Barth-Rudolf Bultmann Letters 1922-1966* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).
- , *Konfirmandenunterricht 1909-1921*, ed. by Jürgen Fangmeier (Zürich: TVZ, 1987).
- , *Letters, 1961-1968*, ed. by Jürgen Fangmeier, Hinrich Stoevesandt and G. W. Bromiley, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981).
- , *On Religion: The Revelation of God As the Sublimation of Religion*, trans. by Garrett Green (London: T&T Clark, 2006).
- , *Predigten 1913*, ed. by Nelly Barth and Gerhard Sauter (Zürich: TVZ, 1976).
- , *Predigten 1914*, ed. by Ursula Fähler and Jochen Fähler (Zürich: TVZ, 1999).
- , *Predigten 1915*, ed. by Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1996).
- , *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914-1925*, trans. by James Smart (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964).
- , *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns, from the sixth edn (London: Oxford University Press, 1968).
- , *The Faith of the Church: A Commentary on the Apostles' Creed*, ed. by Jean-Louis Leuba, trans. by Gabriel Vahanian (London: Collins, 1960).
- , *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*, ed. by Hannelotte Reiffen, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).
- , *The Humanity of God*, trans. by John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960).
- , *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. by H. J. Stenning (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933).
- , 'The Theological Declaration of Barmen', 1934

- <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/barmen.htm>> [accessed 10 October 2010].
- , *The Theology of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1995).
- , *The Theology of Schleiermacher: Lectures at Göttingen, Winter Semester of 1923/24* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).
- , *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. by Douglas Horton (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928).
- , *Theological Existence To-day!: A Plea for Theological Freedom*, trans. by R. Birch Hoyle (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1933).
- , *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings, 1920-1928* (London: SCM Press, 1962).
- , *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Teil 1: Prolegomena, 1924* (Zürich: TVZ, 1985).
- , *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Teil 2: Die Lehre von Gott / Die Lehre vom Menschen, 1924/25* (Zürich: TVZ, 1990).
- , *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Teil 3: Die Lehre von der Versöhnung / Die Lehre von der Erlösung 1925/26* (Zürich: TVZ, 2003).
- , *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1922-1925* (Zürich: TVZ, 1990).
- , *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1925-1930*, ed. by Hermann Schmidt (Zürich: TVZ, 1994).
- , *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten, 1905-1909*, ed. by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt (Zürich: TVZ, 1992).
- Barth, Karl, and Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology*, trans. by Peter Fraenkel (London: G. Bles, The Centenary Press, 1946).

Secondary Sources

- Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *A Theology of History*, Communio Books (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1994).
- , *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, Vol. 1, ed. by John K. Riches and Joseph Fessio, trans. by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).
- , *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Edward T. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).
- Bartsch, Hans-Werner, ed., *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, trans. by Reginald H. Fuller, Vols. I and II combined (London: SPCK, 1972).
- Berkouwer, G. C., *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Harry R. Boer, American ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1956).
- Blumhardt, Christoph, *Action in Waiting*, New Edition (Farmington, Pa.: Plough

- Publishing, 1998).
- Bolli, Heinz, *Schleiermacher-Auswahl* (Hamburg & München: Siebenstern Taschenbuch Verlag, 1968).
- Brazier, Paul, 'Barth's First Commentary on Romans (1919): An Exercise in Apophatic Theology?', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 6 (2004), 387-403.
- Bromiley, Geoffrey W., *An Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 1979).
- Burnett, Richard E., *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principals [sic] of the Römerbrief Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).
- Burrows, Mark S., and Paul Rorem, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics in Historical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 1991).
- Busch, Eberhard, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (London: SCM Press, 1976).
- , *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, ed. by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).
- Carroll, John T., Charles H. Cosgrove, and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1990).
- Colwell, John, *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1989).
- Congdon, David W., 'Hegel: A Great Problem, A Great Promise', 2007 <<http://derevth.blogspot.com/2007/06/karl-barth-blog-conference-2007-hegel.html>> [accessed 18 June 2007].
- Conyers, A. J., *God, Hope, and History: Jürgen Moltmann and the Christian Concept of History* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer, 1988).
- Dawson, R. Dale, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007).
- Doerge, Halden, 'A Still Greater Historicity: Hegel, Jüngel, and the Historicization of God's Being', 2008 <<http://derevth.blogspot.com/2008/06/still-greater-historicity-hegel-jngel.htm>> [accessed 15 July 2008].
- Dorrien, Gary J., *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000).
- van Driel, Edwin Chr., 'Karl Barth on the Eternal Existence of Jesus Christ', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60 (2007), 45-61.
- Ebeling, Gerhard, *The Problem of Historicity in the Church and Its Proclamation*

- (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967).
- Eitel, Adam, 'The Resurrection of Jesus Christ: Karl Barth and the Historicization of God's Being', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 10 (2008), 36-53.
- Fergusson, David, 'Barth's Resurrection of the Dead: Further Reflections', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003), 65-72.
- Fisher, Simon, *Revelatory Positivism?: Barth's Earliest Theology and the Marburg School*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford [England]: Oxford University Press, 1988).
- Flett, John G., *The Witness of God: The Trinity, Missio Dei, Karl Barth, and the Nature of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010).
- Ford, David F., *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt am Main and Bern: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981).
- Gerrish, B. A., *Continuing the Reformation: Essays on Modern Religious Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).
- , 'Jesus, Myth, and History: Troeltsch's Stand in the 'Christ-Myth' Debate', *The Journal of Religion*, 55 (1975), 13-35.
- , *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982).
- Gilbertson, Michael, *God and History in the Book of Revelation: New Testament Studies in Dialogue with Pannenberg and Moltmann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
- Gockel, Matthias, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- Gorringe, Timothy, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- Grieb, A. Katherine, 'Last Things First: Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of 1 Corinthians in The Resurrection of the Dead', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 56 (2003), 49-64.
- Gunton, Colin E, *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Rev. ed (London: SCM Press, 2001).
- Gunton, Colin E., *The Barth Lectures*, ed. by Paul H. Brazier (London: T&T Clark, 2007).
- Hart, Trevor A., *Regarding Karl Barth: Essays Toward a Reading of His Theology*

- (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999).
- Hartwell, Herbert, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Duckworth, 1964).
- Hector, Kevin W., 'God's Triunity and Self-Determination: A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7 (2005), 246-261.
- Hensley, Jeffrey, 'Trinity and Freedom: A Response to Molnar', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 61 (2008), 83-95.
- Heppe, Heinrich, *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. by Ernst Bizer, trans. by G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950).
- Hettema, Theo L., and Arie van der Kooij, *Religious Polemics in Context* (Uitgeverij Van Gorcum, 2004).
- Higton, Mike, *Christ, Providence, and History: Hans W. Frei's Public Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).
- Holmes, Christopher R. J., 'The Theological Function of the Doctrine of the Divine Attributes and the Divine Glory, with Special Reference to Karl Barth and His Reading of the Protestant Orthodox', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 61 (2008), 206-223.
- Howard, Thomas A., *Religion and the Rise of Historicism: W.M.L. De Wette, Jacob Burckhardt, and the Theological Origins of Nineteenth-Century Historical Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Hunsinger, George, 'Election and the Trinity: Twenty-Five Theses on the Theology of Karl Barth', *Modern Theology*, 24 (2008), 179-198.
- Hunsinger, George, ed., *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).
- Iggers, Georg G., 'Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995), 129-152.
- Jenson, Robert W., *Systematic Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
- Jones, Paul D., *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: Continuum, 2008).
- Jüngel, Eberhard, *Barth-Studien* (Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1982).
- , *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth; a Paraphrase*, trans. by John Webster, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).
- , *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy*, trans. by Garrett E. Paul (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986).

- Kennedy, Darren M., 'A Personalist Doctrine of Providence: Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics III.3 in Conversation with Philosophical Theology' (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2007).
- Kerr, Nathan R., *Christ, History and Apocalyptic: The Politics of Christian Mission* (London: SCM Press, 2008).
- Koslowski, Peter, ed., *The Discovery of Historicity in German Idealism and Historism* (Berlin: Springer, 2005).
- Küng, Hans, *On Being a Christian*, trans. by Edward Quinn (London: Collins, 1977).
- Lessing, G. E., *Lessing's Theological Writings*, ed. by Chadwick Henry, trans. by Chadwick Henry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957).
- Lindsay, Mark R., 'History, Holocaust, and Revelation: Beyond the Barthian Limits', *Theology Today*, 61 (2005), 455-470.
- MacDonald, Neil B., *Karl Barth and the Strange New World Within the Bible: Barth, Wittgenstein, and the Metadilemmas of the Enlightenment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).
- Mackintosh, H. R., *Types of Modern Theology: Schleiermacher to Barth* (London: Collins, 1964).
- Mangina, Joseph L., *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).
- McCormack, Bruce L., ed., *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2008).
- McCormack, Bruce L., 'Election and the Trinity: Theses in Response to George Hunsinger', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 63 (2010), 203-214.
- , 'Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8 (2006), 243-251.
- , *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
- , *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).
- McCormack, Bruce L., and Kimlyn J. Bender, eds., *Theology as Conversation: The Significance of Dialogue in Historical and Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans, 2009).
- McGrath, Alister E., *The Making of Modern German Christology: From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
- Molnar, Paul D., 'Can Jesus' Divinity Be Recognized as 'Definitive, Authentic and Essential' If It Is Grounded in Election? Just How Far Did the Later Barth Historicize Christology?', *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und*

- Religionsphilosophie*, 52 (2010), 40-81.
- , 'Can the Electing God Be God Without Us? Some Implications of Bruce McCormack's Understanding of Barth's Doctrine of Election for the Doctrine of the Trinity', *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie*, 49 (2007), 199-222.
- , *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002).
- , 'The Trinity and the Freedom of God', *Journal for Christian Theological Research*, 8 (2003), 59-66.
- , 'The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom: A Response to Kevin W. Hector', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8 (2006), 294-306.
- Neder, Adam, *Participation in Christ: An Entry Into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).
- Nimmo, Paul T., *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).
- Ogletree, Thomas W., *Christian Faith and History: A Critical Comparison of Ernst Troeltsch and Karl Barth* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964).
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. by Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (London: SCM Press, 1968).
- , *Systematic Theology, Vol. II*, trans. by G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994).
- Plant, Raymond, *Politics, Theology, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- Ranke, Leopold von, *Weltgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1881).
- Roberts, Richard H., *A Theology on Its Way?: Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).
- Rumscheidt, H. Martin, *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972).
- Shauf, Scott, *Theology As History, History As Theology: Paul in Ephesus in Acts 19* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005).
- Sherman, Robert, *The Shift to Modernity: Christ and the Doctrine of Creation in the Theologies of Schleiermacher and Barth* (New York: T&T Clark, 2005).
- Sockness, Brent W., *Against False Apologetics: Wilhelm Herrmann and Ernst Troeltsch in Conflict*, Beiträge Zur Historischen Theologie (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).
- Sonderregger, Katherine, *That Jesus Christ Was Born a Jew: Karl Barth's "Doctrine of Israel"* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992).

- Stratis, Justin, 'Speculating About Divinity? God's Immanent Life and Actualistic Ontology', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12 (2010), 20-32.
- Sykes, Stephen, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).
- Tilley, Terrence W., *History, Theology, and Faith: Dissolving the Modern Problematic* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004).
- Webster, John B., *Barth's Earlier Theology: Four Studies* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).
- , *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- , *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).
- Webster, John B., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
- Williams, Rowan, *Why Study the Past?: The Quest for the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005).
- Wood, Laurence W., *God and History: The Dialectical Tension of Faith and History in Modern Thought* (Lexington, Ky.: Emeth Publisher, 2004).