

ETHICS FROM ABOVE OR BELOW?

**A Study in the development of the ethics of Karl Barth
with special reference to his doctrine of revelation
and his theological ordering of gospel and law.**

by

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Abstract

The theology and ethics of Karl Barth have, over many decades, proven to be provocative. Barth's dialectical methodology in approaching questions of theology emphasized the gap that exists between a holy God and a fallen humanity. However, Barth's Christology bridges the gap between a transcendent and imminent God.

In this work, the author seeks to examine the ethics of Karl Barth, with special reference to his doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel and law. This thesis intends to discuss the link between Barth's theology and ethics; a link we believe was established as early as 1924 with the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula. By establishing a bridge between the 'wholly otherness' of God through the anhypostasis-enhypostasis formula and therefore a fully divine-fully human Christ, Barth found a means by which to bring God into history, and thus into the affairs of humanity, including ethics.

Because Barth's doctrine of revelation elucidates the God who is gracious from eternity, Barth re-defines the inversion of law and gospel: gospel and law for Barth, symbolizes the YES of God to humanity -- a YES that will impact Barth's entire approach to ethics.

As all of humanity is under the realm of redemption, so too, is ethics. This placing of ethics within the sphere of redemption creates problems for Barth such as absolutism and subjectivism. Reinhold Niebuhr provides a helpful launching point for our own critique of the Barthian ethic, as seen through its response to communism in Hungary in the 1950s. This work will, therefore, not only examine the development of Barth's doctrine of revelation and ordering of gospel and law, but will also discuss the implications of these two subjects for Barth's ethics. In so doing, we will conclude that while interesting, Barth's ethic falls short in daily affairs because of Barth's view of history, church and state, his rejection of norms, and his neglect of the role of the Spirit within ethics. Had Barth been willing to accept a revised form of norms held under the sovereignty of God, we believe his ethics would have had the possibility of making a greater impact on humankind.

Signed Declaration of Thesis Submitted

I, Elizabeth Carlson Vincent, swear that this thesis, and all the work associated with it, is my own composition.

To the people of Colinton Parish Church,
my family,
and to my husband Dan,
without whose love, patience, belief and prayers
I could not have fulfilled this dream.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Introduction	
1. Restlessness and Reform: Developments in Karl Barth's Theology and Ethics	8
-Early Influences on Barth	
-New Developments in Barth's theological thought (the break from liberalism and religious socialism, dialectical thinking, eschatology and revelation)	
-Developments in Barth's ethical thought	
2. From Experience to the Incarnation: The Development of Barth's Doctrine of Revelation	42
-Revelation as Experience: 1909-1915	
-Revelation as Revolutionary Eschatology: 1915-1922	
-Revelation as Resurrection within the locus and authority of the cross: 1922-1924	
-Revelation as Incarnational Eschatology: 1924	
3. The Barthian Version of the Invasion: Gospel and Law	82
-The Question of Gospel and Law	
-Gospel and Law as viewed through the lens of socialism: 1909-1915	
-Gospel and Law within revolutionary eschatology: the beginning of the YES: 1915-1922	
-The Crisis of the YES: Gospel as made manifest in crisis: 1922-1924	
-The Gospel as Incarnational Eschatology: God's Eternal Election of Humanity as reflected in the person of Christ: 1924	
4. The Ethical Aspects of Karl Barth's doctrine of revelation and gospel and law	117
-The relocation of the ethical question	
-The rejection of natural theology (analogia entis, point of contact, eristic theology)	
-The ethic of command	
dogmatics and ethics	
election and command	
the concreteness of the command	
the Church and the command	
the command and freedom	
5. Barth Encounters the Critics: Reinhold Niebuhr as a Paradigm for the Ethical Critique of Barth	150

-Background information on Niebuhr	
-The Basis for the Niebuhrian Ethic	
Christian Marxism	
Collective injustice	
The norms of justice and love	
-Niebuhr's doctrine of revelation	
personal-individual	
social-historical	
-The Niebuhrian Critique: The Crisis of Communism in Hungary	
Niebuhr's polemic against Communism	
Niebuhr's critique of Barth	
absolutism	
eschatology	
6. How Well Does the Barthian Ethic Serve Us?	188
-The relationship between Church and State	
The role of the State	
The role of the Church	
The inter-relationship between Church and State	
-Barth's doctrine of history	
Weltgeschichte	
Weltgeschehen	
History as it impacts Church and State	
-The place of norms	
Special ethics	
-A revised form of casuistry	
-The role of the Spirit within ethics	
-The Anglo-Saxon misunderstanding of Barth	
Historical/cultural factors	
The struggle with the dialectic	
Conclusion	223
Bibliography	230

INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, a fellow divinity student offered me the following advice: "Don't waste your time with Barth's ethics. After all, he has nothing relevant to say." This divinity student is not the first to make such a remark. Criticisms of Barth's ethics abound in both conservative and liberal theological circles; opponents level a similar complaint: Barth simply does not provide us with a relevant ethic.

My fascination with this critique has provided the impetus for this study. Why does there seem to be such vehement criticism of or apathy towards Barth's ethics? Does Barth really provide us with an ethic that, while congruent with his theological 'system,' is irrelevant when it confronts the complex and perplexing issues we face within theological ethics today? Perhaps, and perhaps not.

The field of ethics is a huge multi-faceted enterprise. Therefore, in order to effectively analyze issues within ethics, we must first define the type of ethic we intend to discuss. When we speak of theological ethics, a myriad of notions may enter our minds. At its most basic level, we define the Christian ethic as that which deals with the "whys" of human behavior. Christian ethics asks questions such as, "Why should we do right?" and "How do we know which criteria determine good and right?" It examines what is good and right, that is, what virtues and beliefs humanity "ought" to cultivate and how these virtues and beliefs "ought" to manifest themselves in our actions. Unlike other types of ethics, theological ethics examines moral questions from a God-centered perspective. Presupposing the existence of God and God's involvement in the world, theists address moral problems by looking to God first. Despite the variations within

various theological approaches to ethics¹ and their frequent willingness to take into consideration the contributions of other types of ethics, the approach of theological ethics' is unique: it reflects upon the question, "What am I as a child of God to do in this world as I seek to love God and my neighbor?"

What this study seeks to achieve is a critical assessment of the development of the ethics of Karl Barth during the period leading up to the ethical work found in the Church Dogmatics. In undertaking the task of addressing these questions, we find that far less has been written about Barth's ethics than about his theology. And little has been said of his ethics before what has been termed the 'mature ethics' of the Church Dogmatics.² It is our position that Barth had developed a solid and concrete ethical system before he wrote the Church Dogmatics. Although tradition has placed the Church Dogmatics in the time period in which Barth's mature ethical thinking is to be found, we would argue that the exposition of ethics articulated within the Church Dogmatics is not completely new thought but an elaboration of his earlier work. More specifically, Barth's placing of Gospel and Law occurs, albeit inchoately, as early as 1913, more clearly in 1922 within the second edition of Romans and finally, quite firmly with his adoption of the

¹For the purposes of this study, we will assume a prior knowledge of the various types of Christian ethics-i.e. teleological, deontological, etc.

²Robert Willis, in his study of Barth's ethics, The Ethics of Karl Barth (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971), states that the Church Dogmatics "represents the culmination of the methodological revision which engaged Barth's attention after the publication of the first volume of the Christian Dogmatics." (66) While Willis gives some helpful insights into the ethics of the Church Dogmatics, we believe he discounts the earlier work of Barth, particularly the Christology of the Göttingen Dogmatics, as the base for Barth's theology and ethics. Therefore, we believe Willis is incorrect in his statement that the Church Dogmatics represents the culmination of revisions from the Christian Dogmatics. Although the Church Dogmatics do represent, to a large degree, a culmination of thought, the base for this thought was established by 1924 in the Göttingen Dogmatics.

anhypostasis–enhypostasis Christology of the Göttingen Dogmatics in 1924.³ Therefore, we believe that an examination of Barth's doctrine of revelation and his theological ordering of Gospel and Law provides the key to understanding the basis of his ethics. Consequently, part of this dissertation will argue that in order to understand the ethics of Karl Barth, we must look to his early work and comprehend his treatment of the doctrine of revelation and its bearing on the theological ordering of Gospel and Law. With this goal accomplished, we believe we will show how Barth's ethic of command functions and why he chooses to approach ethics in such a fashion.

In order to assert the relevance of Barth's ethics, we must show how Barth's theology of revelation forms the framework for his ethics, with particular attention given to the issue of natural theology. Barth's understanding of revelation purely as "self-revelation" in Jesus Christ disallows any form of natural theology (and therefore middle axioms and norms) and places the theological primacy of Gospel over Law. This ordering results in an ethic as expressed in what Barth terms the Command of God. Within this phase of our study, we intend to ask questions of Barth: how do we hear God speak to us? Can an ethic of command really serve as a workable ethic? We believe that as we perform this task of analysis and critique, we will shed light on Barth's position and show how, without

³It is important to note at this early stage our indebtedness to the work of Dr. Bruce McCormack of Princeton Theological Seminary in his Ph.D. dissertation, A Scholastic of a Higher Order. In it he details a genetic study of Barth's theological development from 1921-1931. In our opinion Dr. McCormack's uncovering of Barth's use of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology, as found in the Göttingen Dogmatics of 1924, successfully challenged the argument that Barth's shift in his theological position was to be found in the 1931 Anselm work. Dr. McCormack's position has thus deeply influenced our treatment of Barth's ethics.

an adoption of a revised type of norms, Barth's ethic falls short in providing a means by which to approach everyday issues within ethics. Barth's ethics do in fact, provide a means by which to deal with ethical issues, but we are suggesting that without a modified form of norms, these means are difficult to put into practice.

Before we give a description of the proposed structure of this study, we believe it necessary to briefly discuss the terms 'Gospel' and 'Law,' as defined by Barth, and to explain how they will be used within the parameters of this study.⁴ For Barth, the Gospel is encapsulated in the doctrine of election: the God who lives in freedom, the God known to humanity in Jesus Christ (the electing God and elected man) chooses and invites humanity to join in a relationship of grace. This election of grace, Barth suggests, is the whole of the Gospel, the very essence of all good news. Yet the Gospel has a counterpart: the Law. Here Barth is much more difficult to pin down in terms of definition, for the Law is not the Decalogue or the Sermon on the Mount. It is a form of the Gospel intertwined with and unable to stand independently of the Gospel:

The Law is wholly enclosed within the Gospel: not a second (Law) beside and outside the Gospel, nor a strange (Law) that preceded the Gospel, or that followed it, but the claim that the Gospel itself and as such directs to us: the Gospel itself, in so far as it has the form of a claim which has been directed to us.⁵

~~Barth develops this idea of the Law as a form of the Gospel by basing the~~

⁴Because we will be treating Barth's ordering of Gospel and Law in great detail later in this work, the following definitions serve only to familiarize us with the terms at their most fundamental level.

⁵Karl Barth, Die Kirchliche Dogmatik II\2, 564.

Barth develops this idea of the Law as a form of the Gospel by basing the interrelationship between the two on his doctrine of election: from the first it is Gospel -- in God's decision to create humanity comes the initiation of grace, electing grace. The Law is that which claims humanity: just as God creates, so too is God responsible for humanity, and humankind is responsible to God. As the grace of God is actualized and revealed, humanity is claimed; it is this claiming which Barth terms the Law. The Gospel provides humanity with its freedom; the Law places a claim on this freedom -- not a claim that imposes bondage, but one that stands within the boundaries of an unoppressive Gospel of grace. The Law regulates and judges the use made of the freedom of the Gospel. Just as the Gospel, the revelation of God's grace to humanity, "disposes" humanity, so also does the Law as the form of the Gospel impel humanity to a future congruent with its "disposing."

According to Barth, Gospel and Law cannot be separated. Yet he is adamant that Gospel is first and that Law becomes what it is because it is a part of the Gospel. Law is found within the freedom and grace of the Gospel, the same Gospel which encloses the Law as the ark of the covenant and tables of Sinai. In this ordering we find the roots of Barth's ethical system and begin to understand the relationship between the command of God and the actions of the ethical agent.

Our examination of Barth's ethics will begin with an analysis and critique of his theological/ethical development. This first section will contain a chapter on Barth's early theological and ethical development, with specific attention given to those events and ideas which most strongly influenced Barth's theology and ethics. We understand that the topics covered in this chapter could constitute an entire dissertation. However, we will not deal exhaustively or give a genetic history of

factors facilitating our analysis.

The second section will contain two chapters that focus on Barth's method and its relationship to his ethics. We will examine Barth's doctrine of revelation as defined in four phases:⁶ revelation as experience (1909-1915); revelation as revolutionary eschatology (1915-1922); revelation as resurrection within the locus and authority of the cross (1922-1924); and revelation as incarnational eschatology (1924). We will follow the major development in his doctrine of revelation: from experience to eschatology, from revelation as an unhistorical event to revelation as containing historical content with the adaptation of the new Christological formula. We will endeavor to show how Barth's doctrine of revelation provides the framework for his ethical stance. After discussing Barth's doctrine of revelation, we will turn to his theological ordering of Gospel and Law. There we will find that Barth's ordering of Gospel and Law was set before the Church Dogmatics, paralleling the development of his doctrine of revelation, and that this ordering of gospel and law relates to Barth's refusal to accept middle axioms and norms within ethics.

Our final section will examine the implications of Barth's doctrine of revelation and his interweaving of Gospel and Law in his ethics. We will deal with the question of Barth's negation of natural theology, the idea of insuring the freedom of God within his ethics, and the parallels between the Command of God and the role of the imperative in Barth, with reference to the impact of Immanuel Kant.

~~Any discussion of Barth's ethics must include a critique. Therefore, our last~~

⁶While helpful in determining stages of Barth's development, these phases are not to be considered definitive.

Any discussion of Barth's ethic must include a critique. Therefore, our last two chapters will present an assessment of Barth, using Reinhold Niebuhr as a paradigm: Niebuhr's harsh critique of Barth's response to communism in Hungary became a focal point for Niebuhr's criticism of Barth's eschatologically-absolutist based ethic. As a vehement opponent of Barth's ethics, Niebuhr acts as a launching point for our own critique.

We affirm Barth's starting point for theology -- God's gracious election of humanity in Jesus Christ. However, we do not agree with Barth that there cannot be a place for norms within a theology 'from above.' Certainly Barth's theology results in a command based ethic, but does this mean that there can be no involvement from humanity in determining how this command might be implemented? We think not. If Barth's doctrine of sovereignty is as central as he suggests, then God must be able to use the efforts of humanity, no matter how marred they might be. We would suggest that these efforts are best reflected in a modified type of norm that falls under the authority of God and God's command, but acts in such a way as to reflect flexibility and adaptability to new ethical data. We believe that the marriage of these two concepts might provide a satisfactory compromise between an ethic from above and an ethic from below.

CHAPTER ONE

Restlessness and Reform: Developments in Karl Barth's Theology and Ethics

An examination of the ethics of Karl Barth must have as its base, an understanding of the main concepts prevalent within his theology. Therefore, in this chapter we will establish those themes and ideas that we believe are most important for our study of Barth's ethics.

Inspired by Wilhelm Herrmann's Ethik¹, Karl Barth's deep personal interest in theology burgeoned² so that by 1908, he arrived in Marburg, determined to "soak up" as much of Herrmann as possible.

Herrmann's thought addressed the relationship between religion and morality, whose synthesis was to be found in the person of Jesus.³ This Christocentric emphasis was the root of Herrmann's idea of the essential experience of life: the foundation of humanity's life is the experience of meeting the person

¹Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) was professor at Marburg from 1879. His major works include: Dogmatik (Stuttgart: Friedrich Andreas, 1925); Ethik (Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901); Geschichte der Protestantischen Dogmatik von Melanchthon bis Schleiermacher (Leipzig, 1842); Die Gewissheit des Glaubens und die Freiheit der Theologie (Freiburg: Verlag von JCB Mohr, 1889); Offenbarung und Wunder (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1908); Systematic Theology (London, 1927); Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt, 6th ed. (Stuttgart/Berlin: J.G. Gottasche, 1968); Die Wirklichkeit Gottes (Tübingen: JCB Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1914).

²See Barth's article, "The Principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann," in Theology and Church, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 238. In this article, Barth states that "In my own case, I let Herrmann say to me one essential truth. This truth, followed out to its consequences, later forced me to say almost everything else quite differently and finally led me even to an interpretation of the fundamental truth itself which was entirely different from his. And yet it was he who showed me that truth." (239).

³Wilhelm Herrmann, Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt, 6th ed. (Stuttgart/Berlin: J.G. Gottasche, 1908) ET: The Communion of the Christian with God, 102.

of God in the person of Christ.⁴ The moral consciousness of humanity only submits to the perfect moral personality in which its members discover the revelation of God, and although at this point humanity finds itself morally alive, through its relationship with God, humanity discovers its own failure that can be purified and refined only in an encounter with Jesus.⁵

Despite his close association with Martin Rade⁶, Barth was most significantly influenced in Marburg undoubtedly by Herrmann. Throughout Barth's early writings, the theology of Herrmann is apparent, as is that of the "Marburg"⁷ school: "the inwardness and individualism of true religion, the distinction between faith and the idea of faith, the contrasting ideas of assensus and fiducia, criticism of Protestant orthodoxy, the practice of seeing Luther and Schleiermacher together in the same perspective."⁸ However, we must not ascribe to Barth the title, even at this early stage in his theological studies, 'a critical student of Herrmann.' From the beginning, Barth was an independent thinker. And while he adhered to much of the 'Marburgian' theology, he was not limited by it throughout his life. This

⁴Wilhelm Herrmann, Systematic Theology (London: 1927), 64.

⁵The Communion of the Christian with God, 32, 103.

⁶Martin Rade was the Professor of Systematic Theology at Marburg and editor of Die Christliche Welt. Barth studied under him from 1908-1909 and also assisted in the editing of Die Christliche Welt.

⁷The Marburg school refers to the type of theology espoused by the theological faculty at Marburg in the early 20th century.

⁸Hendrikus Berkhof, Two Hundred Years of Theology, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 181-182.

quality of independence would mark much of his work.

II. New developments in Barth's thought: the break from liberalism, religious socialism, dialectical thinking, eschatology and revelation.

In this section of our work, we will examine those developments in Barth's thought which impact our study and aid in setting the framework for the role of revelation and the function of Gospel and Law in Barth's ethics.

A. The disillusionment of World War One and Liberal Theology.

In 1911, Barth began work in the farming and industrial town of Safenwil, where he confronted the demands of the pastorate and began to challenge the teachings to which he had once adhered. Much of the impetus for this transition came as a result of the outbreak of the war in 1915. Disillusioned by his

theological teachers' sanctioning of the actions of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Barth began

~~reassessing his teachers~~

reassessing his teachers and their ideas:
~~and their ideas!~~

"...to my dismay, among the signatories I discovered the names of almost all of my German teachers...it was like the twilight of the gods when I saw the reaction of Harnack, Herrmann, Rade, Eucken and company to the new situation...they seemed to me to have been hopelessly compromised by what I regarded as their failure in the face of the ideology of the war...their exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions could not be in order...a whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching which I had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy was shaken to the foundations, and with it all the other writings of German theologians."⁹

This critical moment in Barth's development forced him to see the inadequacy of

⁹Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 81.

19th century theology -- a "culture religion" could not survive or give hope to society. Consequently, Barth sought for a theology which, without compromise, could contend with the crises of life. He was aware he was striving for something new: "...it has come increasingly clear to me that what we need is something beyond all morality and politics and ethics. These are constantly forced into compromise with 'reality' and therefore have no saving power in themselves."¹⁰

Barth was aided in his search for 'something new' by Christoph Blumhardt¹¹ whom he met with Eduard Thurneysen in April of 1915. Blumhardt and his ideas, particularly those relating to Christian hope and the kingdom of God, intrigued Barth. Blumhardt had argued for a close alignment between hope and knowledge of God. Furthermore, his combination of the active pursuit of God's kingdom with "waiting on the patient God" impacted^{on} Barth, who assimilated Blumhardt's ideas and combined them with his own new understanding of God as the primary reality who calls humanity into question. This new beginning for Barth was significant: we see the initiation of his move from liberalism in his

¹⁰Letter to W. Spoendlin, January 4, 1915. In Busch, 84.

¹¹Christoph Blumhardt (1842-1918), son of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, espoused a theology of the kingdom of God whose hope was found in the resurrection of Christ. Blumhardt stated the following regarding this concept: "What precisely is the center of gravity of the Kingdom of God? The resurrection, God's revelation in the resurrection!....I know nothing that alarms me in the world when I consider that Jesus lives!....Jesus lives, and he lives...as the Resurrected One." From Eduard Thurneysen, *Christoph Blumhardt* (Zürich/Stuttgart: Zwingli Verlag, 1962), 47. For further interest see Blumhardt's *Christus in der Welt* (Zürich, 1958); *Predigten und Vorträge*, gehalten in der Schweiz, 1886 (Zürich, 1886); *Vom Reich Gottes* (Schlächtern, 1922); *Von der Nachfolge Jesu Christi*, aus *Predigten und Andachten* (Berlin, 1923).

questioning of both religion as experience and of the kingdom of God as that which is built by human efforts.

The encounter with Blumhardt, coupled with Barth's commitment to concentrate more intensely on studying academic theology with Thurneysen, led to Barth's deliberate focus on the Bible.¹² Although tenets of Herrmann's theology were still apparent in Barth's thinking, by 1916 his initial separation from liberalism¹³ was apparent as he sought a "radically new theological relationship between 'theory' and 'praxis,' such that the sole foundation of both would be the

¹²In discussing his study with Thurneysen, Barth said, "We tried to learn our theological ABC's all over again, beginning by reading and interpreting the writings of the Old and New Testaments more thoughtfully than before....I began to read it as though I had never read it before." From: Karl Barth, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," in The Theology of Schleiermacher (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), 264.

¹³When discussing the liberalism that Barth espoused, we are referring to the line of thought within nineteenth century theology that sought to find a common denomination of religious experience, self-evident to humanity. Ideas such as religious experience, the moral righteousness of Jesus, historical relativism, and inwardness were some of the themes Barth inherited that had been proclaimed by theologians such as Johann Fichte (1762-1814), Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922), and Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923). For further discussion on the genesis of nineteenth century liberalism see H.R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937); John Macquarrie, Twentieth Century Religious Thought (London: SCM Press, 1963); Claude Welch, Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century, vol. I: 1799-1870 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972).

Although steeped in liberal theology, Barth always was reluctant to embrace it in its totality: "One thing, however, is certain, that even before 1910 I was a stranger in my innermost being to the bourgeois world of Ritschl and his pupils....even the 'historicism' by which Ernst Troeltsch and the historians of religion of that time thought they could outbid the Ritschilians (and thus also the teacher whom I still regard so highly, Wilhelm Herrmann) struck me as being too sterile, and at any rate was not what I was looking for." From: "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," 262.

sovereignty of God."¹⁴

B. The move from liberalism continues: The first edition of Romans.

One fruit of Barth's return to the Bible appeared in his commentary on Romans. In 1916, Barth had begun a study of Paul's letter, taking notes on his discoveries, which resulted in the publication of the commentary in 1918. In the preface to the first edition, Barth summarized his purpose for undertaking such a vast and ambitious task:

...my whole energy of interpreting has been expended in an endeavour to see through and beyond history into the spirit of the Bible, which is the Eternal Spirit.¹⁵

For Barth, the question of giving God a place of centrality in theology and life was becoming more and more essential. The interaction with Blumhardt forced Barth to take this question of centrality and intertwine it with questions of eschatology and Christian hope. No longer was Barth satisfied with an eschatology that was merely a progressionistic form of optimism, that had been upheld by liberal theology: eschatology had to be grounded in more. As Barth reflected on this issue of eschatology and embarked on his study of Romans, he approached it as a sojourner in an unknown and potentially dangerous land, finding himself asking and seeking to answer the question: in a world hostile to God, how could the kingdom be seen to be at work?

¹⁴George Hunsinger, "Towards a Radical Barth," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 204.

¹⁵Karl Barth, "Preface to the first edition. (1918)," in The Epistle to the Romans, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933) B.

Barth's study of Romans was significant because it provided him with the material he needed to stress the idea of the absolute primacy and priority of God. The study of Romans, and the writing of the commentary, became that which helped Barth to proclaim the superiority of God in an alienated world. The main theme of the commentary was:

...divine eschatology, the irreversible movement from a doomed temporal order to a new living order ruled by God, the total restoration (apokatastasis) of the original, ideal creation in God. This movement of a doomed world, which still knows its origin but cannot get back to it on its own, is due solely to God, who shows His mercy in Christ. In Christ He implants a seed which will sprout and spread overpoweringly until everything is transformed back into its original splendour. All this will not take place in plain view but will work itself out eschatologically.¹⁶

Particularly significant for our study is the development of Barth's view of revelation. Previously, Barth had, like so many other theologians of the liberal tradition, equated revelation with experience. Much of this belief emanated from the thought of Friedrich Schleiermacher who viewed Christianity as both a historical phenomenon subject to higher criticism and an inner experience (aesthetically and spiritually) whose content consisted of questions of dependence. Furthermore, Schleiermacher viewed the certainty of God -- revelation -- as resting upon a specific experience characterized by absolute dependence, and he described revelation in his "Addresses on Religion to its Cultured Despisers" as

¹⁶Hans Urs von Balthasar, The Theology of Karl Barth, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1971), 48.

"every new and original communication of the universe to man."¹⁷ Hence, revelation began not from an eschatological standpoint, but from the standpoint of human experience in all times and places, fluctuating and developing with each new experience.

With the first edition of Romans in 1919, Barth drew away from the idea of revelation as experience and moved toward the concept of revelation as eschatology.¹⁸ This shift is important for two reasons. First, this new way of looking at revelation placed Barth outside the traditional liberal circle. Clearly, he was not orthodox in the sense of the Reformers, yet he was not classically liberal. The challenging of his presuppositions forced Barth to stand alone. Second, revelation as viewed eschatologically bore heavily on Barth's approach to ethics. The interconnection between the two arose in the form of a dialectic. For Barth, the concept of the dialectic had strong ties to the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). In the most general sense, Kierkegaard used the dialectic "to denote the activity of that type of thought which reaches its goal by moving between

¹⁷Friedrich Schleiermacher, "Addresses on Religion to its Cultured Despisers," in H.R. Mackintosh, Types of Modern Theology (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1937), 44.

¹⁸Barth's concept of eschatology was beginning to be refined: he did not, even in 1919, move completely to a Christocentric emphasis in eschatology -- that he developed in the second edition of Romans and the Göttingen Dogmatics. Previous to his adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula, Barth had difficulties reconciling the role of God as being in history, yet outside of it. His eschatology at this early stage reflects this struggle.

question and answer or assertion and contradiction in dialogue."¹⁹ Therefore, the dialectic works on the basis of a point-counterpoint: the question is the answer; the answer is the question, but only in relation to one particular question: that of humanity's existence.²⁰

The dialectic of ethics and eschatology manifested itself clearly in the Tambach Lecture of 1919, which we will discuss at a later stage. However, the interplay between eschatology and ethics, rather than experience and ethics is apparent in the Romans material.

C. The break with Religious Socialism and the Tambach Lecture

Not only did Barth begin to understand revelation in a new light because of the Romans study, but he also re-examined his views on the kingdom of God. Much of Barth's initial view on this particular subject had emanated from his interaction with Hermann Kutter and Leonhard Ragaz,²¹ two members of the

¹⁹Hermann Diem, Kierkegaard's Dialectic of Existence (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959), 9.

²⁰Barth would add to this statement the following: "As long as man questions, the answer is not the question; the answer can be the question only if God has done the asking; that is, what is in question is the real man in his specific situation, not abstract man." From Gesammelte Vorträge, 161.

²¹Hermann Kutter (1863-1931) was a Swiss pastor, and founder of the Religious Socialist movement in 1906. Major works include Sie Müssen (Zürich, 1904); "Wir Pfarrer" (Leipzig, 1907); Wo is Gott? (Basel, 1926).

Leonhard Ragaz (1868-1945) was also a Swiss pastor and the theological chair at Zürich from 1908-1921. Along with Kutter, he was the chief influencer of the Religious Socialist movement. Works include Der Kampf um das Reich Gottes in Blumhardt, Vater und Sohn - und weiter! (Erlenbach - Zürich, München und Leipzig, 1925). For a helpful study of Ragaz see Andreas Lindt, Leonhard Ragaz: Eine Studie zur Geschichte und Theologie des religiösen Sozialismus (Zöllikon: EVZ, 1957); Markus Mattmüller, Leonhard Ragaz und der religiöse Sozialismus,

religious socialist movement which equated the kingdom of God with social action. As early as 1908, Barth had heard Ragaz lecture on the theme of God meeting the needs of humanity through socialism. Ragaz belonged to a group of Swiss theologians who gave a "particularly surprising twist to the 'struggle for the kingdom of God' by endorsing and affirming the eschatology and the hope of the Social Democrats workers' movement, pitting it against the church, theology, and Christianity."²² From Kutter, Barth had heard the message of God's power and God's willingness to work in the church through events of secular world history.²³ While Ragaz placed emphasis on active movement,²⁴ Kutter focused more on the 'prophetic knowledge' of God. Both men helped Barth address his theological questions, but as he continued in his study of the Bible and further developed his commentary on Romans, neither completely convinced Barth to endorse wholeheartedly the religious socialist ideal. Part of his frustration and suspicion lay in Ragaz' 'systematizing' of the religious socialist belief. Barth had learned, since his disillusionment following the first world war and his subsequent study of Romans, that 'systems' do not bring God to humanity: only God is able to draw

Bd. 2 (Zöllikon: EVZ, 1968).

²²Busch, 76.

²³See Sie Müssen, whose thesis was that the message of Jesus had been distorted by the church: as an institution, Kutter believed that church had lost the vision for socio-economic change because of its emphasis on inwardness.

²⁴Ragaz was frustrated with Kutter's lack of interest in politics. See Lindt, 238ff.

humanity and change the shape of the 'kingdom on earth.'²⁵ Consequently, the kingdom of God was taking on a new shape for Barth which he would begin to articulate clearly in his 1919 Tambach Lecture.²⁶

In "The Christian's Place in Society," Barth did several important things. First, he signalled his rejection of the religious socialist teachings. From the outset, Barth articulated his point with candor: the only source of justice, the only one who has the power to calm the unrest and dissatisfaction in society, the only initiator of the kingdom, is Christ -- not Christians in general and not religious socialists in particular. No longer did Barth speak unequivocally about the hope of humanity and its ability to manufacture the kingdom. Rather, he stressed the antithesis: "reality is no longer, harmoniously and unproblematically, a cloak for divine life and operation."²⁷ The socialist task would not be commensurate with inaugurating the kingdom of God. Rather, the "socialist task would receive its

²⁵The anti-systemic approach Barth takes has strong ties to Kierkegaard. In Philosophical Fragments (1846) Kierkegaard argues against reason as an alternative in forming a concept of God: "...the Reason, in attempting to determine the Unknown...at last goes astray....if man is to receive any true knowledge about the Unknown (God) he must be made to know that it is unlike him....This knowledge the Reason cannot possibly obtain of itself; we have already see that this would be a self-contradiction. It will therefore have to obtain this knowledge from God. But even if it obtains such knowledge, it cannot understand it, and thus is quite unable to possess such knowledge." Soren Kierkegaard, Philosophical Fragments (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1936), 37. See also Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments (1846) and Either-Or (1843).

²⁶The Tambach lecture, entitled "The Christian's Place in Society," was delivered at a conference for Religious Socialists on 22-25 September, 1919 in Tambach, Thuringia.

²⁷Berkhof, 191.

ground, limit and orientation in terms of God's revolution alone."²⁸ This movement away from the religious socialist influence regarding the kingdom of God bears heavily on Barth's ethics: since the kingdom cannot be created by human attempts, the initial activity must rest with God. While the ethical agent is responsible to think and act in the earthly realm, God facilitates the reality of the kingdom. Therefore, all ethical activity must be directed by God and God's command. This relationship is crucial to our understanding of the early groundwork of Barth's ethics: even as early as 1919 (and even before this date when he initially was suspicious, in 1913, of religious socialism in its entirety), Barth gave God primacy in the ethical realm.

Furthermore, the antithetical statement Barth made regarding humanity's inability to create the kingdom of God reveals a second point of significance: in *Tambach* we see the use of dialectical language. Whereas in *Romans I*, Barth viewed the relationship between God and the world as predominantly harmonious, in *Tambach* he placed stress on the disharmony. Barth expressed the force of this new relationship in the form of dialectical tension, a style of point/counterpoint, thesis/antithesis. While he was not suggesting that God is uninvolved or lacks concern for the workings of the world, Barth was aware of a gulf between God and the world. At this juncture we see some of the ethical tension which exists for Barth: if a gulf exists between God and the world, how does one act ethically? How is the ethical agent on earth able to know the mind of God in heaven? We

²⁸Hunsinger, 211.

believe Barth resolved this ethical dilemma in two ways. First, he placed the synthesis in God, over and above the thesis and antithesis:

The original is the synthesis. It is out of this that both thesis and antithesis arise...Naturally we shall be led first not to a denial but to an affirmation of the world as it is... Only out of such an affirmation can come that genuine, radical denial which is manifestly the meaning of our movements of protest. The genuine antithesis must follow the thesis: it is through the thesis that it derives from the synthesis.²⁹

How does the placement of synthesis resolve the ethical dilemma? By placing God in the position of "origin," Barth laid the groundwork for God as both immanent and transcendent; the God who is both interacts with humanity and also remains holy and separate. Later, Barth would call this interaction as it takes place in the ethical realm, the 'Command of God.'

Second, Barth employed analogy to discuss the relationship between God and humanity. In Tambach, Barth introduced a form of analogy in which God tears down in order to build. What is significant about this form of analogy, for our purposes, is the aspect of God's tearing down human attempts at ethical solutions in order to allow God to work. This form of analogy is most important when coupled with the idea of synthesis as the first act of God, rather than the last, as it allows the grace of God to overwhelm the judgement of God: the Gospel encapsulates the Law. Thus, in the Tambach lecture we see, in its nascent stage, Barth's ordering of Gospel and Law and its relationship to ethics. For if we discern Barth's use of the dialectic as expressed in synthesis-thesis-antithesis and

²⁹Karl Barth, "The Christian's Place in Society," in The Word of God and Word of Man (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928), 299.

his use of analogy, we are able to see how his ethics function, and why, within his ethical system, they are able to function -- perhaps even in a helpful way.

Undoubtedly, the Tambach Lecture catapulted Barth onto center stage theologically. But what he said at Tambach was not by any means an articulation of his mature thought. It would continue to expand as he found new windows of opportunity to further his theological insights. One such window was the second edition of Romans.

D. The changes of Romans II.

In order to understand fully the significant changes that took place with the rewriting of the Romans material, we must first look briefly at the interim period between the first and the second edition of Romans.

During this phase of his theological development, Barth explored others' ideas which would influence his rewriting of the commentary. The first came to Barth in January of 1920 in the form of Franz Overbeck's³⁰ Christentum und Kultur. In his book, Overbeck attacked the theology of his era, with particular reference to Harnack's historical interpretation of Christianity. Barth discovered in Overbeck the "profound impotence of 'modern theology,' hidden only too well behind the fig leaf of culture-Protestantism."³¹ Presuppositions in theology, Barth

³⁰Overbeck (1837-1905) was Professor of Critical Theology from 1872-1897 at the University of Basle. His most significant contributions to Barth's thought came in the books Christentum und Kultur, ed. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli (Basle: Benno Schwabe and Co., 1919) and Über der Christlichkeit unseren heutigen Theologie (1873).

³¹Eberhard Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 56.

avowed, must be questioned, and the ultimate realities of God taken seriously if theology were to move forward. Overbeck had seen the negative side of Christianity which associated its bourgeois moral idea of the kingdom of God with Jesus' teaching. Barth believed this 'negative' side of Christianity exposed by Overbeck merited serious consideration. Yet, at the same time, Barth made room for the positive hope he gleaned from Blumhardt.

Other important influences upon Barth during this period were those of Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Plato.³² Barth's friend Eduard Thurneysen stirred an interest in Dostoevsky. In his reading of the Russian, Barth encountered the often different world of saints and sinners. More important, he discovered Dostoevsky's high esteem for forgiveness; even the vilest of sinners could experience catharsis. In the midst of this forgiveness lay hope. The same thread that wove its way throughout Dostoevsky's work now found a renewed place in the theology of Barth: forgiveness for all possible. Also important was the influence of Kierkegaard, from whom Barth gleaned the idea of 'krisis' as well as the dialectic of time and eternity, which assured the essential separation between God and humanity. Kierkegaard attacked the objectivism of the historical method and called for a total assent to faith. It was the philosopher's relentless critique that would intrigue and challenge Barth to give Kierkegaard serious attention:

He only entered my thinking seriously, and more extensively, in 1919, at the critical turning-point between the first and second editions of my Romans; after that he could be seen in a more important role in my other literary works...what we found

³²The Epistle to the Romans, 4.

particularly attractive, delightful and instructive was his inexorable criticism... We saw him using it to attack all speculation which wiped out the infinite qualitative difference between God and man.³³

Lastly, through his brother Heinrich, Barth was influenced by Plato. In his role as philosopher, Heinrich Barth encouraged Barth to listen afresh to the 'wisdom of Plato' and to examine the thought of Immanuel Kant in light of Plato.³⁴ Subsequently, Barth adopted the Platonic framework to support his view that the temporal could not, by its own power or ability, conceive of the eternal. From Plato, Barth began to put flesh on his impossible-possibility.

In the spring of 1921, the lecture "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas"³⁵ reflected some of Barth's newly incorporated ideas. Into the lecture, Barth interrelated the ideas of Overbeck, as well as those acquired from Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Plato.³⁶ Barth transformed them into a message which proclaimed loudly and clearly the need to approach theology with a critical eye -- in light of the inadequacies of the past, theology must undergo a critical inquisition. Barth based his call for critical analysis on the belief of the YES of God -- the YES which allows us to be on the inside and allows us to search relentlessly and critically. It was this YES which Barth would clothe in the NO.

³³Busch, 116.

³⁴While Plato may not have been the only 'interpreter' of Kant for Barth, his brother Heinrich's influence on Barth did emphasize the Platonic.

³⁵This lecture was delivered at the Aarau Student Conference.

³⁶Karl Barth, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 54-56, 67-69, 81-83, 92.

It was also Barth's pressing inquiry that would characterize the second edition of Romans.

Barth approached the second edition, knowing that he had to communicate the thoughts of the first edition in a new way.³⁷ He wanted to introduce a theology critical of the liberal and positivist theology of the nineteenth century while at the same time restoring to God, the God presented to humanity in the Bible, the rightful position of complete sovereignty.

Throughout the revised commentary Barth took up a polemic against 'religion': whereas in the past 'religion' had failed to bring the kingdom to earth, now only the action of God, to whom humanity stands in opposition, could bring change to the world. Within the pages of this commentary Barth undertook a frontal attack against the concept of religiosity and its tendency to make a religious system based on the law. He knew that in Romans II he had to clarify the role of grace: the grace that justifies us, the grace given in Jesus.

In the face of his polemic against religion and his rejection of his past liberal theological leanings, Barth faced difficult questions. How can humanity know God if humanity is completely separate from God?³⁸ Even in the first edition of Romans there was a larger glimmer of hope for the possibility of human 'contact' with God. But with Romans II, this glimmer seemed to have been obliterated. Was it possible that the gap could be bridged, or had Barth created an

³⁷Karl Barth, "The Preface to the Second Edition," in The Epistle to the Romans, 2.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 10.

unfillable chasm?

Confronted by this question Barth's further developed his doctrine of revelation. In order to address this issue, Barth argued that humanity gained knowledge of God through the event of the resurrection. In the resurrection revelation meets humanity:

...the unintuitable historical event of the resurrection becomes, by an act of God's grace, intuitable in the event of the cross. We see the resurrection in the Crucified... But however central the cross may be as a locus of revelation within the intuitable world, its light too is borrowed. The resurrection alone is revelation.³⁹

Resurrection is revelation. Previously in Romans I, revelation was eschatology; now it was resurrection. Barth had not abandoned completely the thought of Romans I; rather, he had refined it through this new approach. Despite the disparity created by the separateness between God and humanity, argued Barth, resurrection bridges the gap. The significance of this thought for Barth's ethical development lies in the emphasis he placed on the act of God as that which allowed for contact: Barth's framework, both theologically and ethically, gave God primacy in the initiation and in the acting out of relationship. Furthermore, as Barth refined his idea of revelation from one based wholly on eschatology, he opened the door for an ethic which was not only future oriented but also which dealt with the present situation. In the resurrection we find revelation; in the inbreaking of God to our situation, we, as ethical agents, see the possibility of

³⁹Bruce L. McCormack, "A Scholastic of a Higher Order," Ph.D. Dissertation; Princeton Theological Seminary, 1990, 130.

living as God's people in a God-forsaken world. Encouraged to live responsibly, Barth believed that humanity is called to respond to God's grace in concrete ways, not by living in accordance with abstract principles.

Barth further developed this possibility of interaction with God in his dialectic of time and eternity. He used this dialectic to ensure the distance between God and humanity, with the intent of debunking any myth about humanity's ability to reach God through effort alone. The time and eternity dialectic also gave rise to Barth's dialectic of the veiling and unveiling of God, which assured the goodness of God and 'wholly otherness' of God while maintaining the 'impossible possibility' of God's revelation to humanity.

By 1922, Barth had completely broken from the liberal tradition. With the publication of the second edition of Romans Barth fully embraced the belief that the only revolution was God's revolution, and the only initiator was God. However, it would be incorrect to state that by 1922 Barth had completely solidified his thought with regard to his theology and ethics. He had, nevertheless, had made tremendous strides in the development of his thought, particularly with regard to his understanding of revelation and the kingdom of God. It would not be, however, until 1924 in his Göttingen Dogmatics, that Barth would establish, in full, the base for all his theological and ethical thought.

E. Göttingen Dogmatics and the new Christology

In 1921, Barth accepted a position as Associate Professor of Reformed Theology in Göttingen, a post for which he felt poorly prepared and inadequate.

But the years in Göttingen would stretch and mature Barth as exemplified by his work in historical theology and his dialogue with Roman Catholic theologians. The most important work he produced during the Göttingen years was his Dogmatics of 1924, in which he made a crucial shift in his Christology. Previously, Barth approached revelation through the ahistorical event of the resurrection. In the 1924 Dogmatics, Barth adopted the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology,⁴⁰ which permitted revelation to have a historical content. By adopting the ancient Christological formula, Barth allowed for God to enter into the historical without becoming identical with it, for the human nature of Christ had its "personality, subsistence, reality only in its union with the Logos of God."⁴¹ Hence, although God was in history vis-a-vis the Incarnation, God was not equated with history. Therefore, he retained the divine incognito.

How does the adaptation of the Christology impact Barth's ethics? What makes this shift so important for our discussion? First, the new Christology marked the completion of the base of Barth's theological thought with reference to revelation. From 1924 onwards, he centered all talk of revelation on the Christology of 1924: any adaptations were merely fine tuning, not complete shifts. Second, the establishment of the Christology and its impact on the doctrine of

⁴⁰Barth was lecturing on Reformed dogmatics for the very first time in Göttingen and was particularly daunted by the task. He sought refuge by reacquainting himself with Protestant orthodoxy, and the early church Fathers, where he located the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula. See Karl Barth and Eduard Thurneysen, Revolutionary Theology in the Making, trans. James D. Smart (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964), 182-185.

⁴¹McCormack, 321.

revelation marked a crucial point in Barth's ethics: we have suggested that it is in Barth's doctrine of revelation and his theological placing of Gospel over Law that we see the key to understanding his ethics. Furthermore, we have suggested that the development of these two strands of thought parallel one another and the development of his ethics. With this relationship in mind, we deem it important to connect the development of the Christology with the development in ethics: by 1924 Barth's thought with regard to his 'theological enterprise' was set. Because his ethics parallel his theology, the conclusion is clear: by 1924 the base of Barth's ethical thought was also established. Any adaptations from this point would be those which mark a honing, rather than a transformation of his ethics.

By 1924, several significant changes had occurred in Barth's theological thought. The content of the Göttingen Dogmatics displayed Barth's new phase of dogmatic thinking. Moreover, his theology had unfolded from the days of Romans; although the dialectic was still present, Barth now maintained a newly developed view of revelation, eschatology and Christology.

At this point in Barth's theological development we move in our discussion to the development of Barth's ethics through the 1928-30 ethics lectures in Münster and Bonn.

III. Developments in Barth's ethical thought.

In this section of our discussion, we will examine four themes that occur in the development of Barth's thought which we believe touch on the significant stages of his ethical development.

A. The Primacy of God: the dialectic of ethics

As we examine Barth's ethical criteria, the concept of the full hegemony of God becomes clear as a leading, if not the leading theme of his ethics. Inherent in the theme of God's sovereignty is also the dialectic of ethics, a means by which Barth continually emphasized the distance between God and humanity.

The nascent stage in Barth's emphasis on the dominion of God is seen as early as 1916 in his lecture, "The Righteousness of God" delivered in the town church of Aarau. The motivation for the lecture was Barth's ongoing concern about ascribing to God the rightful place as the Sovereign of the universe. Because of his newly found interest, Barth desired to "begin all over again with a new inner orientation to the primitive basic truths of life; only this can deliver us from the chaos arising from the failure of conservative or revolutionary proposals and counter-proposals."⁴² This critique of both the religious socialists and the classic liberals moved Barth toward placing God as the primary agent of all ethical action. For Barth, humanity had no means to create a righteousness great enough to bring its members to God, nor could a humanly conceived ethic establish the kingdom of God on earth:

We should like to take the mighty thing into our own hands and under our own management, as we have done with so many things... the righteousness of God itself has slowly changed...and is now at all events our very own affair...You may act as if you were God, you may with ease take his rightcousness under your own

⁴²Karl Barth. Letter to W. Spöndlin, January 1916.

management. This is certainly pride.⁴³

Barth challenged any presupposition that the ethical task emanate from humanity. For Barth, the righteousness of God displayed the distance between humanity and God and therefore the necessity of God's initiation in all areas of ethics.

Barth continued to develop this theme in his lecture of February 1917, "The Strange New World Within the Bible." In it he continued his assault on the liberal and religious socialist ideology regarding the kingdom of God and epistemology.⁴⁴ It is the Bible, stated Barth, which informs humanity that God has sought it.⁴⁵ In this argument Barth furthered his insistence on the primacy of God within ethics: because humanity cannot find God via reason, or even through sincere searching, neither can humanity construct or live an ethic not rooted in the priority, authority and sovereignty of God. As it submits to hearing the Word of God in each situation, new and fresh, humanity discerns what is ethically correct.

Paralleling the theme of the dialectic in his theology, was the dialectic within ethics. This feature was most noticeable in the second edition of Romans.

⁴³Barth, "The Righteousness of God," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 15-16.

⁴⁴Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 39-41.

⁴⁵For Barth, "The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what He says to us; not how we find the way to him but how He has sought and found the way to us." *Ibid.*, 43. See also page 45.

For Barth, the dialectic of ethics is that which disturbs humanity.⁴⁶ As it faces the ethical question, "What should I do?," humanity confronts the truth of God, that truth being that in light of who God is, humanity cannot speak of God.⁴⁷ Our encounter with this disturbance creates the dialectical tension: as thought about God disturbs humanity, so does the problem of ethics disturb our conversation about God -- the relationship is reciprocal. Just as ethics cannot be separated into its own discipline, just as ethics is dogmatics, so the dialectical tension we know, as we confront the reality of our separateness from God, impinges upon the ethical realm. God disturbs both the dogmatist and the moralist. The dialectical tension forces humanity to recognize God as the creator and initiator of the ethical moment:

There is no such thing as the 'building up' by men of an adequate ethical life, not even if the quality of their moral behaviour were so sublime that it might be claimed that the will of God had been united with the human will, or that the human will had been absorbed into the divine, or that the divine will had been fulfilled in the human will. All human doing or not-doing is simply an occasion or opportunity of pointing to that which alone is worthy of being called 'action', namely, the action of God. In the sphere of ethics, this rule is adamant.⁴⁸

"The Problem of Ethics Today" also reiterated the theme of the dialectic as that which maintains the primacy of God within ethics. Delivered at a pastor's conference in Wiesbaden and Lüneburg in September 1922, this lecture synthesized

⁴⁶The Epistle to the Romans, 424.

⁴⁷Ibid., 427.

⁴⁸The Epistle to the Romans, 431-432.

what Barth had been saying since 1916. The problem of ethics, stated Barth, is disturbing and disquieting. Rooted in crisis,⁴⁹ it implicates humanity, a crisis which leads to responsibility, a crisis of response to God. Within this lecture Barth vehemently criticized liberalism as incapable of making prophetic, Christian discernments⁵⁰ -- the starting point for all theology and ethics had been lost, and what Barth was attempting to communicate was that the crisis of humanity's inability to find God theologically and ethically was the starting place for all theology and ethics: humanity must seek the base of all theology and ethics first and foremost with God and God's action.⁵¹

B. Ethics as dogmatics: dogmatics as the locus of ethics

A second theme, evident throughout the development of Barth's ethics, is his placement of ethics within the locus of dogmatics. As mentioned previously, Barth believed ethics to be dogmatics, a thought given much attention in the Church Dogmatics. But where are the threads of this theme prior to the Church Dogmatics? We find the first strands of this idea in "The Righteousness of God" in which Barth argued against attitudes and practices of the nineteenth century which had separated theology and ethics into two different disciplines.⁵²

Barth's critique of those who divided ethics and dogmatics expressed itself

⁴⁹Karl Barth, "The Problem of Ethics Today," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 139.

⁵⁰Ibid., 146-147, 149.

⁵¹Ibid., 169.

⁵²"The Righteousness of God," 16-18, 21-22.

in the form of a rebuke against the efforts of 'religion' to create a different ethic from that tied to dogmatics. Although Barth did not directly argue for the unification of dogmatics and ethics in this lecture, it adumbrates thoughts later developed in the second edition of Romans. Within Romans II Barth continued to enunciate this theme. In his exegesis of chapter 12, verse 1, Barth articulated the relationship between dogmatics and ethics in this way: "the problem of 'ethics' is...identical with the problem of 'dogmatics': Soli Deo gloria!"⁵³ Humanity faces this problem when it attempts to speak of God: in its realization that it cannot speak about God, that even its attempts fall short of reaching to the heavens, in the face of the dialectic, humanity is claimed by the truth of God's action. So also in the field of ethics is humanity claimed by this very same truth. Therefore, the attempt to separate what is intimately related results in the very same despair that, according to Barth, we find in the dogmatic dilemma. However, humanity is not left in the chasm of theological or ethical doubt, for the same God who reaches out to us and initiates relationship with us in the realm of dogmatics does so in the ethical.⁵⁴

"The Problem of Ethics Today" further elucidated this idea set forth in the second edition of Romans. Barth became far more direct in his critique of nineteenth century theology and its attempt to sever dogmatics from ethics. He

⁵³The Epistle to the Romans, 431.

⁵⁴There are not, for Barth, two realms of God's dealings with humanity -- the one true God deals with humankind in what Barth classifies as dogmatics and ethics.

stated that in the past theologians and philosophers treated the ethical problem as purely academic. Barth argued that the belief in the nineteenth century was so naive that it simplified the question of the good.⁵⁵ Rather than attempting to discover 'what to do,' the nineteenth century theologies focussed energy on which theologian or philosopher had the most compelling argument or formula for ethics to perpetuate an 'infinitely imperfect but infinitely perfect culture.' Barth posited that in the face of the crisis in which twentieth century humanity found itself; it could not but look to the interrelationship between dogmatics and ethics for an answer. Because, according to Barth, the ways of humanity had been proven impossible in relation to the ethic of Christianity (and this is a direct reference back to Barth's disillusionment with World War I), humanity faced a need for an ethic that could arise only from a relationship with dogmatics, a relationship founded on God and God alone.

By the time Barth delivered his ethics lectures in Münster and Bonn in 1928-30, he had clearly articulated his position on dogmatics as ethics. Within the lectures, Barth decried the division of the two disciplines; to separate them was to surrender Christian theology:

Justice will be done to the special problem of Christian ethics
...when we do not regard the Christian element as just the
predicate but as the subject...when we do not let human conduct
as such be the centre, beginning and the end of theological ethics,
but allot this position instead to man's claiming by the Word of
God, to his sanctification, to God's action in and on his own

⁵⁵"The Problem of Ethics Today," 147-148.

action.⁵⁶

Important for our discussion at this point is to note the emphasis Barth placed not only on the primacy of God but also on the unique relationship between dogmatics and ethics. Early in his thought, Barth desired to create an ethic which united theory and praxis, for "if the knowledge of God is not in itself the service of God -- if eternal truth does not include goals, if illumined consciousness is not in itself will and faith act -- then what are they?"⁵⁷ This thought will be important for our assessment of Barth later in this work, for many denounce his ethics as incapable of uniting theory and praxis.⁵⁸ If this be the case, was Barth shortsighted in his concern, or is his ethic purely theoretical and not practical? Does the union of dogmatics and ethics help Christians face and resolve ethical dilemmas, or does the union hinder such efforts?

C. The Command of God and its koinonia function.

As the union of dogmatics and ethics is significant for Barth's ethic, so also are two further relevant concepts: the command of God and the function of the Church. By 1916, Barth had begun to formulate the idea of the command of God as the basis for ethics. In "The Righteousness of God" Barth indirectly called for an ethic rooted both in God and the command of God. Remembering that much

⁵⁶Karl Barth, Ethics (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 49.

⁵⁷Ibid.; 9.

⁵⁸Barth has been criticized for having an 'Olympian' ethic that does not apply to everyday life. One critic who levelled this complaint was Reinhold Niebuhr, whose polemic we will address later in this work.

of this lecture was a battle cry against the prevalence of liberalism and its emphasis on morality and religion, we must focus on how Barth develops the idea of the command. First, we see this idea in his insistence on allowing 'God to be God.'⁵⁹ Barth argued that all of humanity's knowledge about theology and ethics originates from God as God chooses to initiate relationship with its members. Therefore, the origin of ethics must stem from what Barth called the command. Religiosity, morality, or philosophy cannot create a platform upon which to proclaim any ethic: God is the one who calls us to ethical action: God's command tells us what is 'good' and 'right.'⁶⁰

Second, in pointing out the inadequacy of human reason, intellect and will to reach God, Barth called for something different -- humanity must stop and listen to God:

There is a fundamentally different way to come into relation with the righteousness of God. This **other** way we enter not by speech nor reflection nor reason, but by being still, by listening to and not silencing the conscience when we have hardly begun to hear its voice.⁶¹

In listening, humanity finds the righteousness of God. In listening, humanity finds that God is right. In listening, humanity hears the command of God.

In the 1927 lecture, "Das Halten Der Gebote," Barth was much more

⁵⁹"The Righteousness of God," 24.

⁶⁰Ibid., 23.

⁶¹"The Righteousness of God," 23.

deliberate about the command of God. Some scholars, such as Robert Willis,⁶² have argued that this lecture provides the first instance of Barth's reference to the command.⁶³ Although we suggest that Barth began to formulate this idea well before this lecture, the lecture itself is instructive for our interest in the command. "Das Halten der Gebote" was Barth's attempt to approach, in a new way, the question of the relationship between faith and works. He formulated the relationship between ethics and the Word of God in the form of a question: what shall we do? Barth stated the issue in this way:

...what are we then to do?...no answer can be given except this: follow the command, understanding both ideas in their plainest and deepest meaning as they are to be understood in the Bible.⁶⁴

The concept of the command of God plays a major role in Barth's ethics. But how does it best function? According to Barth, within the locus and authority of the Church. In the lecture "The Desirability and Possibility of a Universal Reformed Creed," Barth reflected upon the role of the church and its relationship to ethics. If we recall that during this period (1923-1925) Barth had been expanding his theological horizons with particular reference to studies in the Creeds and Confessions of the Church and to interaction with Roman Catholic theologians, the importance of this lecture becomes obvious. What Barth had learned in new areas of theology he appropriated in the ethical realm. The Church must have

⁶²Robert Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971).

⁶³Ibid., 41.

⁶⁴Karl Barth, "Das Halten der Gebote," Zwischen den Zeiten V (1927): 206.

something to say regarding the concrete life of men and women; in the ethical stand of the church, those on the outside see the church as the arena for ethical discussion.⁶⁵ As such and as a locus of authority, we see the koinonia function of Barth's ethics. They are not an individualistic ethic in which one hears an etherial command and does as one pleases. Rather, the command of God is heard by Christians concretely within the locus of the church amidst the history of the Creeds and Confessions and amongst the community of faith.

D. Ethics and the freedom of God

Although Barth viewed the Church as a locus of authority, the Church does not stand alone. As with all aspects of Barth's theology, it stands under the authority of God. Barth expressed this idea of God's authority in terms of God's freedom. In many ways, this is the most difficult of Barth's ideas to discuss, primarily because it is a large theme within the work of Barth. For our purposes, we will touch only on two points which we believe important in Barth's ethical development.

The first relates to Barth's position on the primacy of God in ethics. As we have stated, much of Barth's energy in the late 1910's and 1920's directed itself toward combatting the theology and the ethics of the nineteenth century. Because of the prevailing emphasis on the ability of humanity to reach God through reason, experience and even good will, Barth knew he had to restore what was, in his mind, the freedom of God: the freedom of God to act -- to choose humanity in

⁶⁵See Karl Barth, "Church and Culture" and "Church and Theology" in Theology and Church.

grace and love and thereby to initiate the moment of relationship. Barth believed the theology of the nineteenth century had obliterated this concept of God's freedom. Therefore, he focussed on establishing the primacy of God in theology and ethics. God is free in God's command to humanity; God is free in the concreteness and the uniqueness of the command for each situation. God is free in the fresh hearing of the Word by humanity as it encounters ethical decisions within the locus and authority of the church. Hence, we see that much of Barth's concern about maintaining the freedom of God relates directly to his fight against his predecessors and his desire to place God first in all things, to knock down the towers of Babel built by human hands and establish the base of all theology and ethics in the righteousness of God.⁶⁶

Second, we find Barth's concern with the freedom of God related to his fight against natural theology. We will discuss this concern in greater detail later in this work, but at this stage we note Barth's aversion to any kind of natural theology, any form of analogia entis, or any kind of eristics. Barth abhorred natural theology because of its tendency to allow humanity to arrogate to itself the credit for entering into a relationship with God. Perhaps Barth is overly defensive in his polemic against natural theology with its limitation on God's freedom.⁶⁷ But given his theological and ethical enterprise, it is no surprise that no room exists in his thought for a natural theology -- especially in the realm of dogmatics and

⁶⁶"The Righteousness of God," 14.

⁶⁷Barth saw natural theology a threatening because he believed it 'humanized' God's sovereignty. For further discussion, see Chapters 4 and 5.

ethics.

IV. Conclusions

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine what we believe to be crucial points of development in Karl Barth's theology and ethics during the time period of the 1920's. We believe this process necessary in order to clarify the thesis of this study, which argues that the ethical thought as explicated in the Church Dogmatics is not new thought but an elaboration of thought adumbrated and even clarified in earlier works. We have argued that Barth's ethical development parallels his theological development: as changes occurred in his theology, so also did changes occur within his ethics. As Barth rejected the tenets^{ets} of liberal theology, so too, did he reject an ethic originating in the actions of humanity. As Barth developed his thinking regarding the complete sovereignty of God, his ethics became an ethic of the command of God. In discussing the dialectic which entered into his theological thinking -- the dialectic which posits the separation existing between God and humanity, we see the role of the dialectic within ethics. Humanity cannot create or live an ethic construed by reason or good will; humanity must submit itself to the sovereignty of God and to the command of God as it is heard by Christians within the locus and authority of the Church. Finally, with the adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology of the Göttingen Dogmatics, in which revelation is given historical content, (the imminence and transcendence of God is upheld),- God enters into history without losing the divine incognito. Therefore, in the realm of ethics we have a God who,

while remaining separate and holy, enters into the world and interacts with creation.

By 1924, Barth's thought had matured in significant ways, so much so, that he had set forth the entire base of his theology and ethics by the mid-1920's, with periodic refinements. If, as we believe, by 1924 Barth's theology and ethics were set, then the implications are important: no longer is the thought of the Church Dogmatics completely new thought. It is, rather, that which mirrors the work of the 1920's. Moreover, Barth's ethics during the church struggle of the 1930's did not arise 'ad hoc' but were a result of the base he had set early in his work. We believe that as his theological base was set, so too, was his ethical: both being established by 1924. In discussing these ideas, we must understand the significant points of entry for unlocking Barth's ethical system. The first emanates from the development of his doctrine of revelation, a subject to which we now turn our attention.

CHAPTER TWO

From Experience to the Incarnation: The Development of Barth's Doctrine of Revelation

In order to fully understand Barth's ethic, we must address his doctrine of revelation; it is intimately tied to his entire theology, and therefore his ethics. In tracing Barth's doctrine of revelation, we will show how it was established by 1924 with the adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula of the Göttingen Dogmatics. In the doctrine of revelation, as presented in the Göttingen Dogmatics, we find a refinement in Barth's thought regarding the question of the role of history and faith: for the first time, Barth was able to reconcile a God who would fully enter into and participate in the affairs of humanity, yet remain holy and distinct from humanity. In this doctrine of revelation, we find that God was able to be a part of the human arena, including the realm of ethics, in such a way as to completely understand and experience human life, but remain sovereign over it. As Barth established his doctrine of revelation by the mid-Twenties, so too, we will argue, was the basic structure of his ethical thought developed.

Our purpose in this chapter is to discover Karl Barth's interpretation of revelation and analyze its development in the period of the Twenties with particular reference to the impact on Barth's ethics. In order to analyze Barth's understanding of revelation, we have separated his development into four phases: (1) revelation as experience; (2) revelation as revolutionary eschatology; (3) revelation as resurrection within the locus of the cross; and (4) revelation as incarnational eschatology within the locus and authority of the Church. Our first task is to examine Barth's initial phase: revelation as experience.

I. Revelation as experience: 1909-1915

Barth's first approach to revelation stressed the role of experience as the medium by which God could be known. In this regard he was most influenced by nineteenth century theologians like Friedrich Schleiermacher.¹ After Kant's reshaping of Enlightenment thought,² Schleiermacher heralded many new ideas as he attempted to find a mid-point between protestant dogmatism and philosophic rationalism. Drawing upon certain Kantian suggestions, Schleiermacher based his view not on speculative reason but on the sentiments of the heart or intuition (Gefühl).³ His experiential approach declared that faith rested upon the basis of a highest knowledge of human feeling or immediate self-awareness in correlation to God:

...the feeling of absolute dependence becomes a clear self-consciousness...in this sense it can indeed be said that God is given to us in feeling in an original way; and if we speak of an original revelation of God to man or in man, the meaning will always be this, that, along with the absolute dependence which characterizes not only man but all temporal existence, there is given to man also the immediate self-

¹Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), a prominent theologian of the nineteenth century was best known for his approach to revelation as a feeling of absolute dependence. His most famous works include The Christian Faith (1821-1822), eds. H.R. Mackintosh and James Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928); On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers(1799), trans. John Oman (New York: Harper and Row, 1958). For Barth's interpretation of Schleiermacher, see The Theology of Schleiermacher (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982); Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1973). Of the influence of Schleiermacher, Barth wrote, "The first place in a history of theology in the most recent times belongs and always will belong to Schleiermacher, and he has no rival....The nineteenth century brought with it many deviations from Schleiermacher, and many protests against him, and he was often overlooked and forgotten. But in the theological field it was nevertheless his century." From Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century, 425.

²See Immanuel Kant, The Critique of Pure Reason, trans. F. Max Müller (New York: Macmillan and Co., 1915).

³On Religion, 90.

consciousness of it, which becomes a consciousness of God.⁴

For Schleiermacher, self-consciousness was a sense of dependence on God, and humanity's feelings were the immediate product of the universe. This consciousness of being wholly and utterly dependent was, therefore, tantamount to being in relation to God.⁵

In addressing the question of revelation, Schleiermacher turned to his philosophy of religion, centering on the feeling of absolute dependence. According to Schleiermacher, revelation was any original or new communication of the Universe to humanity.⁶ The content of revelation was, therefore, nothing but immediate self-awareness in which each individual knew what was original and new and what was repeated and learned elsewhere. Dogma and doctrine had no prominent place in Schleiermacher's view, and revelation interested him only in its function as a 'transformer' of humanity's religious consciousness. Therefore, Schleiermacher approached revelation and all of theology from an anthropocentric point of view, from religious consciousness, from humanity's action in regard to God. Faith was not God's revelation but humanity's experience, the former being a correlate to the latter.

We would misunderstand Schleiermacher if, at this stage, we simply stated that theologically he approached revelation purely from the position of an analogia entis. This is untrue. Throughout two of his major works, Dialectic and The Christian Faith, God was presented to humanity, but humanity possessed no strictly

⁴Friedrich Schleiermacher, The Christian Faith, ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Stewart, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 17-18.

⁵Mackintosh, 42.

⁶Schleiermacher, On Religion, in Mackintosh, 44.

objective cognition of God; God was never apprehended purely, but always with the correlate of a finite human element, that being, the feeling of absolute dependence. The feeling of the Universe (or the Divine) was the cause for the change and piety of the human soul.

With this approach Schleiermacher combatted the school of rationalism which equated human knowledge with knowledge of God. By presupposing that feeling was "a mode of objective apprehension, a species of emotional perception or awareness of spiritual things,"⁷ Schleiermacher postulated a God whose divine presence could be known in human feeling. This notion about God was one of the legacies inherited by Barth. The other was found in the thought of his greatest teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann.⁸

Herrmann held that the truth of moral ideas was evident to humanity.⁹ He believed that humanity's moral task was to gain an actual unitary will or disposition -- to achieve a personal life in which one realized the good will by living wholly for others.¹⁰ But in seeking these moral ideas, humanity, Herrmann argued, finds itself confronted with its weakness: unable to realize the good by living wholly for others, it needs an encounter with Christ.¹¹ Because a morality, which raises

⁷Mackintosh, 48.

⁸For an understanding of Herrmann's influence on Barth, see Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondance of 1923, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 4-5. Hereafter cited as Revelation and Theology.

⁹Wilhelm Herrmann, Ethik, 5th ed. (Tübingen: JCB Mohr, repr. 1921), 90, 93, 95.

¹⁰Herrmann, Systematic Theology, 27.

¹¹Herrmann, Der Verkehr des Christen mit Gott im Anschluss an Luther dargestellt, 94. Hereafter cited as Der Verkehr.

humanity above what it was, can originate only when humanity is filled with awe and trust for others, a person is needed in whom humanity's trust will not be disappointed. This one is the historical Jesus as presented in the Gospels.¹²

The Christian faith, presented to humanity through Jesus and his inner life, was best exemplified by an inward subjection to God:¹³ in faith, argued Herrmann, humanity gained the conviction that God's power (above and beyond this world) led its life through this world to an incorruptible consummation. While God was the fulfiller of human longing as expressed in conscience, so too, was God opposed to humanity and idolatrous religion such as that found, according to Herrmann, in eighteenth century European bourgeois values.

Like Schleiermacher, Herrmann sought to obliterate what Barth believed to be culture religion of reason found in the eighteenth century and to create a religion based solely on the self-revelation of God. Herrmann viewed this self-revelation as "...any sort of communication...if we have found God in it. But we find and have God only when he so incontestably touches and seizes us that we wholly yield ourselves to him...God reveals himself in that he forces us to trust him wholly."¹⁴ While God's self-revelation is a matter belonging to God, it does have a subjective human element which correlates to the authenticity of the believer. God's revelation is only for those who want to be authentic, and thus, Herrmann wanted to underscore that "the moral self- determination to which the superiority of a stronger personal life brings us is also the beginning of a faith of

¹²Herrmann, Systematic Theology, 47ff.

¹³Herrmann, Der Verkehr, 65.

¹⁴Wilhelm Herrmann, Der Begriff der Offenbarung, in H. R. Niebuhr's The Meaning of Revelation (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 152.

a genuinely religious nature."¹⁵ Lest humanity believe itself able to rationalize its way to God through superior reason (as in the Enlightenment), Herrmann emphasized that only Jesus as the revelation of God made true religion possible.

This true religion was based on two aspects of the revelation of Christ. First, revelation was grounded in the positive datum of Jesus of Nazareth¹⁶ -- the inner life of Jesus as portrayed in the gospel story which communicated God's omnipotence and goodness. Second, revelation was based on the practical reason by which humanity recognized this datum as the ultimate moral demand which made God language appropriate. Herrmann did not place the greatest weight on discussing revelation on the latter point, for by 1910, he would divorce revelation and history.¹⁷ Severing the connection between faith (personal) and the results of research into the question of historical trustworthiness, Herrmann relegated faith to the position of being beyond (Jenseits) history. When humanity found faith as expressed in the 'inner life' of Jesus, and found in itself the image of this "inner life," there it found itself in communion with God.¹⁸

In his doctrine of revelation, Herrmann assaulted the Enlightenment. Like Schleiermacher, Herrmann gave credence to the role of the inward state of humanity, which seemed to result in a type of divine revelation in each individual's

¹⁵Wilhelm Herrmann, Der Verkehr, iv.

¹⁶Herrmann, Systematic Theology, 52.

¹⁷For Herrmann's view of history see Hans Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909-1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism," Yale University Ph.D. Dissertation, 1956, 348.

¹⁸Herrmann criticized Schleiermacher because he believed Schleiermacher "never investigated...whether the consciousness of absolute dependence in the inner life of men did not arise from certain facts experienced by them." From "Christlich-Protestantische Dogmatik," in Die Kultur der Gegenwart, 2nd ed., ed. Paul Hinneberg (Berlin and Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1910), 143-144.

life. However, this revelation could be imparted only by the experience of a liberating and guiding goodness found in the inner life of Jesus. Unfortunately, Herrmann became confusing in this very principle of the "inner life." We never really find out what he meant by the "secret inner life of Jesus" and how this secret is imparted to humanity. However, most important for Barth would be not only the emphasis on inwardness but the divorcing of revelation from the historical, as well as a Christocentric perspective,¹⁹ themes derived directly from Herrmann. These constituted major factors influencing the first phase in the development of Barth's doctrine of revelation.

As we examine this first phase, four main points stand out as the foundation of his position. First, Barth espoused a belief in a revelation based not on reason but on experience. In the 1915 essay, "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott," Barth witnessed to the necessity of grounding knowledge (or faith in God's personality) through the medium of religious experience. According to Barth, reason or dogmatics "should explicate religious experience.... Religious experience is the last court of appeal."²⁰

Second, Barth appealed to religious individualism (inwardness) and historical relativism. As early as 1909, in his first sermon in Geneva, Barth preached that he saw himself as a 'guide to the sphere of the inner life,' reminding his congregation that he could do no more. In the same year Barth again posited

¹⁹Berkhof, 145.

²⁰Peter H. Monsma, Karl Barth's Idea of Revelation (Somerville, New Jersey: Somerset Press, Inc., 1937), 44.

that religion was experience "understood in rigorously individual terms."²¹ We can hear the words of Herrmann resonating through Barth in statements such as "the ground of faith is the personal inner life of Jesus. By that I mean his human character which is described to us as utter obedience towards God, as complete love of his brethren, and therefore as complete self-denial, which does not halt even in the face of death."²²

Third, Barth embraced the view that faith not founded on history and historical study. Thus he articulated an historical relativism, espousing that faith and revelation could be possible only with the presupposition of an absolute relation to an absolute history.²³ For Barth, there was no inherent connection or marriage of history and revelation.²⁴ But history could, through what Barth termed 'Das Leben aus Gott,' reflect a religious idea of God within humanity. This 'Das Leben aus Gott' was, according to Barth, aroused through the gospel of Jesus. Therefore, although God was not known by any argument from human analogy or by a projection of human self-consciousness into another realm, God was known on the basis of religious experience worked through the mediation of history -- this mediation being found in 'Das Leben aus Gott,' or the gospel of Jesus. Even at this early stage in his formulation of ideas about revelation, Barth

²¹Karl Barth, "Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 19 (1909): 320-321.

²²Karl Barth, April 1911, in Busch, 56.

²³Barth rejects the "opposition of faith and history in favor of their coincidence." From Karl Barth, "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte," Schweizerische theologische Zeitschrift 29 (1912): 4. Eberhard Jüngel points out that for Barth, faith was Christian "insofar as the personality of Jesus has historically mediated presence within human society." See Jüngel, 29.

²⁴"Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte," 77ff.

separated human means to God from God's means. In no way had he rejected the liberal teaching vis-a-vis experience and inwardness, but a glimpse of a movement directed towards a revelation based fully on the action and initiation of God had appeared. This movement, however, would come later and would not be completely developed until 1922 when Barth broke entirely from both liberalism and socialism as far as the religious socialism of Ragaz and Kutter.

Lastly, in the initial stage of working out his doctrine of revelation, Barth did place emphasis on Christology, albeit in nascent form. Preaching again in Geneva in September 1909, Barth stated that the beginning as well as the goal of humanity was Christ. From Herrmann, Barth had inherited a view of Christ as an image of revelation and as the Redeemer of humanity. Although this Christological emphasis was far different from that expressed in his later theology, clearly Barth had begun to think in Christological terms and sought to reconcile these thoughts with his views on revelation.

In developing his doctrinal position on revelation, Barth stood, for the most part, in the Marburg tradition. During this first phase, Barth held firm to several important points: the role of experience in revelation; the inwardness of faith; revelation as separate from history yet faith as abstractly mediated by history through the secret inner life of Jesus (not the historical Jesus); and the special place of Christology inherited from Herrmann and Schleiermacher.

The impact of Schleiermacher and Herrmann, especially Herrmann, cannot be underestimated. So significant was Herrmann for Barth that the latter once stated,

...on the day I began my ministry, five minutes before I was to go up into the pulpit, the post brought the new, fourth edition of Herrmann's Ethik, which the author had sent me. I

accepted this coincidence as a dedication of my whole future.²⁵

While Herrmann's Ethik may have seemed portentous, the impact and influence of Herrmann would wane, as would that of most of the theologians of the time, when, with the outbreak of World War I, Herrmann and his colleagues affirmed the actions of Kaiser Wilhelm II -- an event which would catapult Barth into the second phase in the development of his doctrine of revelation.

II. Revelation as eschatology: 1915-1922

With the outbreak of World War I and the disillusionment that came from seeing his theological mentors support the actions of Kaiser Wilhelm II, Barth was forced to rethink his theology. He was now acutely and painfully aware that the theology, which he had once viewed as a displacement of Enlightenment error was only an extension of it in terms of its support of a 'bourgeois culture religion' of the state. With an 'enlightenment' of his own, Barth disavowed his teachers. In a letter to Eduard Thurneysen Barth stated, "The spiritual situation of our German friends is now more comprehensible to me even if it is not more congenial...It is truly sad! Marburg and German civilization have lost something in my eyes by this breakdown and indeed forever!"²⁶

As Barth sought to find a new theological base, he was impressed by the thought of Christoph Blumhardt.²⁷ In this theologian's writings Barth found a hope

²⁵Busch, 52.

²⁶Letter dated September 4, 1914, in Briefwechsel Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen; 2 vols. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1973-74), 1:9-10.

²⁷Of his relationship with the Blumhardt's Barth said, "in the midst of this hopeless confusion, it was the message of the two Blumhardt's with its orientation on Christian hope which above all else began to make sense to me. I owe my acquaintance with it to my friend Eduard Thurneysen." From "Fakultätsalbum der Evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät Münster, 1927," in Karl Barth-Rudolph



centered in eschatological thinking. It presented a new way for Barth to approach the Kingdom of God. Blumhardt's theology, as Barth analyzed it, could relate to and be involved in the world yet still be faithful to God (unlike the thought of the Enlightenment which reduced God to a predicate of human reason) because Blumhardt's starting point was God.²⁸

The eschatology of Blumhardt affirmed Christ's victory on the cross -- the Easter miracle gave humanity reconciliation with God and a hope for the initiation of the kingdom. Armed with the idea of 'revolutionary expectancy' gleaned from his socialist leanings, Barth seized upon Blumhardt's idea of the victorious God as the means by which humanity might see the potential of a coming kingdom.²⁹ Indeed, what characterizes Barth's thought during this second phase is precisely this idea of revolutionary eschatology, whereby God breaks into the world and encounters it in a new way.³⁰ God's Kingdom becomes a possibility realized in the present, although it will only find its fulfillment in the eschaton.

Whereas in Phase I Barth viewed revelation as experience, in Phase II, revelation was rooted in an eschatology of 'revolutionary' proportions. We must

Bultmann Letters, 1922-1966, ed. Bernd Jaspert (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 154. Hereafter cited as "Fakultätsalbum."

²⁸Revelation and Theology, 12.

²⁹Ibid., 13.

³⁰Thomas F. Torrance underlines the significance of Blumhardt on Barth's eschatology that Torrance characterizes as "...a fresh understanding of the Kingdom of God as the breaking into the world of God's unutterable compassion in a victorious grace which was both the judgement of the world and the great supernatural saving event of the Gospel. God has poured himself out in love upon the world in Jesus Christ in order to take all its agony and hurt upon himself, and his purpose of love will conquer, come what may." Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931 (London: SCM Press, 1962), 36.

not assume, however, that this formulation was simply a modification of Blumhardt's ideas. Barth still infused his theology with a large dose of socialist ideology. Certainly he did question what he viewed as the religious socialist's attempt to create a system which seemed to confine God. Nevertheless, Barth still had room for socialism, particularly as a human reflection of the Kingdom of God. Furthermore, Barth's insistence on a revolutionary eschatology reflected the strong polemic against 'religion' he had formulated during this period. In the lecture, "Religion and Socialism," Barth decried the idea that God's kingdom could be equated with religion. Rather, that kingdom was interpreted as "the living majesty of God."³¹ Although Barth still held on to vestiges of socialism³² (especially in terms of a God manifested in a new and radical way which transformed the world), Barth was beginning to make clear that his true concern was to regain and retain the sovereignty of God, which he expressed in his doctrine of revelation as revolutionary eschatology.

For Barth, revelation took on an eschatological emphasis, not in the sense of end times, but in the relationship of time to eternity -- the distance between humanity and God. Phase II adumbrates thoughts on this relationship, which Barth

³¹Jüngel, 31.

³²Within Barth studies, debate has arisen over the relationship between Barth's theology and socialism. Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, in Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1985), argues that Barth's theology was a by-product of his political activity while a pastor in Safenwil. This position has elicited much response: see Markus Barth, "Current Discussion on the Political Character of Karl Barth's Theology," in Footnotes to a Theology: The Karl Barth Colloquium of 1972, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Sciences and Religious Supplements, 1974); George Hunsiger, ed. Karl Barth and Radical Politics (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976); Eberhard Jüngel, Barth-Studien (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 1982); Thomas F. Torrance, Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931 (London: SCM Press, 1962).

developed more fully and explicitly in Phase III in his second edition of the commentary on Romans. However nascent or inchoate, the relationship between God and humanity as expressed in revolutionary eschatology³³ was present in this phase of Barth's development and therefore warrants our attention.

In adopting a position regarding revelation, Barth made an important move from the position he had held as a student and young pastor: whereas he had once viewed revelation as experience, (inward experience), he began to view revelation as a 'God-event,' certainly not an anthropological exercise. The first commentary on Romans banished the notion of revelation as experience and inwardness. For Barth the reality of revelation was one in which "God expropriates our unholy individuality."³⁴ At this juncture, two points stand out for our discussion: first, Barth moved away from an optimistic view of humanity. While he did not fully express his anthropocentric reservation until Romans II, there was still a hint of his

³³When speaking of revolutionary eschatology, we are referring to Barth's position regarding God's relationship with humanity: in a fresh and exciting way, God enters the world, "showing that the 'return of all things to their source' (Der Römerbrief, first edition, 332) is the world of the dissolver of all bonds who intrudes into the dying world. (See Jüngel, 33)

The idea of revolution means a fundamental transformation, difference from what has come before. This transformation, "is so radical that it cannot be forged by the old powers; only new powers can produce it." Helmut Gollwitzer, "Kingdom of God and Socialism in the Theology of Karl Barth," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, 92. For a provocative discussion on revolution see Paul Lehmann, "Karl Barth, Theologian of Permanent Revolution," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 28 (Fall, 1972); The Transfiguration of Politics (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

The definition of revolution underlines why the term revolutionary eschatology is so important for understanding Barth's doctrine of revelation: for Barth, as he began to reshape his theology, there had to be something radically new: this something was God and God's relationship with humanity.

³⁴Karl Barth, Der Römerbrief (Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1963 reprint of the first edition), 423.

distrust of theology grounded in human goodness and effort.³⁵ Second, Barth moved away from the idea of inwardness. If we recall that in Phase I Barth equated revelation as inwardness and individuality, two ideas gleaned from Herrmann, we see the importance of a statement as that cited earlier, in which Barth negated individualism as a theological/revelational starting point.

Barth was distancing himself, even in this transitional time, from his liberal roots and from a view of God based on human experience and intuition. The significance of this development is clear, for with it, Barth began to restructure not only his view of humanity but his entire theological enterprise.

As Barth began to express his newly found insights on God and the Scripture (arising out of his relationship with Eduard Thurneysen and his interaction with the Blumhardts)³⁶ he formulated his vision of the dialectical tension existing between the world and God. No longer are God and humanity in pure harmony; no longer is humanity able to reach God by its high powers of reason. Rather, God is the one who permeates our world, despite the separateness which exists between the world and God. Revolutionary eschatology bridges the gap between a world distant from God, not quietly or subtly, but in the form of a revolution. A new world enters into our world -- the world of God: "Do we desire the presence of God? Do we dare go whither evidently we are being led? That were faith! A new world projects itself into our old ordinary world."³⁷

Revelation is revolution for Barth, but in Phase II, the revolution is God's,

³⁵Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 56.

³⁶Revelation and Theology, 12-13.

³⁷Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 37.

not humanity's. Expressed as a metaphor, God's revolution is a "cosmic intrusion into the cosmic order,"³⁸ a revolution that entails everything -- "trust in God, [the] solving of the riddle of life,...the certainty of salvation."³⁹ While Barth believed the revolution belonged to God, strains of previous thought remained. For example, socialism, as a human reflection of the kingdom of God, was still in the forefront of Barth's thought,⁴⁰ and he believed that some kind of human element was involved in creating the kingdom on earth. He seemed to be linking a vision of the possibility of an eschatological kingdom with a present reality. This effort would be dropped completely in 1919 in the Tambach lecture and even more so in Romans II. The difference is that here in Phase II, Barth took the positive hope discovered in Blumhardt and concentrated on the 'already' in the 'not yet.' In later stages, particularly in Romans II (phase III), Barth appeared "to bring the 'already' to silence in his concentration on the 'not yet.'"⁴¹ Hence, we find that in Phase II, Barth moved completely away from the focus of his first phase of revolution as experience but still maintained vestiges of his socialist thought regarding the kingdom of God.⁴²

Most significant for our purposes was Barth's new launching point for theology: God was now seen as the initiator, bursting into the world, breaking the eschatological barrier. Yet while God entered into the world in a revolutionary

³⁸Barth, Der Römerbrief, 135.

³⁹Ibid., 241, 246, 250.

⁴⁰Jüngel, 31.

⁴¹Michael Beintker Die Dialektik in der dialektischen Theologie Karl Barths (München: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1987), 39-40.

⁴²See Marquardt, Theologie und Sozialismus and "Sozialismus bei Karl Barth," Junge Kirche 33 (1972): 2-15.

way (and here one could say we see this inbreaking through the human vehicle of socialism), God did not enter fully into history. In other words, God did not become equated with the world into which he entered. Therefore, at this point in time, Barth had a doctrine of revelation which allowed for a God who radically encountered the world yet remained distinct from it. This 'imminent and transcendent' God was, for Barth, the God of unhistorical revelation.

According to Barth, the revelation of God is not an historical event. Although at this point in his development humanity seems to have a more prominent role to play in the revelation of God (ie. via socialism), revelation is still not to be confused with history. Yes, God entered into history, but God is not to be equated with this history:⁴³ "When God enters, history for awhile ceases to be, and there is nothing more to ask; for something wholly different and new begins -- a history with its own distinct grounds, possibilities and hypotheses."⁴⁴ Again, in "The Christian's Place in Society," Barth underlined this distinction:

I mean a movement from above, a movement from a third dimension, so to speak, which transcends and yet penetrates all these movements and gives them their inner meaning and motive; a movement which has neither its origin nor its aim in space, time, or in the contingency of things, and yet is not a movement apart from others: I mean the movement of God in history.⁴⁵

At this point in time (1919), Barth had moved away from the socialist thought more prevalent in the earlier stages of this phase. Now Barth separated the possibility of a humanly fabricated kingdom from the kingdom of God and made clear the

⁴³For a discussion of Barth's view of history, see Charles West, Communism and the Theologians (London: SCM Press, 1958).

⁴⁴"The Strange New World Within the Bible," 37.

⁴⁵Karl Barth, "The Christian's Place in Society," 283.

distinction between a God who enters into history and a God who becomes equated with history.⁴⁶ Simply stated, Barth could not accept a God equated with history. To accept such a position would be to reaffirm the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the optimism of the liberals. At this point in time, Barth's thought adumbrated the thought of the second edition of Romans, a development emanating from his encounter with Franz Overbeck.⁴⁷

The period in which Barth met with Overbeck and began rethinking his commentary on Romans could, in some ways, constitute a separate phase in itself. However, we have chosen to include this period in the second phase of Barth's development of his doctrine of revelation because we view it as a transitional phase. Barth's thought was, in many ways, still entrenched in the God of revolutionary eschatology and hope. Now, however, because of the encounter with Overbeck, Barth's thought on revelation (with reference to the historical) would take on a new shape. How did Overbeck influence Barth? What was so important about Overbeck's thought that it stirred Barth to reassess his thought?: The answer is this: Overbeck's view of history.

Overbeck approached Christianity with a suspicion which was, for him, validated by Christianity's decline into historicism. According to Overbeck, history was "an abyss into which Christianity has been thrown wholly against its will."⁴⁸ He therefore created a new category by which to join Christianity and history : Urgeschichte, or primal history. For Overbeck, Urgeschichte was that

⁴⁶Ibid., 298, 320, 323.

⁴⁷"Fakultätsalbum," 155.

⁴⁸Franz Overbeck, Christentum und Kultur, ed. Carl Albrecht Bernoulli, (Basel: Benno Schwabe and Co., 1919), 7.

which lay beyond normal human history, that which transcended the events and happenings in the world and pointed to the "supratemporal, unknowable, inconceivable."⁴⁹ Enamored by this idea, Barth adopted and refined it within his own thought.

What appealed to Barth was the concept of God being in history without being equated with history. The seeds of this notion planted by Overbeck began to grow and marked a move from Phase I of Barth's thinking about revelation. In Phase I Barth, following his teachers, had mistrusted history as a means of revelation⁵⁰ (although Herrmann had confused the issue by holding to what he had termed the historical reality of the secret inner life of Jesus); however, within this second phase of development, Barth refined this mistrust even further by separating the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith and by adopting Overbeck's concept of Urgeschichte. By 1920, the power and impact of Overbeck's influence was obvious in Barth's lecture, "Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vista." Here Barth described his interpretation of Biblical history:

Biblical religious history has the distinction of being in its essence, in its utmost character, neither religious nor historical...not religion, but reality, not history, but truth, one might say...Biblical history in the Old and New Testaments is not really history at all, but seen from above is a series of free divine acts and seen from below a series of fruitless attempts to undertake something in itself impossible.⁵¹

At this point two points need to be underscored: first, by 1920, Barth left behind

⁴⁹Karl Barth, "Unsettled Questions for Theology Today," in Theology and Church, 58.

⁵⁰As early as 1912 Barth had stated, "God is not found in history." From: "Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte," Schweizerische theologische Zeitschrift 29 (1912): 3.

⁵¹"Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas," 66, 72.

any vestiges of reference to religious socialism as a human reflection of the kingdom of God. Now the kingdom of God was radically distinct both from any human enterprise and from human history, although a part of it. Second, Barth began to insist on the freedom of God. Recalling that as early as 1916 Barth had coined the phrase "let God be God,"⁵² we see in this lecture a leaning towards a God-centered theological approach. Barth had been wanting to clarify this idea ever since 1915 when he broke with liberalism. In Romans II he would continue this clarification process. However, within this second phase, Barth also wanted to communicate that when speaking of revelation (and its relationship to history) God's freedom was at stake: the freedom to be God and God alone, the freedom to be involved with humanity yet distinct from humanity, the freedom to be in history but not equated with history. Barth's adaptation of Overbeck's *Urgeschichte* was crucial in terms of the former's complete insistence on the sovereignty and freedom of God within revelation. For Barth, when speaking of the relationship between history and revelation,⁵³ *Urgeschichte* was the only possibility.

With the adoption of *Urgeschichte*, Barth gravitated from emphasizing the "now" of the Kingdom to focusing on the "not yet" of the Kingdom. The hope he

⁵²"The Righteousness of God," 24. Barth also said this in a sermon on Genesis 5.16, in 1916. See "Das Eine Notwendige," Die XX Christliche Studenten-Konferenz (Aarau, March 13-15, 1916), 10ff.

⁵³Barth clarifies that for him, only primal history is the answer when talking of history in its relation to God: "The only possible abode of Christianity lies, so far as the past is concerned, not in history, but in the history before history, the *Urgeschichte*. And only non-historical concepts, standards and possibilities of observation could put us in the position to understand, to talk about -- in fact, to represent in any way -- this Christianity which is not Christianity in the historical sense." From: "Unsettled Questions for Theology Today," 62.

had found in the Blumhardts he did not in any way abandon. Indeed, Barth would always place the 'Yes' of God first -- the grace and hope of God, in a position of primacy over the 'No' and judgment of God. Yet disillusioned by his theological teachers and socialism, recommitted to the Scriptures in a new and exciting way, intrigued and influenced by Overbeck, Barth now shifted his gaze from the 'now' to the 'not yet' as a means to combat any form of rationalism or religion, as human attempts to reach God. He would now, during this transition period of Phase II, concentrate on the gap apparent between God and humanity, a rift which could not be bridged by any human historical act.

Barth's thought regarding history and revelation in this phase of his development is significant for two main reasons. First, his break with the theological tradition of Marburg, and especially Wilhelm Herrmann, would be complete. Both were now "very far away....Without explicitly referring to it [Marburg] he is constantly combatting it. Over against its bloodless idealism Barth posited his realism; over against its individualism, he offered his organic way of thinking...he had now decisively turned his back on Herrmann."⁵⁴ Second, the adoption of Urgeschichte and his new way of approaching theology had forced Barth to rethink the first commentary on Romans. In a letter to Eduard Thurneyson dated October 27, 1920, Barth wrote: "...suddenly the letter to the Romans began to shed its skin; that is, I received the enlightenment that, as it now stands, it is simply impossible that it should be reprinted; rather it must be reformed root to branch."⁵⁵

⁵⁴Berkhof, 188.

⁵⁵Barth, Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 53.

As a result of this new view of history, and his break with the socialist tradition, Barth had to find a new way of viewing the kingdom of God, namely from the perspective of the 'not yet,' a shift in emphasis which would mark the beginning of a new phase for Barth in his doctrine of revelation.

III. Revelation as Resurrection within the locus of the Cross: 1922-1924.

With the realization that the first edition of Romans needed to be reformed and rewritten, Barth began a task which would further clarify and define his doctrine of revelation as centered in the Resurrection within the locus of the Cross. Crediting Franz Overbeck as one of the chief influences in his reworking of the commentary, Barth stated in a letter to Eduard Thurneyson: "For the rest we shall be happy that we have already come so far -chiefly through Overbeck whom we cannot thank enough."⁵⁶ In Overbeck, Barth had found a means to communicate the dominant thought in his newly found theology: as human history obscured true religion,⁵⁷ via Christianity's fall into culture protestantism, the only kind of history which could validate and positively represent Christianity, revelation, and its relationship to God was Urgeschichte; a history that while present in the world was above and outside the world, placing God in a position of sovereignty and maintaining God's holiness and transcendence.⁵⁸

As Barth reapproached the Romans commentary, he did not obliterate what he had stated in the first edition. Rather, he sought to modify and refine:

Whatever its merits and failings, the first edition can now

⁵⁶Karl Barth to Eduard Thurneyson, December 6, 1920, in Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 55.

⁵⁷The Epistle to the Romans, 100.

⁵⁸Ibid., 118, 268.

disappear from the scene. The work has been continued...New advance positions have been occupied, and, as a result, the original position has been completely reformed and consolidated. Consequently the position as a whole has an entirely different aspect. And yet identity of historical subject matter as well as of the theme of which both editions treat, guarantees a definite continuity between the old and new.⁵⁹

This continuity is important to note. We cannot dismiss Barth's past thought as merely adiaphorous. It must be likened to a continuous line moving in one direction. However, we must also recognize the importance of the metamorphosis taking place. With the rewriting of the commentary and its new emphases and aspects, Barth completely broke all ties with the liberal and socialist traditions. He was now stepping out on a branch alone (although really not alone, as he would find in his later study of the Creeds and Confessions of the Church). In 1922, he was sending out a battle cry against all 'religion,' against all attempts to 'humanize' God, against any theology that did not have God as its beginning, middle and end.

During this third phase in the development of his doctrine of revelation, Barth focussed more intently on what he termed the 'no' of God, than on the 'yes' upon which he had focussed in his second phase of development. One of the ways in which Barth made this shift apparent was in his speech regarding humanity's relationship to God. The positive image of hope so clearly rooted in his early encounters with the Blumhardt's was now overshadowed. Instead, Barth emphasized the reality of the world's humanity, its inability to escape its finitude, its limitation, its separation from God:

'God stands in contrast to humanity as the IMPOSSIBLE in contrast to the possible, as DEATH in contrast to life, as ETERNITY in

⁵⁹"The Preface to the Second Edition," 2. [Underline mine.]

contrast to time. There is no way which leads to this event; there is NO faculty in humanity for apprehending it; for the way and the faculty are themselves new, being the revelation and faith, the knowing and being known enjoyed by the new humanity.⁶⁰

While Barth emphasized the negative, or the impossibility, he did not negate the possibility of a revelation of God to humanity. But this revelation is not created or discovered by human reason or will. This revelation is God's revelation, the revelation of faith, apprehended by humanity in the event of the Resurrection with reference to the cross of Jesus Christ.⁶¹ Even before Romans II we see the new emphasis of Barth: the inability of humanity to come to God on its own terms, the impossibility of revelation made possible by an act of God, and the unique relationship between time and eternity so helpfully supported by Barth's adoption of *Urgeschichte* as a historical category.

While we may, at first encounter, think that Barth now abandoned the hope found in phase II and completely changed his thought to focus primarily and exclusively on the negative, we must not jump to such a conclusion as have many other critics of Barth. Barth did not -- and this is key -- ever forget the positive as expressed in the grace of God. (We will perceive this point more clearly in our next chapter as we examine his theological ordering of Gospel over Law). For Barth, even in the darkness there is always light -- even in the negative, the positive shines forth, for without God's first initiating revelation, an act which we believe to be rooted and sustained in the positive, there can be no negative understanding of why humanity is unable to reach God by its own machinations.

⁶⁰Karl Barth, "The Task of the Ministry," in The Word of God and the Word of Man, 189-90, 197. [Caps mine].

⁶¹The Epistle to the Romans, 206-207.

True, there was a huge, seemingly unbreachable chasm created by Barth in this phase. Perhaps even Barth felt it to be so. However, this chasm, would force Barth to seek to find a bridge for the gap -- a bridge he believed could be found within the doctrine of revelation as approached and understood in the ahistorical event of the Resurrection.⁶²

Whereas in Phase II revelation was seen as revolutionary eschatology with the emphasis resting upon the possibility of the hope of the 'now' of God's kingdom, in Phase III Barth established revelation as Resurrection. What did this new 'category' mean for Barth? It certainly did not mean a rejection of revelation as eschatology. It meant a refining of the idea. The emphasis, as stated earlier in our discussion, moved from the 'now' to the 'not yet' -- revelation can be known only through the event of the Resurrection.⁶³ The distant God, inaccessible to human knowledge, was made known in the Resurrection, for in the Resurrection, humanity caught a glimpse of the 'not yet' in the 'now':

'The Resurrection from the dead is...the transformation: the establishing or declaration of that point from above, and the corresponding discerning it from below. The Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God and the apprehending of God in Jesus. The Resurrection is the emergence of the necessity of giving glory to God; the reckoning with what is known and unobservable in Jesus, the recognition of Him as Paradox, Victor and Primal History. In the Resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it. And precisely because it does not touch it, it touches it as its frontier -- as the new world.'⁶⁴

⁶²Ibid., 195.

⁶³Ibid., 206.

⁶⁴The Epistle to the Romans, 30.

Barth's entire doctrine of revelation in Phase III is outlined in this statement. Not only is the Resurrection the revelation but also the recognition of the 'not yet' in the 'now' vis-a-vis the victorious Christ. And yet this revelation is a paradox of sorts, for it touches our world only as a tangent touches a circle -- without really touching it. God enters into human history via Urgeschichte and therefore is not equated with human history which would, for Barth, destroy God's mystery and sovereignty. In the event of the Resurrection, humanity sees the "impossible-possibility."⁶⁵ Not because Jesus is the revelation. In no way was Barth at this point in his development equating Jesus with revelation. From his perspective, Jesus was a medium of revelation who, in his victory on the cross, in his exalted state, revealed God to humanity.⁶⁶ But not in any other state -- definitely not in his historical presence as a human on the earth. In no way did Barth wish to reduce God to a revelation which humanity could take into its hands, manipulate and call its own. For this reason Barth refused to equate Jesus with the revelation, or revelation with the historical. For Barth, revelation could be accomplished only by God being made known without the loss of the divine.⁶⁷ Therefore, revelation could not be a figure in history. Revelation had to be beyond history.⁶⁸ Following this logic Barth placed a high priority on communicating the ahistorical nature of revelation.

⁶⁵Ibid., 195.

⁶⁶Ibid., 203.

⁶⁷See McCormack, p.135, for a most helpful discussion on this topic. McCormack's study of the genesis of Barth's theology provides a very useful reference point not only for this discussion, but for any discussion regarding Barth's theology.

⁶⁸The Epistle to the Romans, 205.

For Barth, Jesus was a medium of revelation within the framework of the Cross and Resurrection. In the event of the Resurrection, the impossible became and remained possible. Recalling that in Phase I and Phase II, we saw Barth give weightier attention to the historical figure of Jesus, we must not infer that in these early phases Barth equated the historical Jesus with revelation. However, the legacy of Herrmann's "secret inner life of Jesus" seemed viable for the early Barth in that God "as the individual inner certainty and authority which became divine revelation for him in Christ as he moves through the history of peoples."⁶⁹ But by 1922, Barth had broken away from this viewpoint to espouse the belief that Jesus was purely a medium. Within history Jesus could only be a paradox.⁷⁰ But in the event of the Resurrection, in the eschatology of the Resurrection, that is, God breaking into time from eternity, Jesus was Victor, but the event not Jesus, is the revelation. We must have Jesus, but we must also have Resurrection.⁷¹

In the event of the Resurrection and through the medium of Christ, Barth believed that God was able to remain God (holy, other and sovereign), and humanity is

made aware of the impossible eschatological possibility - the possibility that he who receives the revelation, and as such must yield and decrease to pass to corruption, is he who has been saved and justified and raised from the dead: saved as one has been lost, justified as beyond justification - this is the resurrection of the dead, which in Christ enters within

⁶⁹Monsma, 34.

⁷⁰The Epistle to the Romans, 29.

⁷¹Karl Barth, The Resurrection of the Dead (London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1933), 152.

the possibility. Thus God manifests himself.⁷²

While in Phase II Barth did not in any way label Jesus directly as the revelation, little was mentioned about the role of Jesus. In Phase III, however, Barth seemingly took a hard line approach to the issue: Jesus himself was not the revelation but the medium of the event of Resurrection and revelation.⁷³ About this point Barth seems overly emphatic. Why was it so significant for Barth to spell out clearly the role of Jesus as only a medium of revelation? Because of Barth's view of history, Jesus as a historical figure could not be revelation. Jesus as God within history could not reveal God because then the divine incognito would be lost and be subject to the manipulations of humanity.⁷⁴ For this reason, Barth vehemently insisted revelation be ahistorical.

According to Barth, the historical is "subject to time. And whatever is subject to time is limited, is relative, is made manifest as world by the last things."⁷⁵ History for Barth, can be defined only in its relation to the ahistorical. History has validity only when it bears witness to the historical;⁷⁶ the non-historical forms the veritable substance of quality of all history.⁷⁷ The unhistorical, with its ability to touch history without becoming equated with history, was the crux of the historical debate for Barth and was crucial for his

⁷²The Epistle to the Romans, 415-416.

⁷³The Epistle to the Romans, 203.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Barth, "Unsettled Questions for Theology Today," 59.

⁷⁶The Epistle to the Romans, 146.

⁷⁷Ibid.; 147.

theology of revelation. Barth maintained that revelation had to be unhistorical because it could not be a predicate to human experience:

If we thrust the Resurrection into history, if we set the presupposition which is in Jesus within the sequence of events, if we weave the paradox of faith into human spiritual experience, we introduce, as it were, a specter which devours every living thing...Resurrection ceases to be resurrection if it be some abnormal event side by side with other events...If the revelation of Jesus be no more than a particular historical happening, an event among other events, a religion among other religions, its relative and particular character ought to become apparent when contrasted with an occurrence so remote as is the story of the religion of Abraham.⁷⁸

Here Barth underscored that in his way of thinking, revelation has to be unhistorical; otherwise it will be subject to human interference. Revelation could now only be an event, forever initiated by God, not created by human experience, never actually participating in world history. Revelation intersects history, and in so doing, neutralizes any attempt by humanity to claim any form of ownership: revelation is in this world, but not of this world. It is not similar to any human experience that might be likened to the divine, it is the divine, initiated by the Divine and carried out in such a way that humanity is able to participate only by responding in faith to the resurrected, victorious, yet paradoxical Christ.

We must not, at this juncture, confuse Barth's insistence on the unhistoricity of revelation as an effort to minimize historical fact. For Barth, the Resurrection was a specific event in time, in history, in a particular place. In this sense, revelation/Resurrection was historical. But the historical process did not, in itself, produce the event of the Resurrection. This was accomplished only by God and therefore revelation also (being equated with Resurrection at this stage by Barth)

⁷⁸Ibid.; 115-117.

could only be enacted by God from above to humanity below.

For Barth, the truth of God was not dependent upon the historical process. How clearly we see Barth combatting the same nineteenth century liberalism which he had once embraced! His new view of history, along with his strong emphasis on the 'not yet,' was undoubtedly an effort to renounce, once and for all, any possibility of humanity's ability to reach God, find God, and control God. With Phase III, highlighted most effectively in Romans II, Barth finally and completely broke away from anything liberal. In this sense, one phase of his development was complete. He would never look back on the break, nor would he ever mitigate his strong attack against 'religion.' With his modified view of revelation in this phase, we see, more than ever, the vast separation between God and humanity. But we must emphasize that this phase is not a complete shift from earlier stages. It is a modification of thought germinated in 1915 in Barth's initial disillusionment with liberalism and socialism. Barth did not, in any way, abandon the eschatology established in Phase II (with particular reference to Romans I). Rather, Barth refined and refocused it. Eschatology -- meaning the relationship between time and eternity⁷⁹ -- was as ever, at the forefront of his thought, for according to Barth, "if Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology there remains in it no relationship whatsoever with Christ."⁸⁰

⁷⁹Dr. Bruce McCormack makes a helpful distinction regarding Barth's eschatology during the period of Romans II. He states that Barth' eschatology "has to do with the relation of eternity to time, a relation which is always and everywhere the same." (McCormack, p.145). Also helpful is a citation from Barth's 1923 lectures later published as The Resurrection of the Dead, in which he spells out clearly the distinction between eschatology as last things and eschatology as that which reflects the relation between eternity and time. See The Resurrection of the Dead (London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1933), 110-112.

⁸⁰The Epistle to the Romans, 314.

The connection between eschatology, Resurrection and revelation is apparent: eschatology for Barth defines the relation between time and eternity.⁸¹ Resurrection as revelation intersects the line between time and eternity but does not equate time with eternity, humanity with God, the historical with the ahistorical. The eschatology of Phase III can be regarded as a different side of the same coin of Phase II in which eschatology was more a present reality (although still ahistorical) vis-a-vis the socialist ideology of the Kingdom of God. With Phase III, eschatology is more untouchable yet still a realistic possibility.

While it may seem that the eschatological relationship in Phase III is wholly negative (i.e. in Barth's insistence upon the chasm of separation between God and humanity, the Kiekegaardian sickness unto death, and the 'NO' of God to humanity), a positive relationship can be seen in history: God, through the medium of Christ, through the event of the Resurrection, enters into history but does not become bound by or equated with it, thereby retaining the divine sovereignty and divine incognito.⁸² The unknowable God becomes knowable; the transcendent God, immanent. The Resurrection brings revelation and knowledge by faith, of the "disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God and the apprehending of God in Jesus...the action, the supreme miracle, by which God the unknown...dwelling in light inapproachable...makes himself known."⁸³

Barth would soon restructure this event of knowing (the Resurrection). In

⁸¹Karl Barth, "The Freedom of the Word of God," in Come, Holy Spirit (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1934), 221f.

⁸²Barth said that, "what touches us -- and yet does not touch us -- in Jesus the Christ is the Kingdom of God who is both Creator and Redeemer." From The Epistle to the Romans, 30.

⁸³Ibid.; 30, 35.

his lectures on the Incarnation in the Summer of 1924, Barth began to examine more closely the relationship between the Incarnation and Revelation, an examination which would cause Barth to modify for the last time, his doctrine of revelation.

IV. Revelation as incarnational eschatology: 1924

Barth's transition from the phase of Romans II was marked by several different influences, each^{of} which moved Barth towards a new emanation^{in relation to} at the role of the Incarnation within revelation. Barth had a deep desire to expand his Christology through a Trinitarian looking glass. He had been accused by Hermann Kutter of living in a Christological vacuum, leaning towards docetism.⁸⁴ This charge Barth wanted to refute. Therefore, he began to reframe the question of revelation from a Trinitarian viewpoint, a new perspective at this stage in his thought. In late May of 1924, he wrote to Eduard Thurneysen: "I understand the Trinity as the problem of the inalienable subjectivity of God in his revelation..."⁸⁵

With the concern about the Kutter attack, earlier work on the history of doctrine, as well as the preparation of his lectures on dogmatics and the Incarnation, Barth found himself engaging in a new ways not only with the doctrines of the Ancient Church and Reformers but also with the dogmatic thought of Heinrich Heppe.⁸⁶

Perhaps Heppe was most helpful for Barth as the latter sought to find a way

⁸⁴See Kutter's letter to Eduard Thurneysen in Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 210-211.

⁸⁵Barth, Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 185.

⁸⁶Barth was most helped by Heppe's Reformed Dogmatics, revised and ed. by Ernst Bizer (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), v-viii. For an understanding of Barth's appreciation of Heppe, see Karl Barth, "Zum Geleit," in Heinrich Heppe's Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche, ed. Ernst Bizer (Neukirchen: Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins Neukirchen, Kreis Moers, 1935), iii-iv.

to approach the teaching of Reformed Dogmatics, for in Heppe, Barth found much of the material, with respect to Reformed Doctrine, which he lacked from his liberal training. Furthermore, Barth's dialogues with Roman Catholic theologians forced him to take more seriously the historical impact of the Ancient Church. Consequently, early in 1924, Barth began to shift his focus for the very last time as he wrestled with the foundations of his theology.

During the period of Phase IV, Barth's major and most significant work in the area of revelation came with his lectures in dogmatics given to students in Göttingen. In these Barth's doctrine of revelation, as well as the base for his theological and ethical thought, would reach maturation.

The doctrine of revelation found within the Göttingen Dogmatics is best defined as incarnational eschatology. In Phase III, and particularly in Romans II, Barth approached revelation through the event of the Resurrection. Christ's life was significant only in its relation to the Resurrection in which Jesus assumed an exalted, victorious state. But in the Göttingen lectures, Barth developed his revelational theology further to include the Incarnation: not only did revelation now meet humanity in the Incarnation, but it also entered into history, taking on historical content.

This new position found its roots in Barth's adoption of the ancient anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology. Revelation was still considered an event in which God is veiled and yet revealed in a creaturely reality; the modification of Barth's doctrine of revelation was its basis in the Incarnation. Eschatology now found its fulfillment in the Incarnation and within history! The adoption of the ancient Christological formula allowed Barth to have a God who, while entering into history fully, could still maintain the divine incognito. Suddenly, the God so

far away and removed from the events of humanity and its history, entered into these events and this history to be revealed to the creation.

This new adaptation to Barth's thought was, in many ways, revolutionary. With it, Barth still maintained that a chasm separated God and humanity; that humanity could not, through its own machinations, bridge the gap; and that God, in an infinite act of grace, entered into the world fully, thus breaking through the eschatological barrier between God and humanity. This modification in Barth's thought merits more attention, as we discuss revelation within the Göttingen Dogmatics and the impact of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology on Barth's doctrine of revelation as well as his ethics.

When we examine the Göttingen Dogmatics, we immediately notice similarities to his doctrine of revelation in Phase III. First, God is still subject. In no way has Barth abandoned his firm belief that the theological enterprise begins with God. For Barth, "revelation means the knowledge of God through God and from God."⁸⁷ Barth argues that modern theology's tendency to locate revelation in feeling or experience (here combatting Schleiermacher primarily) relegates God to the level of an object for human use and consumption, rather than ascribes to God the role of subject who chooses, in the event of revelation, to become object. Second, God is, even in the event of revelation, still wholly God. The content of revelation is not a part of God, or an aspect of God's character, but God alone, wholly God. Third, God is the one who reveals the revelation:

The revelation of **this** God...cannot be confused or admixed with humanity's question, because no matter in which person he reveals himself, in virtue of the

⁸⁷Karl Barth, The Göttingen Dogmatics, v.I, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1991), 61.

unity of his three persons he escapes every attempt of humanity to identify him with itself, and as a final Word that both attracts and repels he constantly tells humanity that he himself is God.⁸⁸

Lastly, God is still the hidden God. While God now fully enters into history and is revealed, God is still veiled. Revelation is thus not a direct openness on God's behalf but a becoming open. The husk is torn away, the incomprehensibility is removed, but God's infinite sovereignty is retained. God does not, in any way, lose the divine incognito. God does in these 1924 dogmatics, however, seem to be more approachable, more reachable, than in Phase III. But in sovereignty and holiness God is still hidden.

While Barth retained much of his view of revelation from Phase III and carried it over into Phase IV, the main difference is evident in his eschatology, for with Phase IV, Barth's eschatology would move from being rooted primarily in the Resurrection with reference to the locus of the cross, to the event of the Incarnation, with reference to the locus and authority of the Church. We have stated earlier that with the modification in his eschatology, Barth allowed for the possibility of the historicity of revelation. What prompted Barth to make this move? What factors were involved as he struggled to make sense of a doctrine of revelation that might possibly have historical content and yet not obliterate the 'wholly otherness' of God? These were questions Barth asked himself as he wrote his lectures on dogmatics.

In the margin of his notes, Barth wrote to himself, "If God is so immutably God (transcendence, immanence, turning to us), does he reveal himself? Is he not

⁸⁸Ibid.; 96.

hidden precisely in his revelation?"⁸⁹ The question confronting Barth was, 'Could the hidden God be also the revealed God?' For Barth, the hidden God could also become the revealed God only by concealing God's deity in another; God's being subject by a being as an object. For Karl Barth, everything is dependent upon God concealing His 'inaccessible' divine I-ness with a human I-ness, as with a veil, so that humanity can grasp God as a person: God could not merely be an object, but a recognizable I, a human being.⁹⁰ The hidden God could become the revealed God in an I-Thou relationship with humanity. But what might the conditions of this revelation be? How might the hidden God be revealed? Could there possibly be revelation with historical content? According to Barth, yes, as long as certain conditions were met:

1. God must be wholly God. It must really be God who encounters humanity if revelation is to be possible.⁹¹
2. God must meet humanity, and therefore God must be truly human and nothing else.⁹²
3. The real deity and humanity of God must be so united that neither can be changed into the other or mixed with it. The union must be strictly dialectical.⁹³
4. This union of deity and humanity cannot be general or multiple -- it can

⁸⁹Ibid.; see note #9, p.136.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.; 136.

⁹²Ibid.; 138.

⁹³Ibid.

only occur once for all.⁹⁴

By what means might these conditions be met? According to Barth, the Incarnation is the objective possibility of revelation. In the Incarnation, Barth found the answer to his question. But his argument did not stop with the realization of the Incarnation. He had to find a way to express the reality of God's becoming human in such a way that the I-Thou relationship would be maintained. Barth does so by adopting the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology of the Ancient Church.⁹⁵

During his studies on the Creeds and Confessions and in his preparations for teaching on the Incarnation and Reformed Dogmatics, Barth reacquainted himself with the ancient Alexandrian Christology. It would become the lynch pin of his doctrine of revelation. In the Spring of 1924, Barth mentioned this important reacquainting process to Thurneysen: "Take a look in an old book on dogmatics and see what they understood by 'An-Hypostasia' in regard to the nature of Christ. That was forceful teaching -- which should now be put back on the lampstand."⁹⁶ As Barth understood it, the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology affirmed the full

⁹⁴Ibid.; 139.

⁹⁵George Hunsinger points out that the terms anhypostasia and enhypostasia were first used as a pair by Leontius of Byzantium. Hunsinger argues that "the contribution of Leontius was to accept the Chalcedonian formula, 'in two natures' but to interpret it along lines that preserved...emphasis on the priority of the Word and the unity of the Word made flesh. Leontius achieved this conceptual reconciliation in terms of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis of the human nature of Christ." George Hunsinger, editorial note #4 in Herrmann Diem, "Karl Barth as Socialist," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, 135. For further discussion on the anhypostasis-enhypostasis see D.M. Baillie, God Was In Christ (London: Faber and Faber, 1948); J.N.D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrine, 5th ed. (London: A&C Black, 1977); John McIntyre, The Shape of Christology (London: SCM Press, 1966, especially 98ff).

⁹⁶Barth, Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 185.

divinity and full humanity of Christ. The term anhypostasia asserted that the human nature assumed by Christ had no existence in itself: there was no distinct human personality, but divine Personality assuming human nature.⁹⁷ Christ's humanity could have no other mode of existence apart from the union with his divinity. However, in the enhypostasia, this nature (the human) had existence through its relation to the second person of the Trinity (and note here how Barth's movement from a potentially 'docetic' Christological position was thwarted in his adoption of the Trinitarian emphasis), the eternal Logos. For Barth, the adoption of the ancient formula verified that "the human nature of Christ has no personhood of its own. It is anhypostatos-the formula which the description culminates. Or, more positively, it is enhypostatos. It has personhood, subsistence, reality only in its union with the Logos of God."⁹⁸ Barth was attempting to communicate that in his humanness alone, the nature of Christ had no independence: Christ's real humanity always exists in His divinity and has no other mode of existence.

It could not, for if this nature were independent from the eternal Logos, it would nullify the holiness and the veiledness of God. Only in its intimate connection with the second person of the Trinity did the nature assumed by Christ have meaning and substance. It had to be connected to the divine in order to have meaning. Alone, it could not stand -- not as revelation. What was significant in Barth's adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology was that with it,

⁹⁷D.M. Baille, God Was In Christ (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), 85.

⁹⁸Barth, The Göttingen Dogmatics, 157. In the Church Dogmatics, Barth said, "Jesus Christ exists as a man because as this One exists, because and as He makes human essence His own, adopting and exalting it into unity with Himself. As a man, therefore, He exists directly in and with the one God in the mode of existence of His eternal Son and Logos -- not otherwise apart from this mode." CD IV/2, 49.

Barth could allow for revelation to take on historical content without God losing the divine incognito. The vast chasm, so painfully obvious in Phase III, was thus bridged by Barth via the Incarnation, in which the Logos is both ensarkos and asarkos.

Barth's adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology had major implications for his doctrine of revelation. First, as we have discussed, revelation now had historical content: "the Logos had truly assumed human flesh and in so doing, has entered fully into human history, taking up a kind of residence there."⁹⁹ In Phase III, and particularly in Romans II, revelation had been unhistorical: through the event of the Resurrection and medium of Christ, God was revealed and yet remained veiled, outside of history. Only in his exalted state was Christ a medium of revelation, thus preserving the distance between time and eternity. With Phase IV, as expounded in the Göttingen Dogmatics, revelation now had historical content and was understood through the window of the Incarnation: in the medium of the human yet divine Christ, history and revelation are united.

The barrier so apparent and emphasized in earlier phases had been broken through without the loss of God as subject. And God was still able to 'be God' in the divine incognito. The anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christology indicated that "although Jesus Christ is the creaturely medium of revelation, he is first and foremost the Eternal Logos who is eternally God himself. When he condescends to the creaturely realm and assumes a human nature and human body, he becomes clearly visible and knowable as other creatures are knowable...However, his

⁹⁹McCormack, 333.

complete identity with God is not abrogated by his appearance in time."¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, Barth's Trinitarian emphasis, so lucidly developed in this phase, became the base of his doctrine of revelation and would also provide the foundation for his ethics.

These implications for Barth's doctrine of revelation remind us that by 1924, Barth's doctrine of revelation was complete. Any changes he made thereafter would be modifications, but not complete shifts. The essence of this doctrine found in the Incarnation of Jesus, revealed to humanity the veiled God, the God once so seemingly distant and removed from the world. Jesus, for Barth, is the revelation and in being the revelation, Christ becomes the reconciliation. In the revelation, in the act and through the initiation of God, humanity is able to know the unknowable and be reconciled; the same word of grace, spoken as the primary word to humanity, provides the framework by which a world once separated from God is called to live.

In this chapter, we have traced the development of Karl Barth's doctrine of revelation during the late Teens and early Twenties. We believe that in this time period the major development occurred in Barth's doctrine of revelation, culminating in what we have termed the incarnational eschatology of the Göttingen Dogmatics -- God, through the Incarnation, in the second person of the Trinity, Jesus, enters into history without becoming identical with it. Whereas in earlier thought, revelation was viewed from the realm of human experience, the divine revelation of God vis-a-vis eschatology, to the Resurrection, in the final analysis, revelation is found in the Incarnation. The Resurrection is in no way discarded but

¹⁰⁰Charles T. Waldrop, "Barth and Bultmann: Representatives of Two Ancient Theological Traditions," Perspectives in Religion 11 (1984): 11-12.

is seen under the locus of the Incarnation. In this respect, Barth's doctrine of revelation grabbed a hold of an historical anchor, yet God is not equated with human history alone. By 1924, Barth's theology and ethics were grounded in this reality: the revelation of God has historical content as seen in the Incarnation, in which the eternal Logos assumes a human nature. Hence, Barth's eschatological chasm found a bridge in the Incarnation, thereby making his theology one which has an interactive emphasis.

In approaching the Barthian ethic, the importance of the doctrine of revelation is clear: maintaining a view of revelation in which God retains the divine incognito and yet is completely involved in history means that Barth will have an ethic (and we believe this occurs in the Twenties) that will uphold divine sovereignty, finding its base in the Word of God as issued in the form of a command. In so doing, God for Barth, remains in a position of control, yet in the Incarnation, becomes genuinely a part of the world.

Barth will argue that the transcendent and immanent God speaks to humanity and the ethical issues it faces through the 'voice' of the Creeds and Confessions of the Church and within the locus and authority of the church, God's living symbol of Christ on earth.

The word that God speaks, argues Barth, is a loving one. Therefore, the ethic to which Barth adheres has as its center, a 'gracious command,' instilling within humanity a commitment to respond to God and the world in such a way as to reflect Divine grace. Barth defines this word of grace for ethics through his theological ordering of gospel and law, the next window into which we look.

CHAPTER THREE

The Barthian Version of the Inversion: Gospel and Law

Karl Barth's doctrine of revelation had far reaching consequences for his entire theology and ethics. Established by 1924,¹ with the adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula, Barth's theology placed God in a position of divine sovereignty, yet allowed for God's full entry into human history through the incarnation.

Not only did Barth's doctrine of revelation significantly shape his theology; it also shaped his ethics, as exemplified in his theological ordering of gospel before law. In this chapter, we intend to examine Karl Barth's theological ordering of gospel and law and to show how its development parallels the development of Barth's doctrine of revelation.² We believe Barth's gospel-law inversion is not only apparent in his thought before the Church Dogmatics and his 1935 essay Gospel and Law³, but is also intricately tied to his epistemology. Therefore, we will first discuss Barth's ordering of gospel and law and then will draw parallels with the development of his doctrine of revelation.

¹We are not suggesting that Barth's development in his thought was a completely smooth, linear process. Indeed, his journey theologically was, at times, a rough one -- from his early years as a student through 1924 (and his entire life), Barth always wrestled with his theology in an attempt to be true to what he perceived to be the task of dogmatics. Therefore, while each stage we discuss represents a point of modification in his thought, we are suggesting that by 1924 Barth established the base for his theology and ethics once and for all.

²While the phases of Barth's development discussed in this chapter and the previous chapter are not to be considered definitive, they are helpful as signposts for the development of his thought.

³The essay, Gospel and Law was originally to be read as a paper in Barmen. However, because of an injunction to silence, Barth was unable to do so. However, the paper was published in 1935 in #32 of the first series of Theologische Existenz heute.

I. The Question of Gospel and Law

A. The Question of the relation of God to humankind

When Barth speaks of gospel and law,⁴ he is describing the relation of God to humankind. For Barth, gospel and law are predicates of God. Whereas Martin Luther attempted to make law-gospel categories which described human existence before God,⁵ Barth could not, with regard to his starting point for theology, speak of humanity in the presence of God before he spoke of God in the presence of humanity.

For Barth, the relation of God to humankind is an expression of the divine disposition: God for us.⁶ By choosing to be in a covenant relationship, God also chooses to be in the presence of humanity which brings humanity before God and establishes its 'primal history.' This existence in God's presence is best described

⁴We believe that for Barth, gospel and grace are interchangeable terms.

⁵For a deeper understanding of Martin Luther's (1483-1506) position on law and gospel, see the following: Paul Althaus, Paulus und Luther über den Menschen 1938; The Theology of Martin Luther, trans. R.C. Schultz (Philadelphia, 1966); H. Bornkamm, Luther's World of Thought, trans. M.H. Bertram (St. Louis, 1958); G. Ebeling, Luther: An Introduction to his Thought (London: Collins Publishing Company, 1970); Martin Luther, Die Bekenntnisschriften der evangelisch-lutherisch Kirche (Göttingen, 1952); Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (London: James Clarke and Co., 1953); On the Bondage of the Will, trans. Packer and Johnston (London, 1957); Reformation Writings v.I&II, trans. B.L. Woolf (London, 1952); Thirty-four Sermons (on the law-gospel theme), trans. W. Gace (London: T. Paine, 1649), available in the British Museum Library, 695 a.II.; Vorlesung über den Römerbrief (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1928); Luther's Works (American edition) ed. Jaroslav Pelikan & Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis/Philadelphia: Concordia, 1955-) German edition: Kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke D. Martin Luthers (Weimar Edition: Hermann Föltaus Nachfolger, 1883-); T.M. McDonough, The Law and Gospel in Luther (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963); A. Schlatter, Luther's Deutung Des Römerbriefs (B.f. Chr. Th., 1917).

⁶For an excellent and in depth treatment of gospel and law and its relation to the divine disposition, see Jüngel, Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy, 126.

within the doctrine of election.

Because humanity's primal existence is in the presence of God -- the God who chose humanity -- election is what determines humanity and defines its existence as a covenant partner with God. Election is, for Barth, the inclusive concept⁷ and thus, the sum of the gospel, and the essence of humanity is therefore determined in the gospel. Because Barth takes a supralapsarian view on predestination,⁸ the decision of God from the beginning to the end of time places humanity in the position of recipient of the mercy and righteousness of the divine will. From eternity God lays claim to the human race. Hence, the fundamental relationship of God to humanity is based on one and the same disposition: the

⁷In placing gospel before law, Barth makes election an act which is prior to justification and regeneration. And sanctification is found within the doctrine of election: "We would not stand in sanctification did we not also stand in justification and therefore in election." Karl Barth, The Göttingen Dogmatics v.I, 473.

⁸Ibid., 468. As we discuss Barth's supralapsarian position with regard to predestination, brief background of the 17th century Infralapsarian-Supralapsarian controversy may prove helpful. The issue at stake in this controversy was the relation of predestination to the creation of the world, humanity and its fall. The question surrounding the controversy was 'What do we mean when we say that from eternity humanity is elected by God, or, rejected by God? Is it that in eternal election God thought of humanity generally, i.e., humanity as not yet created, but to be created; not yet fallen, but to fall because of divine permission and human action? Or, is it that in eternal election, God thought of humanity as already created, fallen because of the divine permission and human action? Infralapsarians argue that God's eternal purpose is to reveal and glorify Himself. The fall is an event decreed by God. However, the Infralapsarian does not believe that the reasons for this decree are knowable. The Infralapsarian would not say, for example, that the creation and fall were decreed in order to reveal God's mercy and justice. The Supralapsarian view differs. The Supralapsarian would espouse that God had and has a basic purpose quite apart from all His other purposes, particularly creation and the fall. The original purpose of God is this: that God's mercy and righteousness should be revealed to humanity. Barth himself held to the Supralapsarian view. For him, predestination is the secret of creation, and redemption and consummation -- from all eternity, humanity is the object of the mercy and righteousness of the divine wil.

grace of God which, from eternity, is revealed in Christ, the pre-existent Logos. Since God has decided in Christ, from eternity, to be for humanity, humanity is determined as people, that is where the law makes its entrance.

According to Barth, God's decision for humanity in Christ and the execution of judgment upon Christ from eternity establishes a divine justice, the justice of the gracious God. In this sense, law is a form of the gospel. Barth clarifies this relationship in his definition of law as "the form of the Gospel, i.e., as the sanctification which comes to man through the electing God."⁹

For Barth, gospel and law are a single word in God's activity.¹⁰ Because God loves from all eternity and is the one who chooses humanity, the law is simply first and foremost the form taken by God's commitment to the good of the human race. This loving attitude claims humanity and demands a corresponding attitude towards God. Therefore, in determining humanity to be in covenant relationship, in the divine disposition, God becomes simultaneously a judge of humanity and thus the law of its existence.¹¹

As objects of the divine disposition and action, humanity confronts several questions: 'How will it respond to its covenant partner?' 'How will it exist under this determination?' Here humanity finds that it has responsibility within the covenant. The gospel does not simply bring humanity into God's presence, but law, as a form of the gospel, calls humanity to action. Where humanity is

⁹Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/2, trans. G.W. Bromiley, J.C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, R.A. Stewart, eds. Geoffrey Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 509. (hereafter cited as CD volume and book).

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 511.

¹¹*Ibid.*

understood as that which is constituted by self action and determination (in so far as it is connected to the divine action), gospel acts as law. This self-action and determination, therefore, comes to humanity as a result of the divine action of eternal election in Christ and is enacted within humanity by the Holy Spirit, which transforms humanity into a rational, self-determining, acting creature.¹²

Therefore, as divinely determined people, humanity is faced with a decision: whether to live as God has commanded and thus affirm God's eternal decision of election. In so doing, humanity acknowledges its eternal determination and God as the law of its existence which to Barth, is the gospel, for the gospel creates:

a new being for a person only by permitting him to act, so that he may come to a 'human decision which corresponds to the divine decision.' Barth's version of the relation between gospel and law is, in the final analysis, concerned with this correspondence, this analogy between God and humanity, an already ontological correspondence between the the existence of God as pure act and the existence of the human person as self-defined in action.¹³

Thus, in discussing gospel and law, the relation of God to humanity is defined. By calling humanity into a covenantal relationship from eternity, God's grace becomes the first and final word from the Creator to the creature. This eternal relationship of grace is closely connected to Barth's doctrine of revelation: in the God event of revelation, God speaks a word of grace to humanity by revealing Himself in the veil of the incarnate Christ. The relationship between Barth's doctrine of revelation and the theological ordering of gospel and law is not mere coincidence. As Barth develops his doctrine of revelation, so too, he seeks and

¹²CD I/2, 364.

¹³Jüngel, 124.

finds the true relationship between the gospel and the law.

II. The Relation of God to Humankind as expressed in Gospel and Law: the parallels in Barth's doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel before law.

Phase I: Gospel and Law as viewed through the lens of socialism (1909-1915)

During the years prior to 1915, Barth had little specifically to say about the relationship between gospel and law. However, indirectly, Barth dealt with this relationship in two major ways: through his liberal adherence to inwardness and his commitment to socialism.¹⁴

During this phase of development, Barth viewed, as mentioned previously, revelation as experience. This posture had a major bearing on how he approached gospel and law. As early as 1909, Barth stated, "...for us religion is experience understood in rigorously individual terms..."¹⁵ What this means for Barth's treatment of gospel and law is this: during his first years as a student¹⁶ and as a pastor in Safenwil,¹⁷ Barth clearly adhered to a tradition of liberal theology in which religion/revelation were equated with inwardness and experience. This left little room for any revelatory function of the law or the gospel. For if revelation were understood purely from the perspective of how humanity experiences God,

¹⁴An interesting dichotomy is found in the influence of Herrmann and the inwardness he espoused and the outwardness of socialism embraced by Barth.

¹⁵Karl Barth, "Moderne Theologie und Reichsgottesarbeit," Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche 19 (1909), 320-321.

¹⁶Barth's advanced studies occurred in Bern, Berlin, Tübingen and Marburg; thereafter, he went to Geneva as a ministerial probationer and finally to Safenwil as a pastor.

¹⁷Safenwil was an industrial and agricultural community located in Canton Aargau, Switzerland.

then gospel and law become predicates of human experience and do little to aid in revealing God. At most, they might function to clarify who God is, but in this phase of development, Barth's concern was not with how gospel and law functioned epistemologically.

However, it would be unfair to state that even in the beginnings of Phase I, Barth had no interest in or concern for the role of the gospel and law. During his early years as pastor in Safenwil (1911-1914), Barth addressed the concepts of gospel and law through the lens of socialism.¹⁸ In coming to Safenwil, he confronted the hardships of industrial workers and therefore began to take a keen interest in societal issues: "...when I moved into the industrial village...my interest in theology as such had to step back noticeably into second place...I became passionately involved with socialism and especially with the trade union movement."¹⁹ The pastorate in Safenwil catapulted Barth into the world of class warfare and into studies directed toward factory legislation, insurance and trade union affairs.²⁰ This engagement with socialism and social issues forced Barth to incorporate new ideas into his theology.²¹

¹⁸During his tenure in Safenwil, Barth's commitment to socialism was based on the socialist emphasis on confronting injustice and the hope that lay therein. The influence of religious socialism on Barth came also during this period (see *Fakultätsalbum*, 155), but was most significant after the outbreak of World War I (see Busch, 76-78).

¹⁹"Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," 263.

²⁰See *Fakultätsalbum*, 292.

²¹Friedrich Wilhelm Marquardt argues that it was Barth's socialist praxis which informed his theology. Marquardt argues that it was Barth's engagement in political issues during his pastorate in Safenwil that shaped his theology. In an oral interview at the Frei Universität in Berlin, December 1990, I asked Professor Marquardt to clarify his position. In the interview he reaffirmed what he had already stated in his book, *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths* (Münich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1972) that is, that one must first and always look

He began to examine what he believed to be the "divine power of the gospel reflected in the organizational concepts of socialism: 'I see it in other places as well, but here more clearly and purely, and I see it here in the way that it must work in our time.'"²² One of the ways Barth saw the relationship between socialism and the gospel was in the person of Jesus.²³

In the lecture, "Jesus and the Social Movement," given to the Workers Association in Safenwil on December 17, 1911, Barth stated, "Jesus is the social movement and the social movement is Jesus in the present....The real significance of the person of Jesus can be summed up in two words -- social movement -- ...the spirit which counts before God is the Social spirit."²⁴ For Barth, Jesus and socialism both sought independence for the dependent,²⁵ and both arose as movements that identified with the poor and lowly.²⁶ For Barth, Jesus' movement

to Barth's socialism and political praxis as the basis for his theology. We disagree with Marquardt. While Barth's socialism certainly played a crucial role in all of his theology, we cannot agree that Barth's theology was a product of his engagement with socialism. Barth is, first and foremost, a theologian, not a socialist. Although his interest in socialism would always exist, it did not as a political influence, create the foundation of his theology.

²²Barth made this comment on December 17, 1911. (Jüngel, 87).

²³In discussing Jesus, we believe Barth is adhering to the view of Christ as an image of revelation and Redeemer of humanity. Moreover, in discussing Jesus as the social movement, we believe Barth is drawing heavily from what he had learned earlier from Herrmann, that is, the 'secret inner life of Jesus'-- that which was portrayed in the gospel story, communicating God's omnipotence and goodness. In this inner life is the faith that humanity must grasp in order to find communion with God.

²⁴Karl Barth, "Jesus and the Social Movement," in Karl Barth and Radical Politics, 19. The original lecture was printed in Der Freie Aargauer 6 (Dec. 23, 26, 28, 30, 1911) nos. 153-156.

²⁵Ibid., 23.

²⁶Ibid.

was a "volcanic eruption from below."²⁷

Moreover, Barth argued that in socialism, the kingdom of God was realized -- at least on a human level. Unlike the Church, which Barth believed viewed the kingdom as only other-worldly, Barth espoused a view in which the kingdom "comes to us in matter and on the earth"²⁸ and is best reflected in socialism. For Barth, the kingdom was not of the world, but was in the world.²⁹ From a human standpoint, the gospel was for Barth a movement from below to above. But from the divine side, it came from above: "it is not that we go to heaven but that heaven comes to us...not in a spiritual sense purely, but materially in social help, in the social spirit."³⁰ At this point we must clarify that even in phase I of his development, Barth did not equate socialism with what the socialists were doing but with what Jesus had done.³¹ However, socialism was the place where, on a human level, the kingdom of God was best expressed.

In Barth's eyes, the role of gospel and law he found was connected to

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid., 27.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 27-28.

³¹ Interestingly, despite Barth's conviction that the socialists were not fulfilling what Jesus had done, Barth joined the Social Democratic Party on January 26, 1915 in a venture to display solidarity with those in Safenwil and even more so, in an attempt to help direct the future of socialism, which he believed had been severely compromised. In a letter to Eduard Thurneysen, dated February 5, 1915, he stated: "I have now become a member of the SDP. Just because I set such emphasis Sunday by Sunday upon the last things, it was no longer possible for me personally to remain suspended in the clouds above the present evil world. Rather, it had to be demonstrated here and now that the faith of the Greatest does not exclude, but includes work and suffering in the realm of the imperfect...the Socialists in my congregation will now, I hope, have a right understanding of my criticisms of the party. And I myself hope now to avoid becoming unfaithful to our 'essential' orientation..." From Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 28.

socialism this way: in 1911, gospel was, for Barth, ultimately connected to Jesus (as revealed in the way of life given to us through Jesus' secret inner life), who was connected to the social movement. At this point in Barth's ministry, while gospel was associated with the salvation of the individual before God, clearly, the gospel also had a quality of unrest-of revolution: God's plan was for a different kind of world, not one in which workers or others experience oppression:

...the new kingdom of God, a new world, a new society: that is what was at stake in the entire contents of the gospel. This new reality could also be called "socialism" -not as an ideology but as a condition to be realized. "Jesus is the movement for social justice." "Socialist" is thus, it must be said, a predicate of the gospel. God wants socialism. The true socialism is the kingdom of God-both as the goal of God's history with man, and as the present movement on earth here and now. Where the kingdom of God is at stake, there socialism is always at stake as well. Where socialism is at stake, moreover, there God's kingdom is always already at stake.³²

Barth continued articulating the connection of gospel to the social movement in a sermon on I Corinthians 11.23-26, given in Safenwil on March 16, 1913. In this message, Barth made three major points that illumine the relationship between the gospel and socialism. First, the gospel functions to convict us of our sin and accuse us³³ as it "makes us pensive, disquieted, yearful; it arouses in us the

³²Gollwitzer, 77-78.

³³In the sense that the gospel has an accusatory tone, Barth seems to be following the traditional orthodox view of the theological use of the law. This may be due to his reading of John Calvin (1509-1564) while Barth was a probationer in Geneva. To this effect Barth has said that while in Geneva, although "living completely and utterly in the religious atmosphere that I had brought with me from Marburg...Nevertheless it may have been the spirit of the place...which caused me to deepen the experience I had gained...by making considerable inroads into Calvin's Institutes." From "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," in The Theology of Schleiermacher, 262. For further study on Calvin's approach to the law and gospel see Andrew J. Bandstra, "Law and Gospel in Calvin and Paul," in Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin, ed. D.E. Holwerda (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1976); Josef Bohatec, Calvin und das Recht

longing for a freedom and strength; it allows us to wait for a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness lives."³⁴ But the gospel does more. It also offers the power of that^{which} is found in Jesus and is given to humanity through his body and blood that^{which} allows, according to Barth, for Christ to rule in the lives of humanity. In the giving of bread and wine, Jesus offers humanity Himself and, therefore, the power of faith, for "as bread and wine nourishes and strengthens your body, so shall my life (Jesus) become a power for you."³⁵ Lastly, the gospel offers humanity "not only...a knowledge of sin and power of faith, but also the Law and Spirit of New Life,"³⁶ found in the words of Jesus, "for you." But this is a corporate "you": within the "Gemeinschaft," or community, is the place that ultimately expresses Christ's love, found in bread and wine:

...the love we experience in Jesus can not remain dead in us,
but it must flow through us to others...for you! We must also say
for you...the Law and Spirit of New life in the community with
Christ means: unconditional brotherhood and solidarity, unlimited

(Graz: Hermann Böhlaus, 1934. Esp. pp.22-24ff); John Calvin, Commentaries of John Calvin 46 vol., various trans. (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1843-1855); Instruction in Faith (1537) trans. P.T. Fuhrmann (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949); Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book I&II, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960. Especially Ch.7-8); Theological Treatises trans. Rev. J.K.S. Reid (London: SCM Press, 1954); Edward A. Dowey, The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952. Especially Ch. 5); R.A. Gessert, "The Integrity of Faith: An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Law in the Thought of John Calvin," Scottish Journal of Theology 13 (1960), 251ff.; John Hesselink, Calvin's Concept and Use of the Law (unpublished dissertation, Basel, 1961. A copy is available in the Calvin Collection of the Calvin Theological Library, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.); Reformatio Perennis: Essays on Calvin and the Reformation in honour of Ford Lewis Battles, ed. Brian A. Gerrish (Pittsburgh: The Pickwick Press, 1981. Especially pages 11-26).

³⁴Karl Barth, "I Korinther 11, 23-26," in Gesamtausgabe I. Predigten 1913 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1976), 103-116.

³⁵Ibid., 110.

³⁶Ibid., 111.

justice and eagerness to be face to face with our fellow humanity.³⁷

At this point we may note that the inwardness so characteristic of this phase seems to have given way to a communal orientation so important within socialism. True, there is a communal flavor in this later part of phase I (i.e. 1911-1915), but this does not mean that Barth in any way changed his views towards revelation: revelation was still very much experience in Barth's mind. In the context of even the later part of phase I, gospel is reduced to an experiential concept vis-a-vis its relation to socialism. Barth stated in 1911, that the gospel "is a matter of the Kingdom of God in the hearts, of Christian character, the moral consciousness oriented to the norms of Jesus."³⁸ Surely at this point in time, gospel as Barth defined it in 1924 was not the same gospel of 1911 or 1913. However, with the impact of the First World War and the developments in his doctrine of revelation, the place of the gospel-law debate would begin to move from a shadowy presence to a place of substance. This metamorphosis would begin in phase II of his development, from 1915 through to the second edition of the commentary on Romans (1922) in which gospel and law would find their roots in a radical eschatology.

Phase II: Gospel and Law within revolutionary eschatology: the beginning of the YES. (1915-1922)

As we discussed earlier in this work, the move from the liberalism of Phase I to the revolutionary eschatology of Phase II did not occur in one sudden bolt. Rather, the development of Barth's doctrine of revelation up through the second

³⁷Ibid., 112.

³⁸Karl Barth, "Wir wollen nicht, dass dieser über uns herrsche!," Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz 21 (1911).

edition of Romans was a continuum of gradual shifts away from liberalism and religious socialism. This period, marked by constant flux and new ideas, impacted Barth's theological ordering of gospel and law. Most significant in providing understanding of Barth's ordering of gospel and law within Phase II is the Tambach lecture, "The Christian's Place in Society," delivered in 1919. In it, Barth utilizes the dialectical language of the thesis-antithesis and synthesis and places the YES of God (gospel) in a position of primacy over the NO (law) of God.

However, Tambach was not the first indication of Barth's positioning of gospel before law: several earlier works adumbrate that which provided the basis for Barth's argument given at Tambach.

Barth's break from the liberal theology of his student and early years in Safenwil reflected not only a crisis within theology and socialism but also a crisis of grounding: Barth's entire foundation for his thought had been severely disappointed.³⁹ In the wake of his frustration, Barth sought a new base for his theology⁴⁰ and began to reflect upon God's revelation as that which could be best described through the medium of revolutionary eschatology: the radical inbreaking of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of the world in such a way as to point to

³⁹Barth himself stated: "...the outbreak of the World War...meant for me concretely a double fall into a sickness of spirit: first, in the teaching of all my theological teachers in Germany who seemed compromised beyond redemption by what I perceived as their failure vis-a-vis the ideology of war; and then, in socialism, of which I had expected, credulously enough-more so than I had of the Christian church-that it would shun the ideology, and which I now saw to my horror doing just the opposite in every country." From: Karl Barth-Rudolph Bultmann Letters 1922-1966, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley and eds. Geoffrey Bromiley and Bernd Jaspert (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Press, 1981), 154.

⁴⁰With reference to his pursuit of a new base for thought, we have previously addressed the importance of his study of the Bible with Eduard Thurneysen and his interaction with the Blumhardt's as two of the key events that shaped the thought of Barth in this second phase of development.

~~of the kingdom of God into the kingdom of the world in such a way as to point to~~
the sovereignty of God. Barth's reflection of revelation also impacted his ordering of gospel and law in such a way that in a nascent form, he began to place the gospel, God's YES, before the law, God's NO.

Barth expressed this placing of gospel before law in two major strains of thought during phase II. First, he insisted that all theology be God-based, as against experiential. In so doing, humanity experiences unrest which in turn moves it towards God. Undoubtedly, this rings of orthodox Lutheranism.⁴¹ However, we must understand that this seemingly loud NO of God to humanity is really the beginning of Barth's no to religious socialism. Barth wanted to make it very clear that the unrest humanity faces is the unrest of realizing that by its own merits or programs, it cannot appropriate access to God. The unrighteousness that humanity experiences is not the judgment of God, but is, in a sense, a judgment of itself. The problem Barth underlines is that when humanity feels this unrest, rather than ascribing to God the rightful place of sovereignty, rather than acknowledging that the righteousness it seeks can be found only in God and given by God, humanity attempts to 'build Towers of Babel' and reach God itself. In a letter to Eduard

⁴¹For Martin Luther, humanity under the law perceives life and death-life through the commandment of the law, which simultaneously becomes death in that humanity cannot fulfill the commandment. The law pursues humanity, demands of humanity, points to the failure of humanity, and thus leads to despair and a preparation to hear the gospel. Ronald F. Thiemann clarifies the Lutheran position: "According to the standard of the law God pronounces a verdict of condemnation over sinful human existence, a verdict which stands in stark opposition to the gracious declaration of forgiveness in the gospel of Christ. In the context of atonement the concepts law, wrath, sin, and condemnation are sharply distinguished from and opposed to the concepts gospel, grace, faith and forgiveness in order that the unique saving work of Christ might be highlighted." "Toward of Theology of Creation: A Response to Gustaf Wingren," in Creation and Method, ed. H. VanderGoot (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, Inc., 1981), 121.

Thurneyson, Barth stated his objections this way:

The conference in Patteln was very fine. I was greatly delighted with Bader's lecture...he described the development of the distinction between Ragaz and Kutter...Conclusion: the religious-socialist "concern" is finished, the taking of God in earnest at its beginning.⁴²

By 1916, in his lecture, "The Righteousness of God," Barth began to equate the unrest and Towers of Babel with religious socialism:

We are inwardly resentful that the righteousness we pant after is God's and can only come to us from God. We should like to take the mighty thing into our own hands and under our own management, as we have done with so many other things ...We arrogate to ourselves, unquestioningly, the right to take up the tumultuous question, What shall we do? as if that were in any case the first and most pressing problem. Only let us be quick to put our hand to reform, sanitation, methods, cultural and religious endeavors of all sorts! Only to do 'real work!' And before we know it the trumpet blast of conscience has lost its disturbing tone...The longing for a new world has lost all its bitterness, sharpness, restlessness, has become the joy of development, and now blossoms sweetly and surely in orations, donor's tablets, committee meetings, reviews, annual reports...and countless mutual blows. The righteousness of God itself has slowly changed from being the surest of facts into being the highest among various high ideals, and is now at all events our very own affair.⁴³

The language of reform, methods, religious endeavors and the like clearly points to Barth's growing frustration with the religious socialists. In that discontent, we hear a loud and resolute NO from Barth, and from Barth's perspective, also from God. But this is not a no to humanity in general. This distinction is extremely important. In emphasizing theology as God-centered and focused, Barth was making sure that no one or nothing got in the way. He had already rid himself, for the most part, of the liberal legacy. He was beginning, now, to do the same

⁴²Revolutionary Theology in the Making, 31. Note: Hans Bader was, at the time of this letter to Thurneyson (September 8, 1915), a pastor in Zürich and one of the founders of the religious-socialist movement in Switzerland.

⁴³"The Righteousness of God," 15-16.

with religious socialism.

Moreover, Barth argued that God's righteousness, which we seek, is an eternal righteousness and therefore, is prior to the unrighteousness of humanity. In this sense, humanity is able to expect, as Barth says, more from God.⁴⁴ God's sovereignty is greater than humanity's unrighteousness. Therefore, as humanity expects more from God, humanity will recognize the touch of God that reaches out, empowering people to seek after this righteousness that, on the one hand, so readily awaits them, but on the other hand seems elusive. Humanity's attempt to sanctify itself through its own efforts ~~leads~~ only obstructs the coming of God's kingdom. When humanity seeks to find this kingdom, this righteousness, on its own, it deafens itself to the call of God.⁴⁵ However, nothing can stop the inbreaking of God into the world: the righteousness of God permeates even the unrighteous world, regardless of human machination. This inbreaking of God into the world is the second strain of thought prevalent during Barth's second phase of development.

For him, God initiates a revolution when confronting humanity, a revolution of eschatological proportions. This revolution of God offers the

⁴⁴Ibid., 25.

⁴⁵Barth believes that although humanity may, by its own machinations, fail to hear the word of grace God offers, this choice does not prohibit the freedom of God to continue to speak and, during this phase of Barth's development, radically break into the world. Barth reminds us that to hear the word of grace is a difficult task amidst the unrighteousness of the world: "His righteousness is an eternal righteousness! This is difficult for us to hear. We must take the trouble to go far enough off to hear it again. We make a veritable uproar with our morality and culture and religion. But we may presently be brought to silence, and with that will begin our true redemption." From "The Righteousness of God," 23-24. This silence that comes upon humanity is the silence the Barth of this phase would describe in the revolutionary eschatology of Tambach and Romans I.

"magnificent, productive, hopeful life of a grain of seed, a new beginning, out of which all things shall be made new"⁴⁶ and the Word of God to humanity "authoritatively announces that God must be all in all...Oh that we dared in faith to take what grace can offer us!"⁴⁷ This revolutionary eschatology, this radical inbreaking of the righteous God into the unrighteous world, is, for Barth, the word of grace that places the gospel before the law. God's YES comes to humanity in the kingdom of God-the eternal YES reaches to humanity and offers it a word of grace. This is the radical eschatology of Phase II and for this reason Barth begins to place gospel before law.

Even in 1916, with his doubts clearly expressed regarding the efforts of the religious socialists to fabricate the kingdom of God on earth, Barth still believed that socialism, in the sense of Jesus 'as the social movement,' and 'the social movement as Jesus' was a human reflection of the kingdom of God. There was still very much a linking of God's kingdom with humanity's present reality. However, with the Tambach lecture, much of this thought was dismissed, and the YES of God found itself once again in the center of Barth's dialogue with theology.

In that lecture, Barth did away with any notion of religious socialism as the kingdom of God.⁴⁸ In its call for a radical renewal, Barth would affirm socialism as a parable of the kingdom of God. However, there was much, particularly

⁴⁶Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," 49.

⁴⁷Ibid., 49-50.

⁴⁸Eberhard Busch argues that the Tambach lecture was "to speak a farewell to al theology which Barth himself had followed for some time, and especially to religious socialism." From: Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth, 111.

within religious socialism, which in Barth's mind needed an overhaul.⁴⁹ In the Tambach lecture, Barth described this needed change by discussing the dialectical tension between Christ/kingdom of God and human actions, whether conservative or revolutionary.

In setting up a contrast between God and the world, Barth immediately established a thesis -- the presence of God in the world -- yet quickly countered this thesis with an antithesis --- the tension which exists between Christ and the world.⁵⁰ The tension so apparent between the thesis and antithesis is, however, overcome by the synthesis: the revolution of God that is from eternity, preceding our human revolution:

The original is the synthesis. It is out of this that both thesis and antithesis arise. Insight into the true transcendence of the divine origin of all things permits, or rather commands us, to understand...Naturally we shall be led first not to a denial but to an affirmation of the world as it is...only out of such an affirmation can come that genuine, radical denial which is manifestly the movements of our protest. the genuine antithesis must follow the thesis: it is through the thesis which derives from the synthesis...it is the original and spontaneously productive energy of the synthesis from which the energy of the thesis and the energy of the antithesis both derive.⁵¹

⁴⁹A helpful example of how Barth viewed the socialist call for radical reform as a parable of the kingdom is found in the Tambach lecture in which Barth states that in its protest against existing things, spiritual Israel represented the parabolic characteristic of the present world and the penetration of it by God. See "The Christian's Place in Society," bottom 307. Helmut Gollwitzer in the article "The Kingdom of God and Socialism" gives a helpful clarification: "Positively, the concept of 'parable' means this: What ought here to take place in social affairs is capable of 'reflecting' the kingdom of God 'indirectly as a mirror-image.'" In Hunsigner, Karl Barth and Radical Politics, 98.

⁵⁰Barth sets up this dialectical relationship by stating: "The Christian... in society! How these two magnitudes fall apart! How abstract they are to us!" From "The Christian's Place in Society," 275.

⁵¹"The Christian's Place in Society," 299, 321.

Barth's concern in establishing this dialectic is two-fold: first, he wants yet again to make clear that any revolution -- any origin-any initiation of the kingdom -- is purely and solely God's work. The tension established in the antithesis underscores this point. Humanly speaking, society's renewal is impossible.⁵² Second, Barth's concern to establish the synthesis as the origin of the thesis and antithesis relates closely to questions of gospel and law. It would be inaccurate to state that Barth's main concern in the Tambach lecture was to differentiate between the role and order of gospel and law. Yet, indirectly -- and we believe underlying his entire purpose of the lecture -- was his intense concern for a place of primacy for gospel. True, Barth is cognizant of and acknowledges the function of the NO -- the role of the law that reveals to humanity its need for God. But even more important, he stresses that the NO finds its full meaning only when enclosed within the YES:

To go back to origins is not to go back to annihilation, if we go back to the origin of origins, to God. On the contrary, it is only in God that we can come to a positive position. The negation which issues from God and means God, is positive and all positives not built upon God are negative.⁵³

There is then no denial of the negative, but there is a clarification as to its place and function: the NO follows the YES.⁵⁴

⁵²At this point Barth breaks decisively from religious socialism. He states that the "relation between Christ in us and the world is not really a matter of opening the sluices and allowing the ready water to stream over the thirsty land...The Divine is something whole, complete in itself...it does not permit being applied, stuck on, fitted in. It does not permit of being divided and distributed, for the very reason that its more than religion. It does not passively permit itself to be used: it overthrows and builds up as it wills. It is complete or it is nothing." *Ibid.*, 276-277.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 294. (underline mine).

⁵⁴Again Barth clarifies: "...we may deny ourselves the No even less than the Yes, for it follows after it." *Ibid.*, 316-317.

Recalling that during this period (1915-1919) Barth was most concerned with ascribing to God a place of authority, sovereignty and primacy, especially in matters of epistemology, the connection that arises with gospel and law is no surprise. Considering Barth's position on revelation (revelation as God's revolution -- from above), the place of the gospel as that which precedes law must stand. Religious socialism was dead; the revolution of God's kingdom was based on God's initiative and humanity was able to live accordingly, in expectation of the coming kingdom, for "in light of the resurrection, we no longer live under the illusion that we can overcome the world but we also know that God can and will."⁵⁵

For Barth, Tambach marked an important part of the development of Phase II: religious socialism was swept out of Barth's approach to the kingdom, and the revolutionary eschatology of the first edition of Romans had become more defined with God as the initiator and sole legislator of the kingdom. Moreover, Barth began to view God's kingdom as being 'wholly other,' a term gleaned from his brother Heinrich.⁵⁶ Because God now stood at the forefront of his theology,⁵⁷ so gospel would take a position before law.

With the close of 1919, Barth moved into a transitional period marked by his

⁵⁵McCormack, 69.

⁵⁶McCormack notes that Barth had heard this term used in a lecture given by his brother at the Aarau Student Conference. Furthermore, following this lecture, Barth noted this term in a letter to Thurneysen, dated April 13, 1919 (in Barth-Thurneysen Briefwechsel I, 325.)

⁵⁷Barth again underlines this importance in the Tambach lecture: "The synthesis we seek is in God alone and in God alone can we find it...For creation and redemption are possible only because God is God, because his imminence means at the same time his transcendence." (322).

interaction with Franz Overbeck and Overbeck's concept of Urgeschichte. This period of time (after Tambach and before Romans II (1919-1922)) would be characterized by a continued refining of Barth's doctrine of revelation, and thus his ordering of gospel and law.

As examined earlier, Barth's interaction with Overbeck and his adoption of Urgeschichte significantly impacted⁵⁸ his doctrine of revelation. The concept of Urgeschichte placed the relationship between revelation and human history at an impasse: while present in human history, God was not equated with it.⁵⁸ This strong insistence on maintaining the freedom of God is key to Barth's clarification of the positioning of gospel before law. One way that Barth stressed this freedom of God was through clarifying the role of the YES (gospel, grace) and the NO (law, judgment).

In the 1920 lecture, "Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas," Barth clarified the role of the gospel and law in two ways. First, he stressed the role of the YES as that which comes before the NO. For Barth, God's first word to humanity is a word of grace: because we are known by God before we ever know God, we encounter an act of grace on God's part from eternity.⁵⁹ God's grace is eternal, and the only "eternal election is God's: the disposition of history and of the individual mind are secondary and temporal."⁶⁰ Here again, we see Barth attacking any form of human reason and any act of history (~~in Urgeschichte~~ here Overbeck's influence is clear) as falling short of God's eternal act of electing

⁵⁸For the more detailed discussion of this concept, see Chapter Two.

⁵⁹"Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas," 95-96.

⁶⁰Ibid., 59.

humanity to participate in covenant relationship. Furthermore, this God of grace, who is involved in yet separate from, human history, has from eternity predisposed humanity as the recipients of His deep love, for according to Barth,

...we belong to the Yes and not to the No...we are caught and taken captive by a presupposed and original Yes which we would not attempt to deny if it did not cause us such unrest. We cannot quite forget the souls provenance: we cannot quite forget its unity with God in the beginning.⁶¹

Second, Barth expressed the role of gospel and law in terms of a crisis facing humanity. This theme, which adumbrates what would become the primary theme of Phase III, warrants our attention. The crisis of humanity is, according to Barth, not in the NO. It comes to humanity in the YES! Humanity's knowledge of God's grace, of God's eternal election, is what causes humanity unrest because people must admit that even in the YES, they often take part in refusing the very grace offered.⁶²

Within this lecture, (Biblical Questions, Insights and Vistas), we begin to see how Barth holds gospel and law in tension, how they are unified and yet distinct. Barth does not, and will not, deny the possibility that even within the YES, there is NO⁶³ or that humanity is forced to live on the narrow ridge of rock upon which it must balance between the YES and the NO.⁶⁴ But clearly the eternal word of God is gospel: clearly, the eternal election is God's. The question that gives humanity such angst is the question of the knowledge of God, the place

⁶¹Ibid., 54-55.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid., 59.

⁶⁴Ibid., 58.

where humanity finds its origin and yet from which it finds itself separated.⁶⁵

Most assuredly, the NO Barth is combatting is religiosity: the bourgeois nineteenth century culture-religion and the socialism that had failed to meet the crisis of the war and had lulled Christianity into a faith of anthropomorphism. And because religiosity was a product of the law,⁶⁶ the law could never be a means by which humanity gained knowledge of God --certainly not in the revelatory sense of the word. The NO of God is the NO humanity confronts after God's revelation has met it: the NO finds its complete meaning in the YES.⁶⁷

During this point of transition, Barth's treatment of gospel and law was still very much a focal point. Since he viewed revelation as ahistorical, he was even more determined to lift up the sovereignty of God and, at the same time, underline the gap existing between God and humanity. This he would do in the second edition of Romans by developing the other side of the hope found in Phase II: the hope located in the revolutionary eschatology would not be abandoned but refined. In fact, this hope would exist in an even more significant sense since Barth had rejected religious socialism that was, ultimately, a false hope. Therefore, while Barth never abandoned the hope he expressed in the revolutionary eschatology and the YES of God in Phase II, he would emphasize this hope in a different way in Phase III. This would be in the crisis of the NO.

⁶⁵Ibid., 59.

⁶⁶Ibid., 81.

⁶⁷Even in 1920, Barth viewed the relationship between gospel and law as one in which gospel came before law and yet was uniquely related to the law. Although he does not, in Phase II, use the terminology he would later apply to the relationship between the gospel and the law (i.e. law as a form of the gospel and gospel as the content of the law), certainly the skeleton of this language is apparent.

Phase III: The Crisis Of the Yes: Gospel as made manifest in crisis (1922-24).

Barth entered into Phase III of his theological development with a need to further define his own theology. Having encountered Overbeck's concept of *Urgeschichte*, having broken with the religious socialists, he knew that the radical eschatology of Phase II needed to be redefined, a task that could best be accomplished in a revision of the commentary on Romans. Within this third phase, there was undoubtedly an emphasis on the negative of the dialectic that might lead us to believe that the hope of the revolutionary eschatology of Phase II had been abandoned by Barth. It had not. Rather, it took on a different character. Since his adoption of the concept of *Urgeschichte*, Barth was extremely concerned to once again make clear that revelation was not in any way, shape or form related to a human-centered event; in other words, revelation had to come from God to humanity and not from humanity to God. It would seem that this idea is redundant. However, if we examine the various factors in Barth's development, we can understand how with each new piece of information, with each new influence on his thought,⁶⁸ Barth became more and more certain that if he were to stress anything in theology, it had to be the sovereignty and freedom of God: God had to be in a position of primacy. In Phase III, Barth further refined his doctrine of revelation to revelation as resurrection: in the event of the resurrection -- in his exalted state as the Redeemer of humanity, as the eternal Logos at the right hand of God -- Jesus in his resurrection is revelation to humanity. Revelation

⁶⁸For Barth there were some very significant people who impacted his thought during the interim period between 1920-22. In the preface of the second edition of Romans, he mentions several such as Overbeck, Plato, Kant, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, and of course, Eduard Thurneysen. See "The Preface to the Second Edition," in The Epistle to the Romans, 3-4.

was, therefore, more than ever, God's event-outside of, yet within and impacting on history. There is no denying that the tone of Romans II and the entire phase carries a more harsh tone. However, in lieu of his revisions and his concern for the place of God, that which seems negative, is, for Barth, positive and, more important, rooted in the positive, in the YES of God. This relationship between the positive and negative would have implications for the further development of his ordering of gospel before law.

By 1920, Barth had begun to develop the theme of the YES of God as a crisis. By the second edition of Romans, this crisis was fully manifest, impacting on Barth's ordering of gospel before law. In the article, "Krisis und Gnade,"⁶⁹ Michael Beintker provides excellent insight into the function of the crisis motif and its relationship to the gospel-law ordering in Romans II. Beintker states that (in reference to the 1935 essay "Gospel and Law") "Barth had really said nothing decisively new in 1935...so it may not be surprising when this same crisis motif of Romans II is taken into consideration as an important building block for Barth's ordering of gospel before law."⁷⁰ Beintker argues, and we concur, that the crisis motif -- the loud NO -- in Romans II is a crisis arising from the YES, from grace. Faced with God, who chooses humanity from eternity, humanity confronts a crisis: in encountering the freedom of God, the freedom to choose and initiate relationship, humanity faces the electing God and the reality of the chasm that exists between people and God:

In grace, not sin, God enters in on their behalf...Grace is the truth

⁶⁹Michael Beintker, "Krisis und Gnade" Evangelische Theologie 46(1986): 442-456.

⁷⁰Ibid., 445.

of God about the individual and about the broad cause of his whole life; and because grace is this, it brings him radically under crisis... We know that grace is the grace of the hidden God by which the vitality of the known man in this world is fundamentally disturbed. We know also that in grace the supposed unity of mankind meets and is disturbed by a wholly other majestic and unobservable unity, which is true oneness.⁷¹

The crisis humanity faces is an unavoidable, rooted in the eternal grace of God:⁷²

...God does not leave us and we cannot leave God. It is because God himself and God alone lends our life its possibility that it becomes so impossible for us to live. It is because God says YES to us that NO of existence here is so fundamental and unescapable. It is because the answer to all our questions is God and God's conduct towards us, that the only answers that we can find in terms of our own conduct either change immediately into questions or are otherwise too vast for us.⁷³

This predicament is, in fact, one of time and eternity. In facing God and God's love, humanity finds itself cognizant of the vast difference that exists between itself and God.⁷⁴ This dialectic of time and eternity sets off within humanity a series of shock waves: the wholly other God speaks a word of entrance into the world and, in so doing, emphasizes the vast difference between time and eternity that only God can bridge through, in this phase, the resurrection of Christ. Undoubtedly this difference, can be construed as the NO of God -- indeed, a loud NO. However, this judgment, this crisis, arises first out of God's grace, out of the YES. The YES brings a disturbance to human lives⁷⁵ in a way that law

⁷¹The Epistle to the Romans, 221, 452.

⁷²Karl Barth, "The Small Moment," in Come, Holy Spirit, 53.

⁷³"The Problem of Ethics Today," 169.

⁷⁴Barth states, "Under grace men know that they are servants of sin." The Epistle to the Romans, 226.

⁷⁵Barth comments, "It is grace alone that is competent to provide men with a truly ethical disturbance; and if grace is to perform this function, it must be treated as covering the whole field of human life and must be permitted to make that

cannot do, since humanity can corrupt and misuse the law, eliciting a contrived righteousness separate from God's righteousness.⁷⁶

According to Barth, the law cannot truly be understood without placing it in the light of the gospel. The crisis of the NO is crisis only as it is related to the YES of God, for "the crisis motif establishes God's NO already stated before in the divine YES: because God has said YES before and will hereafter say YES, his NO to humanity is especially sharp and deep...Already in Romans II is found the surprising statement that the NO of God on the whole, will be clear only as it is overcome in the YES."⁷⁷ Thus, the NO of God is founded first and foremost in the YES: judgment is possible only because of grace, and only in grace does God judge.⁷⁸ There is, according to Barth, "nothing but YES and NO in God, only because of the YES;"⁷⁹ the NO cannot exist without the YES, for

this NO, posited with finality by revelation, is not without the 'deep secret YES under and above the NO' which we should 'grasp and hold to with a firm faith in God's Word' and 'confess that God is right in his judgement against us, for then we have won.' This is how it is with that NO: 'nothing but YES in it, but always deep and secretly and always seeming to be nothing but NO.'⁸⁰

absolute assault upon men without which ethics are completely meaningless." Ibid., 430.

⁷⁶In this sense, Barth is referring to the law as "religiosity" or "religion" rather than as a form of the gospel. Barth believed that if law were the guiding principle behind God's relationship with humanity, humanity would create yet another Tower of Babel. Ibid., 241.

⁷⁷Beintker, "Krisis und Gnade," 447.

⁷⁸The Epistle to the Romans, 93.

⁷⁹Karl Barth, "The Great 'But,'" in Come Holy Spirit, 23.

⁸⁰Karl Barth, "An Answer to Professor Adolf Von Harnack's Open Letter," in Revelation and Theology, 50.

Therefore, the NO cannot exist without the YES; because the NO is, in reality, the YES of God.⁸¹ We have previously stated that the NO of God is intricately tied to the YES, so much so that the relationship has been described as ontological.⁸² Therefore, the law stands in a unique position: only as a form of the gospel does it function properly. Apart from the gospel, the law may, according to Barth, form

an actual obstacle to the inheritance of the Kingdom of God... Hence, when the law claims to possess in itself ultimate reality and to be like God, it becomes ungodliness and unrighteousness and attracts to itself the wrath of God...In this context the word 'law' embraces all who set out to experience the infinite, all who venture upon its contemplation or description or representation. This is always transgression...The law is not itself revelation, but a worldly, limited, negative impress of revelation...The law of righteousness... 'is the law of faith.'⁸³

As the gospel moves humanity into crisis, and as the law becomes, then, a form of the gospel, so too does God's word, as found in the gospel, place a demand of grace upon humanity which calls for an acquiescence of the human will to the divine. Humanity is wooed to give up its pursuit of God on its own terms and accept the terms of God's revelation:

Grace means: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Consequently, grace, as the existential relation between God and man, is bound to move from the indicative of the divine truth concerning men to the imperative by which the divine reality makes its demand upon them. They must will what God wills as hitherto they have not!...There is demanded of them- of each single person-a different being and having and doing.⁸⁴

⁸¹Barth says, "...the negation in which we stand can be understood only in light of the divine affirmation from which it proceeds." The Epistle to the Romans, 94-95.

⁸²Beintker, "Krisis und Gnade," 449.

⁸³The Epistle to the Romans, 135-136, 366.

⁸⁴Ibid., 222.

of each single person-a different being and having and doing.⁸⁴

Significantly, this move from the indicative of the divine truth concerning humanity to the imperative by which the divine reality makes its demand is the base for a divine ethical command, which we will discuss in the next chapter. Equally important is Barth's insistence upon the demand of grace, but the balance God's grace plays in the working out of this demand. While Barth is more than aware that humanity in its own power cannot fulfill the demand, the demand of grace does, at one level, make humanity aware of the "possibility of impossibility."⁸⁵

Not only does the gospel place a claim upon humanity, it also calls humanity to a response -- repentance:

The dialectic of the miracle of God is expressed in the words:
the goodness of God leadeth Thee to repentance. What is demanded of men by God can be demanded only by God, can be only a new call to God, a new call to conversion, awe, humility, a new requirement to abandon every security and to resign every honor, to give glory to God, to the unknown God, as always something new, as something that has never been done before.⁸⁶

Clearly the crux of the gospel-law ordering is found here! The love and grace of God, the gospel, brings humanity to repentance. Certainly the law does not do so, especially not by its own merit. The law as a form of the gospel has a direct correlation to the crisis of the YES, which reveals to humanity the NO of God.

Barth's approach to revelation in Phase III impacts gospel and law in this way: revelation in Phase III is an ahistorical event with which there can be no human interference. As such, revelation intersects history. In so doing, the God-

⁸⁴Ibid., 222.

⁸⁵Ibid., 223.

⁸⁶Ibid., 60.

event permeates the world and displays grace. But this is not a temporal event, nor is the grace displayed temporal. Recalling that Barth's eschatology is expressed in the dialectic of time and eternity,⁸⁷ the event of revelation finds its ultimate parameters in the time-eternity dialectic as do gospel and law. The impossible-possibility, as defined by the "coincidence of time and eternity, occurs as God's deed in which the opposition between each of the poles mentioned is not abrogated so that a continuity between them results."⁸⁸ Eternity -- the eternal grace of God in the pre-existent Christ -- touches the world, an event never to be confused with any human event. For this reason, therefore, God's grace, even in the strident tone of Phase III, must be the first word of God to humanity. And Barth confirms this point in his ordering of gospel before law.

Phase IV: The Gospel as Incarnational Eschatology: God's Eternal Election of Humanity as Reflected in the Person of Christ (1924).

By the end of Phase III (1922-1924), Barth had clearly placed gospel in a position before law. In Phase IV, especially within the Göttingen Dogmatics and the Ethics lectures of 1928-1930, the gospel's content is more fully discussed. This content is Jesus Christ.

⁸⁷The dialectic of time and eternity serves as an expression of Barth's eschatology in the following manner: it assures the inbreaking of eternity into time without equating eternity with time. McCormack cites a helpful book by Michael Beintker, Die Dialektik in der dialektischen Theologie Karl Barths In it Beintker examines this relationship between eternity and time. He states, "Eternity cannot become time. But eternity can encounter time. Barth calls that moment the 'Moment,' when he has in view the relation of eternity to the existence of the believer. And he characterizes it as 'primal history' when he is establishing the relation of eternity to the even of revelation in the Christ event...Every temporal moment can become a parable of the eternal moment...Thus Barth developed in the second edition of Romans distinct features of an 'eschatology of the hic et nunc,' in which all moments of our time and history can be thought of as being in the same nearness to the eschaton." Michael Beintker as cited in McCormack, 147.

⁸⁸Revelation and Theology, 148.

For Barth, Christ as the content of the gospel is correlated to his adoption of the ancient anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula: God is fully human yet fully divine. Entering into history as a man, God still maintains the divine incognito. This Christology, along with its partner, God's eternal election of humanity in Christ, served to reinforce Barth's ordering of gospel before law.

In Phase IV, Barth continued to reaffirm that the crisis humanity faces originates in the grace of God: God's word to humanity is YES: "...the divine Word does not say NO. It says YES, for the YES breaks forth out of the NO...For when God is known, even though it be in judgment, then He is known totally, and therefore, so also is His grace. When the divine NO to us is truly heard, then it is broken through by the divine YES, whose shell it is."⁸⁹

While it may seem that here in the Göttingen Dogmatics Barth is arguing for the primacy of the law, this is not the case. The YES which breaks forth from the NO is the original YES of the crisis-the YES, which in fact, gives the NO its meaning. God's gospel encloses the law like a shell.⁹⁰

Significantly, Barth does see an interconnectedness between the gospel and

⁸⁹The Göttingen Dogmatics, 461, 464. [underline mine]

⁹⁰Barth reiterates this idea of the gospel enclosing the law clear in the 1928-1930 Ethics. He argues: "...it may be easily overlooked that the origin of the establishment and revelation of the law is undoubtedly God himself and the love of God...while one may emphasize the distance and even the antithesis between God and man which the revelation of the command and occurrence of the crisis manifest, one must still remember above all that this event does at least mean encounter with God...it must be perceived above all that the fact of this encounter is itself proof of the love of God, a love which is perhaps displayed as wrathful love, yet still is God's love." And again: "Love is before judgement and above it. Law is simply the concrete form and voice of the gospel." From: Ethics, 90-91.

the law.⁹¹ However, Barth's emphasis is on God's word of grace as the first word spoken to humanity. Even in the act of creation, God expresses grace to humanity: "God's Word is his, the truth of the unknown, inscrutable, holy God, graciously revealed to us so far as God speaks to us and by his speaking grants us hearing, so creating communion between himself and us, between us and himself."⁹² Ultimately, for Barth, the gospel, reflected in revelation, is the gracious word of God to humanity.⁹³ And this revelation, which in Phase IV is constituted in the Incarnation, reflects further the reason Barth places gospel before law.

With the adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula, Barth gave revelation historical content but allowed for the divine incognito to remain intact. Recalling that in Phase III revelation did not have historical content but did enter into history through the ahistorical event of the resurrection, Barth's theological development in the area of Christology and therefore his doctrine of revelation has significant consequences. With the revised Christology, God, who

⁹¹In the Ethics lectures, Barth describes the unique relationship that exists between the gospel and the law: "As the concept of law cannot be interpreted apart from the atonement that has taken place in Christ, so the concept of atonement cannot be interpreted without thinking of the law. The command of the Creator is formally and materially the command of life-formally because it is given to us in and with the life that God has created, materially because we are ordered to live this life that God has created-so the command of God the Reconciler is the command of law-formally because it is given to us as we are directed by grace and put under law, materially because we are ordered to acknowledge God's contradiction of us by the law, and in this submission to give God the glory. To live by faith is to love God and fear him, to fear God and love him." Ethics, 293. Important to note here is Barth's insistence on the way the gospel brings us to the law and how in the law we respond in obedience to God and therefore show God we love him. But even in their interconnectedness, gospel is still very much God's first and last word to the world.

⁹²"Church and Culture," (given June 1 1926), in Theology and Church, 335.

⁹³"Church and Theology," in Theology and Church, 289.

in Barth's theology had seemed so distant, enters into the world fully without losing any divine sovereignty. The implications are two-fold: first, God's grace as reflected in the gospel is emphasized in a new way -- now the God whose first word to humanity is a word of grace enters into history, demonstrating the impossible-possibility of covenant relationship; second, the content of this gospel rests in the Incarnate Christ.⁹⁴

According to Barth, God speaks to humanity in Christ⁹⁵ and "in himself and primarily Christ is the Savior and Head of Elect humanity and only implicitly and secondarily is he also the judge of rejected humanity."⁹⁶ This concept of Christ as the head of the elect is crucial to our understanding of Barth's ordering of gospel before law: the gospel, whose content is Christ, is anchored in God's eternal election of humanity.

Barth emphasizes that from eternity, humanity has been elected as God's covenant partner:

'God lives for us in Jesus Christ...The meaning is: we are-I am, you are-objects of God's regard from all eternity...I am regarded and acknowledged by God, yes infinitely far from him as I am. Not as a second God but as a man who has sinned, is sinning, and will sin, and who can recognize himself as nothing else than lost, I am acknowledged by God in Jesus Christ his beloved Son, acknowledged, chosen, and, when the fullness of time was come, reconciled to Him.'⁹⁷

The presupposition of humanity's election is therefore the great act of the mercy

⁹⁴Karl Barth, "Gospel and Law " Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers 8 (1959): 5-6.

⁹⁵"Church and Theology," 302.

⁹⁶The Göttingen Dogmatics, 461.

⁹⁷Karl Barth, The Christian Life, trans. J. Strathearn McNab (London: SCM Press, 1926), 12-13.

of God: God lives for us and in us in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.⁹⁸

The sheer act of creation is one of grace in which humanity gains insight into its own existence.⁹⁹ Indeed, this act is an eternal manifestation of grace, of election, of the eternal gospel. And this gospel, whose content is the eternal Christ, is the eternal election of God. As God eternally elects humanity and as humanity experiences the crisis that comes from this election, humanity is simultaneously judged. Here, importantly, is where the gospel and law work so closely: as the gospel brings humanity God's first word of grace, and subsequently crisis, so the law of God calls humanity to obedience as God's covenant partners.

From eternity, the manifestation of God's mercy and righteousness is established,¹⁰⁰ and, for Barth,

the decision before and under which we are set by God's word in Christ is so decisive that we are not permitted to go back to an indecision, indefiniteness, or neutrality prior to this decision. The decision is always first and supreme. From and to all eternity we are simply the objects of the mercy and righteousness of the divine will.¹⁰¹

The Christological formula of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis, specifically introduced and discussed in the Göttingen Dogmatics confirms the ordering of gospel before law as the reflection of God's gracious election of humanity in Christ from eternity. The YES of God that informs the NO is the Word of God: the Word of revelation, the Word of grace. We have, in the first three chapters of this work, traced the development of Karl Barth's ethics from the late Teens to the

⁹⁸Ibid., 41.

⁹⁹Karl Barth, The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, trans. R. Birch Hoyle (London: Frederick Muller, Inc., 1938), 20.

¹⁰⁰The Göttingen Dogmatics, 468.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 468.

early Twenties through an analysis of his doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel before law. This examination establishes the basis for understanding the way that Barth approached the question of ethics. Our next task is to examine the way that Barth's doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel before law influenced his approach to ethics. To this aspect of Barth's work, we now direct our attention.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Ethical Aspects of Karl Barth's doctrine of revelation and gospel and law.

I. The Relocation of the Ethical Question

In addressing questions of the relationship between Barth's theology (as completed by 1924) and his ethics, we must begin by understanding where Barth places the ethical question, which for Barth, finds its home and validation within the confines of dogmatics and therefore within God's gracious election of humanity. The question of ethics is, for Barth, not a question of good and evil or the choice between good and evil, for this is a category redolent of human inauthenticity.¹ The question of ethics is,

a search for the heteronomous and intrinsic law with which we must come into harmony if we are to live authentically and creatively. Choosing between good and evil implies that people are already in touch with reality and their only task is its administration. Barth's relocation of the ethical question acknowledges the fact that men and women are not already in touch with reality, but that search is the human task and it is possible only on the basis of grace. The choice between good and evil calls elements within our environment into question. The real ethical question calls us into question.²

The heteronomous intrinsic law of which Bettis speaks is, for Barth, the ethical imperative (rooted and grounded in God's divine election) which carries its own intrinsic validation and calls humanity into radical obedience to God:³ the ethical imperative exists for Barth in God's authority alone.⁴

¹CD IV/1, 449.

²Joseph Bettis, "Political Theology and Social Ethics: The Socialist Humanism of Karl Barth," Scottish Journal of Theology 27 (1974): 293-294.

³CD II/2, 535.

⁴Ibid., 587.

Because Barth places the ethical question within the locus of God's prerogative and election, several implications follow, namely, Barth's rejection of certain approaches to theology and ethics (natural theology, the point of contact, eristic theology) and his basis for all ethical activity as found in the command of God.

II. The Implications of Barth's doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel before law.

A. The rejection of Natural Theology.⁵

Barth's rejection of natural theology⁶ arose out of his doctrine of revelation, one in which all knowledge of God was presented and understood in the event of the revelation of Christ. This left no room for any form of natural theology, which emphasized the role of humanity in comprehending the divine. This ability was based on the power of reason, whereby humanity would reflect on its nature

⁵In "Natur und Gnade," Emil Brunner stated: "This much is clear: the theologians attitude to theologia naturalis decides the character of his ethics." From "Nature and Grace," Natural Theology (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946), 51. This statement is certainly true to the case of Karl Barth, for his rejection of natural theology would clearly inform his ethics.

⁶We will not be examining theories of natural law in detail in this work. For further information on natural law theories see the following: Thomas Aquinas, Nature and Grace: Selections from Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas (London: SCM Press, 1954); Summa Theologica, trans. Thomas Gilby (London: Blackfriars, 1965); J. Dalby, The Catholic Conception of the Law of Nature (London: SPCK, 1943); Alexander Passerin d'Entreves, Natural Law: An Introduction to Legal Philosophy (London: Hutchinson, 1951 and 1971); Jacques Ellul, The Theological Foundation of Law, trans. Marguerite Wieser (London: SCM Press, 1960); J. Finnis, The Fundamentals of Ethics (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1983), Natural Law and Natural Rights (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980); Otto Gierke, Natural Law and the Theory of Society v. I&II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1934); C.G. Haines, The Revival of Natural Law Concepts, (Harvard: Harvard University Press); N. Micklem, The Theology of the Law, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943); E. Troeltsch, The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches, 2 vols., (Allen and Unwin, 1931).

and, in so doing, discover God's general end for humankind, 'blessed immortality.' Apprehending this goal would thus empower humanity to determine the means by which to achieve its end. Thus, at one level, natural theology espoused a belief in the "participation of eternal law in rational creatures"⁷ and believed natural law to be the imprint of God's providential plan on humanity's natural reason. Natural law was ingrained in humanity as "that which God had implanted in the mind of Adam and therefore man as man."⁸ With the help of reason, humanity could seek for concrete norms that would serve its effort at self-realization and reject those that radically contradicted this pursuit.

Proponent of natural law doctrine would concur that it functions under a three-fold proposition: that "man is intelligent, that reality is intelligible and that reality, grasped by intelligence imposes on the will an obligation that it be obeyed in its demand for action or abstention."⁹ In this three-fold presupposition, natural law demands a morality that stems from within human nature. Moreover, natural law provides a structure of human order -- this structure is the being of humanity's nature, a rule or measure of righteousness that God demands from His creatures. Born out of the Biblical legal codes, moral judgments and human conscience, natural law provides not only a judgment of right and wrong originating in divine reason,¹⁰ but also a valid norm of conduct that has as its first precept to do good

⁷St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, trans. Thomas Gilby (London: Blackfriars, 1965), 1a2ae, 91.2.

⁸Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration, ed. A.R. Vidler and W.A. Whitehouse (London: SCM Press, 1946), 14.

⁹James Gustafson, "Christian Ethics," in Religion, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1965): 321.

¹⁰Natural Law: A Christian Reconsideration, 21.

and avoid evil.¹¹

In functioning as a law of reason, natural law corresponds to the nature of voluntary agents. True human action depends on reason (conformed to natural law), controlling the activity of the will. Therefore, the full expression of natural law depends on humanity's voluntary affirmation of it in right conduct: obedience to natural law is not achieved automatically, for humanity is responsible for cooperating or not cooperating with God in its use of reason.

Significantly, natural law can be known by humanity in spite of its sin. The Encyclical Humani Generis states that in spite of the wounds of original sin, humanity can know the basic principles of natural law.¹² However, sin does obstruct humanity's ability to accurately scrutinize that which may appear as natural law: humanity cannot, therefore, fully and completely interact with the Divine outside of faith. Thus, humanity's participation in eternal law is defective: "Human reason cannot have full participation of the dictate of the Divine Reason, but according to its own mode, and imperfectly."¹³ While the natural law is independent of divine revelation, it finds its fulfillment in divine revelation: there, the Christian will be most able to discern the authority of natural law.

In Karl Barth's thinking, natural law and natural theology were anathema:¹⁴ the knowledge of God could "not be sought or found in human empirical or existential reality. One cannot reflect upon the human situation and obtain

¹¹Summa Theologica, 93.3 ad 1.

¹²Encyclical Humani Generis, D.2305f; 2320ff.

¹³Summa Theologica, 93.3 ad 1.

¹⁴Barth's major reaction was to natural theology. However, because natural theology includes some concepts of the natural law, we include both terms. Our discussion, however, will focus on natural theology and Barth's polemic against it.

knowledge of God with any certainty at all. Such knowledge is not present before us in everyday experience."¹⁵ Barth defined natural theology as "every (positive and negative) formulation of a system which claims to be theological, i.e. to interpret divine revelation, whose subject, however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose method therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scriptures."¹⁶ According to Barth, whose most famous argument against natural theology was in his response to Emil Brunner's "Natur und Gnade,"¹⁷ natural theology was not a subject that Barth would consider as a separate entity within theology. Because, Barth argued, natural theology relied upon other means (history, reason, nature) rather than God's sole revelation in Christ, natural theology could only be compared to

an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to fall. All one can do is to turn ones back upon it as upon the great temptation and source of error, by having nothing to do with it and by making clear to oneself and to others from time to time why one acts that way....Really to reject natural theology means to refuse to admit it as a separate problem. Hence the rejection of natural theology can only be a side issue, arising when serious questions of real theology are being discussed.¹⁸

Because Barth adhered (and indeed spent a great deal of time and energy formulating his position) to a doctrine of revelation that was based on God's

¹⁵Paul Matheney. Dogmatics as Ethics (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang GmbH, 1990), 16.

¹⁶Karl Barth, "No!," in Natural Theology (London: Geoffrey Bles: The Centenary Press, 1946), 74-75.

¹⁷The famous Barth-Brunner debate of 1934 revolved around this issue of natural theology. Barth also addressed the issue of natural theology in the 1938 Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh University. See The Knowledge of God and the Service of God, trans. J.L.M. Haine and Ian Henderson (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938.) See especially Lecture 1.

¹⁸"No!," 75-76.

gracious election of humanity, all natural theology could be nothing but a nuisance.¹⁹ For him, there was no way that individuals could possess any kind of moral criteria independent of their relation to God and God's revelation. Hence, Barth's greatest complaint against natural theology: it reduces the God event of revelation; it exercises divine sovereignty without being divine and it relegates God to a position secondary to human reason and effort. Although natural theologians like Thomas Aquinas have admitted to the natural law as being intrinsically tied to revelation and faith, Barth argues that humanity, outside of Christ, has completely lost the image of God: it has been annihilated. Therefore, under no circumstances is access to God possible at any level through an intrinsic law of nature in humanity. So emphatic was Barth on this point that he wrote in a letter to Rudolph Bultmann:

Where people play around with a natural theology and are so eager to pursue theology within a framework of a pre understanding that has not been attained theologically, the inevitable result is that they end up in rigidities and reactionary corners which are no better than the liberalisms of others; on the contrary, where this happens, I would rather be in hell with the Religious Socialists than land up in the heaven in which it will be ones lot to be condemned to a 'state of life' for all eternity, to have to gaze at the 'Thou' that is foreordained by creation and have to maintain this condition for redemption."²⁰

¹⁹In his response to Brunner, Barth states: "For of what use would the purest theology based on grace and revelation be to me if I dealt with the subjects of grace and revelation in the way in which natural theology usually deals with its so-called distant data derived from reason, nature, history, as if one had them pocketed, as if one had the knowledge of them below one instead of always behind and in front?" From "No!," 77.

²⁰Considering Barth's position regarding the religious Socialist's, this is a very telling statement! From Karl Barth-Rudolph Bultmann Letters 1922-1966, 50. See also The Göttingen Dogmatics, 92-93 for further elucidation by Barth on his view of natural theology.

In addressing natural theology, Barth's concern can be seen in his confrontation with three major areas: the place of the analogia entis, the point of contact, and the role of eristic theology.

1. The Analogia Entis

One primary area that Barth attacked in his fight against natural theology was the concept of the analogia entis, the analogy of being. It suggests that there is something in the being of humanity that has its analogue in the being of God. Naturally, with the theology that affirmed the relationship between God and humanity as purely God-created and initiated, an analogia entis would have no place in Barth's theology or ethics.²¹ The issue Barth raises regarding the analogia entis is one of openness: the receptiveness or non-receptiveness of humanity to God's revelation. In approaching this concern, Barth's polemic against the analogia entis "intends to maintain the same sovereignty of grace...Barth means that in describing the relationship between man and God we may never speak of an objective state of affairs, but we must speak of a relationship which is founded in god and remains founded in Him."²² Clearly, then, Barth's concern revolves around the relationship between the analogia entis and humanity's knowledge of God: under no circumstances does Barth want the analogia entis to find a place of parity with God's grace -- indeed, he wants the analogia entis to find no place

²¹G.C. Berkower in his helpful book The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth describes Barth's aversion to the analogia entis in this way: "On the basis of the analogia entis, natural theology posits an essential readiness, an openness for the knowledge of God as that knowledge which is already present in natural man prior to and apart from the encounter with the gracious God. This man of the natural theology is the man who knows God without the miracle of grace...in natural theology man denies his being completely closed to revelation." Berkower, 185.

²²Ibid., 180-181.

at all except subsumed under the category and reality of faith. There is no analogy, on the basis of which beginning with itself, humanity can come to a knowledge of God's being.²³

It would be incorrect to state that in refuting the analogia entis Barth rules out any concept of analogy. On the contrary, Barth desires to speak of an analogy of faith, the "αναλογία τῆς πίστεως", the likeness of the known in the knowing, of the object of thought...it is the divine act of knowledge which takes place on man rather than through man that distinguishes those whose knowledge is grounded in the love of God and therefore in true fellowship with Him, in the presence of God."²⁴ Dr. Bruce McCormack notes that Barth's analogy of faith refers fundamentally "to a correspondence for which there are no preconditions on the human side and no on going effects."²⁵ According to McCormack, this means four things:

1. The analogy is not posited with creation.
2. There is nothing in the being or knowing of the human subject that helps initiate the event.
3. The analogy is actualized by God alone and therefore, does not pass onto human control.

²³CD II/1, 82. Earlier in II/1 Barth stated that humanity cannot speak of knowing God as Creator "wholly or partially because we have a prior knowledge of something which resembles creation. It is only because it has been given to us by God's revelation to know Him....the factor that makes humanity analogous to God does not lie in him or in his nature, also not in the sense that God could recognize and accept as an analogy something lying in the creature as such." II/1, 77, 239.

²⁴CD I/1, 243-244, underline mine.

²⁵McCormack, 160.

4. The possibility of human language is not grounded in the suitability of human language for revelation. The possibility of language that becomes suitable for revelation is grounded in revelation.²⁶

The analogy of faith underlines Barth's entire theological enterprise: all knowledge of God, all interaction with Him, depends on the meeting that takes place in the event of revelation. The relation of the analogy of which Barth speaks is one that is "founded in God's revelation and which therefore can be and is the basis of true knowledge of God."²⁷ Therefore, humanity does maintain an analogy to God but only in so far as it is based in God's revelation, grounded in faith. Humanity only knows God through grace, not through natural self-evidence from which conclusions are drawn. For Barth, there is only the grace of God's revelation.²⁸

2. The Point of Contact

Closely related to the concept of the analogia entis is the point of contact, this being the place where humanity is able to meet God because of God's image being implanted within humanity, an idea closely linked to the theology of Emil Brunner. Therefore, in order to understand Barth's aversion to the notion of the point of contact, we must first examine Brunner's position.

²⁶Ibid. McCormack cites Eberhard Jüngel who says that "...the language in which the revelation shall be able to come to speech must, as it were, be commandeered by revelation. Where such 'commandeering' of the language by revelation for revelation becomes event, then there is a gain to knowledge. It exists in the fact that God as God comes to speech." From The Doctrine of the Trinity: God's Being Is In Becoming (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), 11.

²⁷Berkower, 183.

²⁸CD II/1, 235.

According to Brunner, there exists between God and humanity an "anknüpfungspunkt," or point of contact, whereby humanity may perceive certain knowledge of God, of the Divine Law, outside of the Bible. For Brunner, the point of contact is the 'lex naturae' written on the hearts of human beings, which when encountered by the law, says, "'Yes it is so; I cannot deny it.' We could not persuade him so quickly were it not that the law is written in his heart. Because it already in his heart, although in a dim and obscure manner, it is awakened again by the Word."²⁹ With this knowledge, humanity is open to being apprehended by God -- even in its rebellion, humanity has reason and is therefore receptive to God's Word.³⁰ Integral to Brunner's concept of the point of contact is the place of human reason, for without reason there is no revelation: by means of its reason, humanity is able to perceive God in His works.³¹ This reason is a part of what Brunner defines as the formal Imago Dei.

Brunner separates the Imago Dei into two realms: the material imago and the formal imago. Brunner argues that materially

the imago is completely lost, man is a sinner through and through and there is nothing in him which is not defiled by sin. To formulate it differently: as before, man is a person.... Yet he is not a personal person but an anti-personal person; for the truly personal is existence in love, the submission of the self to the will of God and therefore an entering into communion with ones fellow-creature because one enjoys communion with God. This quid of personality is

²⁹Emil Brunner, Man in Revolt (London: SCM Press, 1939), 537.

³⁰Ibid., 103. Brunner argues that when humanity is apprehended by God, this apprehension takes place in the following order: humanity's outward presence and the external act of hearing; the act of understanding, in the logical and grammatical sense; then humanity's rational and personal being, above all its center, the knowledge of responsibility. See Man in Revolt, 536-537.

³¹Emil Brunner, Revelation and Reason (London: SCM Press, 1947), 68.

negated in and through sin, whereas the quod of personality constitutes the humanum of every man and also that of the sinner.³²

While the material image has been destroyed, the formal has not. The formal sense of the imago is the concept of the human -- that which distinguishes humanity from anything else that is in creation, in spite of its sinlessness or sinfulness.³³ The formal image impresses the superiority of the human over the rest of creation. Based in humanity's special relation to God, humanity is to bear God's image, one that has been perverted but not lost.³⁴ Therefore, the formal imago still acts as a means by which God is revealed: "...the dialectic of faith in particular is based on the fact that man bears within himself traces of the divine image, though they are disfigured, it is true; these traces witness to the fact that originally the creation was good, and thus reveals God."³⁵ Brunner is clear to emphasize that what is not lost in sin is humanity's distinct role of being 'human'³⁶ in that its members have the capacity to reason and therefore

³²"Nature and Grace," 24.

³³Ibid., 23.

³⁴Brunner asserts that "...sin does not mean the annihilation of the original element in man, but its perversion." Revelation and Reason, 74. See also Man in Revolt, 137.

³⁵Emil Brunner, The Mediator (London: The Lutterworth Press, 1934), 31.

³⁶For Brunner, "To arrive at an explanation of what happens between the impressing of the divine image and its being lost, we must make use of a process of 'extrapolation' (so to say). To say that man has lost the image of God indicates that one no longer understands what the Old Testament meant by the expression: being person in the sense that every man, sinner or not, whether believer or not, is a person as differentiated from the subhuman creature; for this essence of being is certainly not lost." Emil Brunner, The Divine-Human Encounter (London: SCM Press, 1944), 94.

comprehend the speech of God to them.³⁷ However, Brunner is quick to point out that he is not affirming natural theology in the sense of the Roman Catholic view:

humanity is always with revelation

...the natural man is never understood save as one who comes from an original revelation, which was instituted by the Creator, but has been perverted into a self imposed world view or mythology. The status corruptus is only to be understood as the human perversion of an original status integritas, and in the Bible it is never otherwise understood....Thus even as a sinner, as the 'natural man,' man is never without revelation; rather he always comes from and can only be understood in light of, this revelation which precedes the fact of his being a sinner.³⁸

Therefore, because in the formal sense the Imago Dei is preserved even in its perversion, it acts, for Brunner, as the point of contact.

Because the formal imago is not lost but perverted, humanity has a point of contact with God. That humanity is unique in this sense is a result of two factors: humanity has the capacity for words, and humanity is therefore, responsible. Because humanity is receptive to language, humanity is receptive to the Word of God.³⁹ However, this is only on a material level. Nevertheless, humanity is endowed with the possibility of being addressed, which for Brunner implies a presupposition of human responsibility⁴⁰ and a knowledge of sin and grace: "Only a being that can be addressed is responsible, for it also can make decisions. Only a being that can be addressed is capable of sin. But in sinning, while being responsible, it somehow or other knows of its sin. This knowledge of sin is a necessary presupposition of the understanding of the divine message of

³⁷"Nature and Grace," 23.

³⁸Revelation and Reason, 53.

³⁹"Nature and Grace," 31.

⁴⁰Ibid.

grace."⁴¹ Therefore, although materially the imago has been lost, formally, the imago is intact. This is Brunner's understanding of the point of contact.

Despite Brunner's argument, Barth finds fault with the concept of the *anknüpfungspunkt*. What is at stake in their debate is the very issue of the starting point of theology: Brunner, with creation and Barth, with Incarnation. Barth, in his rejection of any form of revelation, which stresses even a modicum of human receptivity before God's grace, renders a natural theology as simply unacceptable:⁴² in Barth's view, nothing comes before the grace of God. Barth cannot, on any level, accept the point of contact ground in the imago, which for Barth has been totally obliterated in the fall:

The fact that God 'reaches' man with his Word may well be due to something other than, the formal possibility of his being addressed and his humanitas...evidently the 'formal imago Dei' meant that man can 'somehow' and 'to some extent' know and do the will of God without revelation....Has not Brunner added to man's 'capacity for revelation,' to what we have been assured is purely 'formal' something material: man's practically proved ability to know God, imperfect it may be, but nevertheless really and therefore surely not without relevance to salvation?⁴³

Barth argues that in the fall the image of God was completely lost, only to be restored by the incarnate Christ. Therefore, the point of contact is not, for Barth, real outside of faith.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²CD II/1, 137, 139.

⁴³"No!," 89-90, 82.

⁴⁴"No matter how it may be with his humanity and personality, man has completely lost the capacity for God....The image of God in man of which we must speak here and which forms the real point of contact for God's Word is the *rectitudo* which through Christ is raised up from real death and thus restored or created anew, and which is real as man's possibility for the Word of God....Hence this point of contact is...real only in faith." CD I/1, 238-239.

Barth's rejection of Brunner's point of contact is based on Barth's rejection of a presupposition of a suitability within humanity for the reception of God's revelation. For Barth, God is the one who, in the event of revelation, creates a point of contact -- the point of contact, and there is "in no way prior habitus in man for such reception."⁴⁵

3. Eristic Theology

The third position that Barth refutes, as a result of his doctrine of revelation and his theological ordering of gospel before law, is that of eristic theology, which Brunner used to describe a combination of apologetics and polemics.⁴⁶ Barth describes eristics as a theology wherein humanity's "aptitude for the revelation of God consists only in the fact that in the rational existence of man there is a diacritical point where this existence can become discontinuous, where it can issue in a 'negative point' where its most essential truth, its 'fundamental condition,' i.e. despair, can come to light....All that man 'can do' with reference to revelation is despair."⁴⁷ Naturally, Barth would reject such a theology whose root is despair, since for Barth, theology finds its base in the eternal grace of God. Yes, this grace does bring humanity into crisis and judgment. Yes, this grace does tell people that they are in need of Christ in order to know God. But grace is the preemptive word for Barth. In no way would he ever embrace an approach to God based on any kind of human reason, even a reason that might lead to despair and, thus, to conversion. True conversion happens for Barth when a person encounters the love

⁴⁵Berkower, 192.

⁴⁶See The Divine Imperative, especially Chapter VII.

⁴⁷"No!," 115.

and grace of God witnessed in Christ and, in embracing its election, sees the hand of God reaching out as a covenant partner. For Barth, no one seeks after God without God first revealing Himself through Christ. No one finds God until God finds him or her. Therefore, the question of existence, so prevalent in Brunner's eristics, can find its origin only in faith: because humanity's existence is so perverse, it cannot begin to ask questions (even if these lead to despair) that are capable of bringing about God's revelation.⁴⁸

Since Barth does not accept any form of natural theology or a human point of contact, how does this impact his ethics? In this next section, we will discuss how Barth's doctrine of revelation and theological ordering of gospel before law form the foundation for his ethic of command.

III. The Ethic of Command

For Barth, the criteria for all ethics is found in the command of God. Because Barth believes in a personal living God, he based this command in the groundwork of his theology -- in God. According to Barth, the starting point for all ethics is "the Word of God which is addressed to people and requires an active answer."⁴⁹ Thus, theological ethics revolves around humanity's response to the Word of God and humanity's obedience to this Word in Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ In placing

⁴⁸For further discussion on this matter see Karl Barth, "Theology and the Modern Man," Zwischen den Zeiten 8 (1930): 374-396.

⁴⁹Heinz Eduard Tödt, "Karl Barth, der Liberalismus und der Nationalsozialismus," Evangelischer Theologie 46 (1986): 544. Barth states that "the Word of God is the basis for all ethics" (Göttingen Dogmatics, 272), and calls the task of ethics as that which presents and claims humanity by the Word of God. (Ethics, 45).

⁵⁰Matheney, 30. See also Karl Barth, "Politische Entscheidung in der Einheit des Glaubens," Theologische Existenz heute n.f. 34 (1952): 8.

the ethical question in the realm of human existence before God, Barth stands apart from traditional moral philosophers⁵¹ and redefines the ethical question: the divine-human relationship begins with the acknowledgement that "God is God...Ethical propositions are therefore ethical only as expositions of this presupposition which may never be regarded as a thing already known, or treated as a basis of further routine questions, or a something from which it is possible to hurry on to a new position."⁵² Consistently, Barth emphasizes that the foundation of ethics is first and foremost rooted in God. Therefore, ethics is, for Barth, dogmatics⁵³ and must be treated within the doctrine of God.

In viewing ethics in this manner, Barth is again 'protecting' what is, for him, the sovereignty of God: "the attempts methodically to separate dogmatics and ethics are dubious even from the point of ethics itself because in the process there regularly occurs a change of focus, a fatal interchange of the subjects of God and man."⁵⁴ Clearly we see yet again the connection between Barth's theological position and his ethical: the polemic that Barth so vehemently supported in the reshaping of his theology -- namely the refutation of any kind of theology that begins with humanity -- Barth continues in his ethics. No ethic can be a true ethic for Barth if its foundation is not in God. Ethics cannot, therefore, be separated from dogmatics: since ethics addresses the question of human existence before God, it can find its meaning in no other place than dogmatics, for the whole of Barth's work seeks to answer the very question of existence, whose answer rests

⁵¹Matheney, 20.

⁵²The Epistle to the Romans, 439.

⁵³Ethics, 18, 49. See also CD II/2, 515; The Epistle to the Romans, 430.

⁵⁴Barth, CD I/2, 790.

in none other than God's sovereignty and eternal message of grace to humanity. There can be no other place where deliberation regarding the nature of God and humanity's relationship takes place -- the task of ethics must be elucidated in relationship to dogmatics.⁵⁵

Significantly, Barth does not discount the input of other ethical approaches, such as philosophy. For Barth, "...general ethical questions and answers can witness to Christian ethical knowledge if they are understood in light of God's command....Reason, experience, human freedom and other philosophical categories can be subsumed theologically although they cannot have independent truth, value, and authority in themselves."⁵⁶ Barth is painstaking in his efforts to assure the place of other ethical systems in answering the question of existence, but makes an even greater effort to ensure that their place can be only within the hemisphere of Christian ethics and the sovereignty of God. Only when enlightened by the truth of the Word of God can any ethic find validity for Barth.

His approach has one major emphasis: the Word of God -- eternal and sovereign to humanity. Because for Barth, the gospel and life are intertwined and interconnected, so too are dogmatics and ethics. Truth within ethics, as in dogmatics, is known and comprehended within the arena of the hearing of the Word of God.

We are not surprised to find that Barth unites dogmatics and ethics. In fact,

⁵⁵For Barth, "Ethics, or rather the multifarious ethical systems,...result from man's desire to give the answer himself and of himself and so be like God, knowing good and evil....Such ethics is not genuine but illegitimate." From Ian C.M. Fairweather and James I.H. McDonald, The Quest for Christian Ethics (Edinburgh: The Handsel Press Ltd., 1984), 127.

⁵⁶Matheny, 38. See also Barth, CD II/2, 524; Ethics, 36.

had he not done so, there would be the surprise, for in a theology that from 1915 began to 'restore' God to a place of primacy in theology, there could be no room for an ethic independent of this enterprise. To establish a standard of morality detached from theology would, in fact, detract from Barth's goal, reinforcing the *analogia entis* against which he fought so adamantly. Ethics had to be dogmatics. Barth had to unite the two if his theology were to remain consistent. And in doing, Barth's ethics had to be one that applied the language of command. If, as Barth strove to achieve, the sovereignty of God were to be upheld above all else, then the form of an ethic had to be one that came from above, thus, the divine command. But what is this command that Barth so ardently articulated? What is the nature of the command for the Christian as he or she seeks to make ethical choices in keeping with faith and relationship with the covenant partner?

For Barth, the most important aspect of the nature of the mandate is that it belongs to God and God alone.⁵⁷ The command originates in God and is given by God -- no other holds credence. In recognizing this starting point, humanity's response is to be one that regards God as the unconditional Lord⁵⁸ and in so doing, hears that "God is our God and that we are His Israel, His Church."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Ethics, 94. Within Barth's command ethic, there is a hint of a Kantian influence, particularly in the concept of an imperative given to humanity. Barth himself stated, "Pure ethics require -- and here we are in complete agreement with Kant -- that there should be no mixing of heaven and earth in the sphere of morals. Pure ethical behavior depends upon its primal origin, an origin which needs to be protected by a determinism on our part to call God and man, however much we may be tempted to stray into romanticism." (The Epistle to the Romans, 432).

Moreover, Kant's idea of conformity to the noumenal self will impact Barth's approach to questions of freedom and obedience. For further discussion, see note 94, page 134.

⁵⁸Ibid., 95.

⁵⁹CD II/2, 735.

This is an extremely important concept for Barth. As humanity recognizes that the directive emanates from God, and in response, elevates God to God's rightful position of Lordship and sovereignty, then humanity is able to embrace its role as God's partner and Church. This idea, inherent in God's command, is intricately connected to Barth's doctrine of revelation and his ordering of gospel before law. Recalling that for Barth, revelation is an event, positioned within history yet remaining distinct from history in its eternal origin -- (remembering that in addressing the place of gospel and law, Barth argues that God's gospel, God's word of grace, Jesus Christ, is the first and overwhelming word to humanity) -- the connection between the command and humanity's response is significant. Barth cannot envision any ethic of command apart from humanity, in that, as God speaks the irresistible word of grace, humanity responds (in whatever way each person chooses) and thus hears and acts on the command. This is not to say that God's pre-eminent declaration needs humanity. However, humanity does need the command in order to embrace its election and live as the people God created humanity to be. In this sense, command language is irreplaceable in understanding Barth's theology and its relationship to ethics and the actions of humanity.

Therefore, the command as God's dictate means that in establishing the starting-point for all ethics, and simultaneously lifting up God's sovereignty, there must exist an absolute personal, living will distinct from humanity,⁶⁰ that is, God. Clearly, for Barth, the imperative concept governing his ethic is that of God's directive and its primacy above all else. Furthermore, this mandate will not only find its origin in God, but will also reflect God's gracious election of humanity --

⁶⁰Ethics, 85.

the content of the command.

When Barth speaks of the command and its content, he is referring to the way that God's action is to be reflected in the actions of humanity.⁶¹ But this kind of statement seems nebulous. What does Barth mean when he says that the content of God's command is found in God's action? We believe Barth is referring to the eternal action of God in His grace in electing humanity.

God's command, together with its content, is rooted in election.⁶² God does not give humanity His command without first promising to be humanity's eternal covenant partner, to whom He is fully committed.⁶³ In this way, the divine command, along with its content, is but a form of God's grace and is, therefore, the starting point of every ethical question and answer for Barth.⁶⁴ Barth is quick to point out that if God's grace has not been revealed, then the content of the command is not of or from God: "We must seek the command of God only where it has itself torn off the veil of all human opinions and theories about the will of God and manifested itself unequivocally. We must seek it only where He has revealed Himself as grace, and therefore, in His truth."⁶⁵ Here we see where Barth is congruent with his theology: ethics cannot have as its content anything but God's grace, and this reality is equally true theologically for Barth.

⁶¹According to Barth, the content of the command is "simply that the person should reflect God's action in his or her own action, accepting God's action as right." From William P. Werpehowski, "Command and History in the Ethics of Karl Barth," Journal of Religious Ethics 9 (1981): 302.

⁶²Bettis, 296.

⁶³Ethics, 96.

⁶⁴CD II/2, 519.

⁶⁵CD II/2, 559.

Thus, the command that arises from Barth's theology, and therefore his ethics, is rooted in God and God's eternal commitment to humanity by His grace, that is Jesus Christ, the eternal Logos.

The scope of this command is all encompassing. Because God's eternal election is for all humanity, because from eternity God extends His hand of relationship to all his creatures, all people are under the command, whereby "The truth from which - whether he knows and wants to know it or not - man derives and which he will not evade."⁶⁶ Starting with the knowledge of God's divine election, there is, therefore, no human action that does not stand under God's command;⁶⁷ no human existence can avoid responding one way or another to the command,⁶⁸ and no human can be exempted from decision in relation to God's command or neutral toward it.⁶⁹

While humanity has a choice in its response to the command, its intention is humanization.⁷⁰ What God desires is not the creation of a race of automatons but individuals who can embrace fully their humanity as they are created in the image and likeness of the Creator. Barth is not arguing for a command that binds. Rather, the command gives permission and freedom to be the people God has created us to be. Therefore, as humanity, we are under the compulsion of the

⁶⁶CD II/2, 516.

⁶⁷Ibid., 535.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Matheney, 200. See also Eberhard Jüngel, "Keine Menschlosigkeit Gottes. Zur Theologie Barths zwischen Theismus und Atheismus," Evangelische Theologie 31 (1971): 344ff.

command and stand under its authority, but are free in how we respond to it.⁷¹

Because humanity is under the command of God and claimed by God, humanity is also under an obligation⁷² that calls humanity to conform its actions to those of God. Furthermore, humanity is able to discern what actions it might take because the command of God is always concrete.⁷³

Since Barth rejects any kind of universal norm or categorical imperative, the command must be definite and specific: Barth's "divine imperative is valid fully and only in the concrete context of specific human existence. The living reality of God in time elicits free response to His directive within a particular concrete event."⁷⁴ Because humanity encounters the problem of ethics as the fundamental question of its existence, Barth argues that humanity, too, must recognize that in light of a definite time -- humanity's time -- answers to the questions people face come specifically.⁷⁵ If humanity refuses to recognize the concreteness of the command, humanity has misunderstood its meaning, for as it

is given to us at each moment [it] is always and only one possibility in every conceivable particularity of its inner and outer modality....It is surely apparent at once that the concept of an unconditional truth of the divine is incompletely grasped at all, if its definiteness is not taken into account.⁷⁶

As the command is specific, it moves humanity to specific action -- in

⁷¹We will be discussing the role of freedom in relation to the command later in this chapter.

⁷²Willis, 172; *Ethics*, 50.

⁷³*CD* II/2, 587.

⁷⁴Matheney, 179.

⁷⁵"The Problem of Ethics Today," 143.

⁷⁶*CD* II/2, 663-664.

addressing the question of the response to the command, humanity is reminded that it must respond to actual situations, rather than retreat into abstract moral questions⁷⁷ that serve as a shield from action. Indeed, Barth is very clear that ethics is not obtuse speculation. It deals with "real options in the real sociopolitical world. It is concerned with changing that world....There is no such thing as an ethically neutral action. All activity is potentially ethical. And since a person is what his actions are, there is no dimension of human being that is not essentially ethical."⁷⁸

Given that God speaks His command to humanity in a concrete and specific way, how best does humanity hear God's word? Is Barth's ethic merely an individual ethic in which each person hears God word in a personal way and acts accordingly? It may seem so. However, when examining the command and how it is most effectively and accurately heard, we believe that Barth views the church as the most effective arena in which the command is heard.

Although Barth argues that the command of God has a uniquely personal element,⁷⁹ he also believes it finds its locus and authority in the church. If we recall that he began a more intense study of the Creeds and Confessions of the Church in the early Twenties, and was in dialogue with Roman Catholic

⁷⁷Bettis, 170

⁷⁸Ibid. See also CD II/2, 657-661.

⁷⁹When Barth speaks of the command as being personal, he means that "it claims our obedience in relations to this definite person, Jesus Christ." CD II/2, 609-610. Clearly, although the command is personal, it is not exclusively so: "...the summons, even as it comes very directly and specifically to me, sets me materially in a series with all others...a demand is made on me...as humanity." Ethics, 72.

theologians from which he gleaned a fresh perspective on the role of the Church,⁸⁰ we do not find surprising that Barth would place the church in the position of the focal point for receiving the command. We must emphasize that when speaking of the church, Barth does not have in mind the ecclesiastical halls of power, but rather the place in which the Scripture is preached and exegeted, and where conversation and dialogue with the church of the past and present takes place:

We hear God's command under Scripture and we hear it in the Church; that is, we hear it in conversation and debate with fellow hearers of the God's Word as it is attested in Scripture. These fellow hearers may be contemporaries or they may not: The Church is not only present, but also past....And...the extent of our openness must be greater still. We are to hear God's command in the Church. But if in the Church, also in the world, because the Church is inseparable from the world...⁸¹

For Barth, the church does not address the question of ethics if the command of God is not heard. If the church does not exegete the Scriptures and remain in dialogue with its present and past, it does not fulfill its task, for if the church does not speak out, particularly in its ethical stance, then it fails to declare to those outside of the church what it is.⁸² The church is, according to Barth, the

⁸⁰We are not arguing that these two influences exclusively moved Barth towards a renewed appreciation of the role of the Church. They are, however, two important factors which we believe to be worthy of note. In Barth's debate with Paul Tillich in 1923 (published in Theologische Blätter), Barth underlines the importance of the church for theology and therefore, for ethics: "Not only God, not only Christianity, by which I mean here 'one holy catholic Church,' and to a lesser degree also the individual churches to which we belong, is the presupposition of theology." From James M. Robinson, ed. The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology, v.I (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1968), 154.

⁸¹Biggar, 109. See also CD IV/3, 493-494.

⁸²Ethics, 82. See also Karl Barth, "The Possibility of A Universal Reformed Creed," in Theology and Church, 132.

place where culture is understood and represented,⁸³ and therefore, the place where humanity's existence is addressed.⁸⁴

Barth's ethical approach naturally parallels his theological, in which the church is the locus and authority of dogmatics.⁸⁵ In the preaching of the Word of God, in discussion, and in the Creeds and Confessions -- here is where God's command is heard, for the foundation of ethics is the constitution of the community of faith as fellowship; community being fashioned from particular people in their relation to God. Therefore, Barth argues that in the 'oneness' of each person, "this relation is realized. Now Christ is the One-ness of each particular one, and He is therefore, the fellowship of them all."⁸⁶

Thus, the church is where God's command is heard and in this hearing, humanity is confronted with the sovereign God and finds itself asking the question of humanity's freedom under God's command, "what shall we do?"

The concept of freedom is crucial to understanding the relationship between the hearing of the command and the action that follows, since for Barth, human freedom is freedom for humanity to embrace its true role as children and covenant

⁸³"Church and Culture," 341.

⁸⁴At this point we would note that Robert Willis, in The Ethics of Karl Barth (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1971) states that "Barth's interpretation of the definiteness of the command effectively sets aside...the necessity of deliberation in ethics." (183) We believe that Willis misunderstands Barth's view of the church, wherein this deliberation takes place as the fellowship hears and appropriates the Word of God as expounded and as heard in the Creeds and Confessions of the Church. In fact, Barth himself encourages deliberation: "...ethical reflection may and must consult community in its past and present history. It must do this in order to be admonished, nurtured, enriched, perhaps stirred and warned by the use which the fathers and also brethren made and are still making of Christian freedom. From The Humanity of God, 85.

⁸⁵CD I/1, 23; I/2, 538ff.

⁸⁶The Epistle to the Romans, 449-450.

partners with God;⁸⁷ to act in accordance with the role given us, that is, to act as those who are free in their relation to God and free in their responsibility to others.⁸⁸

For Barth, freedom is a gift of God: in God's grace, humanity is chosen and given the opportunity to choose.⁸⁹ In its direct relation to God, humanity finds its true liberation to be itself and thus, "freedom is understood totally in terms of its origin. It is understood in the context of God's turning to humanity, that is, in terms of God's call to humanity to turn to God in thankful response.⁹⁰ Because Barth views freedom in terms of its origin, God, the responsibility implied in ethics is to make clear that each move an individual makes involves a 'specific and direct' responsibility towards God. Therefore, ethics is "reflection upon what humanity is called to do with the gift of freedom."⁹¹ Clearly, what humanity is called to do is accept its origin, which,

...does not mean creaturely autonomy in relation to the Creator -- not even under the title of the 'finite capable of the infinite,' least of all under this title, we might say -- but which means instead the acknowledgement that our life belongs to God and therefore the subjection of our own will, which is no more grounded in its own reality today than it was on the day of creation, to the will of the Creator.⁹²

Thus, the creaturely freedom endowed to humanity by God is either negated

⁸⁷Ethics, 175.

⁸⁸Matheney, 43-44.

⁸⁹The Humanity of God, 65.

⁹⁰Matheney, 111-112.

⁹¹Ethics, 85.

⁹²Ibid., 211-212.

in disobedience⁹³ or affirmed in obedience.⁹⁴ In accepting its creaturely reality and therefore its limitations, humanity opens itself up to hear the command of God. Humanity must, before it can ever hear or understand God's command, recognize that its freedom is not a result of human machinations, of reason or will or otherwise, but is God's gracious gift. Herein lies the paradox of freedom that God gives to humanity: in admitting it is unfree (in that human freedom is tied to God's freedom in choosing humanity and not vice-versa), humanity finds true liberation and permission to act.⁹⁵ Thus, the dialectic of human existence before God and in Christ is fleshed out: humanity is free, but only in its recognition of its bondage is humanity able to know true freedom and fulfill its election, living as God's covenant partner. In so doing, humanity is free to contribute creatively

⁹³Ibid., 263.

⁹⁴Ibid., 76, 79. An interesting parallel that exists between Barth and Kant lies in Kant's understanding of the noumenal self and the concept of obedience. A noumenal reality is, for Kant, that which adheres to ideas of pure reason. Consequently, "the idea of self, for example, is a continuing permanent reality underlying all our sense experience and as being able to act freely is the idea of a noumenal self." Diogenes Allen, Philosophy for Understanding Theology (London: SCM Press, 1985), 217.

For Kant, human beings "so far as they are subject to moral obligations have freedom....as moral agents they must be noumenal beings." (Allen, 218). For Barth, freedom also is found in obedience, but an obedience of a different kind. Unlike Kant, who argued that freedom is found in obedience to moral obligation (moral obligation being means to ends, and our chief end, happiness. They are categorical in form: one performs ones moral obligation because of duty), Barth argues that freedom is found in obedience to God's command.

The parallel is striking: while the terms and starting points differ, there is no uncertainty that in some way, Kant influenced Barth's view of freedom and obedience. For further discussion of Kant's position see Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. For a helpful analysis of this work, see H.J. Paton, The Moral Law (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1947).

⁹⁵CD II/2, 585-586.

to the world in which it has been placed⁹⁶ and act responsibly not only toward God but also toward the neighbor.

Barth believes that freedom includes both our recognition of it as a gift, and our willingness to allow for that gift to have been given to others, namely, to all of humanity. The basic form of humanity is "Mitmenschlichkeit," a joyful being together,⁹⁷ realized not in isolation or detachment, but in the human encounter: therein lies the realization of freedom, that is, freedom for others.⁹⁸ Thus, freedom implies community. But it also implies responsibility, for "in understanding Barth's ethical thematic [we must] realize that freedom, as a category of human nature, is described as a faculty of human responsibility before another."⁹⁹ In humanity's freedom for God, (as found in Jesus Christ), so too, comes a correlative freedom for the neighbor.¹⁰⁰

Barth's emphasis on the relationship humanity has with one another in the ethical realm is closely knit to his belief of the church as the place where God's command is heard. Yes, as God's individual covenant partner the command is addressed to me -- but not in an etherial, mystical way. God's voice does not boom out of the heavens, instructing a person to do this or that deed. It is heard - - in the community as it worships, upholds the Word of God to the exegetical and

⁹⁶Ronald Goetz, "The Karl Barth Centennial: An Appreciative Critique," The Christian Century 103 #6 (May 7, 1986): 462.

⁹⁷Matheney, 122. See also Ray Anderson, "The Concept of the Neighbor in the Ethics of Karl Barth." A paper presented at the Annual Congress of the Theological Society of South Africa, UNISA, Pretoria, 7-9 August, 1986).

⁹⁸Ethics, 74.

⁹⁹Matheney, 111-112.

¹⁰⁰Willis, 247.

homiletical task. One does not receive the command haphazardly. To do so would be completely contrary to Barth's entire approach to theology and ethics. God speaks, and as the command is heard, it reflects the truth of God's sovereignty and divine freedom, instructing humanity to thus act in such a manner that this eternal grace might be displayed and upheld.¹⁰¹

Because Barth's entire theological and ethical emphasis revolves around God's sovereignty, it follows that he would reject any kind of attempt to 'systematize' the ethical task. Therefore, Barth turns away from any kind of casuistry or norms within ethics.¹⁰² For Barth, there is no room for a generalized or universal set of principles within ethics outside of the command of God.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹It would seem plausible, if not essential, having understood the place of God's sovereign, eternal grace as manifested in the command, that Barth would reject any attempt to upstage God's place of primacy. Hence, his rejection of the National Socialist movement and the German Christians is right in line with his ethical approach. However, we would argue that his encounter with the crisis of the 30's did not create Barth's ethics. His ethical stance was set well before the 30's -- in fact, before the ethics lectures of 1928-1930. Since we have argued that Barth's theology and ethics are to be viewed together, we contend that his ethics were, with some modifications to come, established by 1924 with the anhypostasis-enhypostasis formula of Christology presented in the Göttingen Dogmatics. In the scope of this paper, we do not have time or space to delve deeply into the critique that Barth had little, if no ethic previous to the *Kirchenkampf*. However, we did deem it noteworthy to draw the connection between Barth's theology and ethics in this sense as a tangential thought.

¹⁰²Barth does, as we will argue in Chapter 5, have of form of casuistry in what he terms special ethics.

¹⁰³For this reason, Barth rejects any form of casuistry or middle axioms. Nigel Biggar presents an interesting case for the possibility of Barth allowing for normative ethics in that they play a strictly preparatory and preliminary role. See Nigel Biggar, "Hearing God's Command and Thinking about What's Right: With and Beyond Barth," *Reckoning with Barth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (Oxford: A.R. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., 1988), 113ff.

Before continuing further, we believe it necessary to touch briefly on why Barth does not consider things such as the Ten Commandments or the Sermon on the Mount to be forms of universal principles or norms. In addressing these two texts, he comments that they have two special features: (1) according to their

Because God's sovereignty is so closely united with His command, and, therefore, the ethical task, and because the command is concrete and specific, any attempt to base ethical activity in human moral reason or rules is unacceptable:

the question of good and evil is never answered by man's pointing to the authoritative Word of God as a set of rules....Nothing can be made of these commands if we try to generalize and transform them into universally valid principles...the divine command does not take the form of universal and general rules, but that of individual, concrete, specific orders and directions.¹⁰⁴

In denying the place of universal rules, Barth puts an end to any possibility of an absolute ethic¹⁰⁵ and the possibility of a human ethic of reason or morality.

Perhaps this is where Barth is the most frustrating and yet the most consistent in

witness, the command seems to be addressed to an indeterminate number of people and (2) they appear to be concerned, generally, with certain possibilities of action on the part of all kinds of people. (CD II/2, 681) Barth states that these passages could be misconstrued to proclaim something like general principles of the command of God.

Barth argues that these texts in no way lessen or compromise the concreteness and specificity of the command. (II/2, 681-682) He concludes "that what takes place in these proclamations is that God declares Himself to be the Subject of all these special summons, the One who has the power and right to confront the individual in these specific addresses with binding commands and prohibitions because He is the Lord of the people or community to which the individual belongs, whose property the individual is, and to whose control and claim the individual is subject." (II/2, 682) Moreover, Barth views the passages in which summaries are found as not being concerned with a special command beyond the concrete and specific command of God. On the contrary, these texts, according to Barth, speak of the commanding God and His relationship with the committed person. These texts show "how God and man and man and God are bound to one another -- bound in exactly the same way as emerges in the other texts with the descriptions of concrete and definite divine-human encounters, of the definite and special divine commanding and forbidding." (II/2, 683)

Therefore, Barth contends, texts such as the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount act as summaries of divine commands and not as universal moral principles. (II/2, 700)

¹⁰⁴The Humanity of God, 82; CD II/2, 672, 675.

¹⁰⁵The Epistle to the Romans, 466.

his thought. Barth's critics often denounce his ethic as non-specific, which results, paradoxically, "from his failure to generalize. Barth's insistence that God's judgement must not be limited and cannot be controlled makes it impossible to draw conclusions from any particular experience of judgement that might allow us to construct a systematic ethics."¹⁰⁶ In refusing to generalize, Barth negates what are, for him, human attempts to explain the question of existence, the very same question he addresses in his theology. As humanity is called to 'bear witness' to God's existence and the revelation of God in Christ, through its response,¹⁰⁷ the only appropriate form an ethic can take is one whereby the eternally revealed God (in Christ) calls humanity to act: to live as free creatures -- in their election, in the being of Christ, responsible not only to their own election but also to the election of others.

As we understand Barth's theology and its emphasis, is it really surprising that his ethics are command-oriented? We think not. Whether they are acceptable as an ethical choice is another issue. But since, according to Barth, humankind forever struggles against its election in its attempt to seek and find God on its own terms, the tension that exists regarding the Barthian ethic is not unusual. But to term the ethic non-specific or too "Olympian" is to misconstrue the force in his ethics, for specificity is, in Barth's mind, the command to live as God's chosen partners, reflecting the eternal grace of God in all action. When humanity chooses to neglect this partnership, this election of grace, then humanity acts in an unethical way. Therefore, Barth's ethic insists that "at moments of moral certainty we are

¹⁰⁶Robin Lovin, Christian Faith and Public Choices (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 24.

¹⁰⁷Karl Barth, "Humanismus," Theologische Studien 28 (1950): 27.

not dealing with a system of rules we could write out on paper and use to calculate our next moral move. We are confronted with a living God who addresses us and who refuses to be reduced to an object that our minds can easily grasp."¹⁰⁸

If, ethics cannot be defined by a set of rules and principles, but rather by the command of God, what kind of ethicist is Barth? Some scholars¹⁰⁹ have defined him as a divine-act deontologist. However, if Barth is in any way to be considered a deontologist, divine act or other, he would have to uphold the universality that accompanies a deontological approach to ethics. Because Barth rejects any kind of universality, we cannot accept this definition. Rather, we would affirm that Barth's ethic is best described as an ethic of command based in the freedom of God. This approach best defines Barth's theological and ethical position, whereby God in His freedom chooses humanity to be His covenant partner and in so doing calls humanity to act in a way reflective of this choice. Barth's theology, having found its fulfillment in the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula, thus sets the base for his ethics, formed in tandem with his theology culminating in 1924.¹¹⁰

Barth's ethics have always been controversial. Consistently they have been criticized and viewed as unhelpful in addressing issues within ethics. Are these challenges to Barth's theology and ethics correct? Is Barth simply too ethereal in

¹⁰⁸Lovin, 22.

¹⁰⁹Robert Willis, The Ethics of Karl Barth, 171; Robin Lovin, Christian Faith and Public Choices, 27; ~~Robert~~ ^{Robald} Preston as quoted in Fairweather and McDonald, 186.

¹¹⁰We recognize that Barth did make modifications in his ethics after the Twenties, such as the dropping of the orders of creation after the National Socialist's used the idea to support their government. However, any changes Barth made would best be described as clarifications of his earlier thought.

his approach for the challenges of daily life? Many would reply in the affirmative. What are their complaints? Where might they help us in analyzing and understanding Barth? As we seek to find answers to these questions, we turn our attention to one of Barth's contemporaries, Reinhold Niebuhr, for in Niebuhr, we encounter Barth's critics.

Chapter Five
Barth Encounters the Critics: Reinhold Niebuhr as a Paradigm
for the Ethical Critique of Barth

Throughout his theological career, Karl Barth was criticized for the way in which he approached questions of ethics. One theologian who was vehement in his critique of Barth was Reinhold Niebuhr,¹ who particularly attacked Barth's ethics. For this reason, and for the many similarities in their backgrounds, we believe Reinhold Niebuhr provides an excellent paradigm through which to critique Barth.²

Before engaging in some of the parallels that exist between Barth and

¹Niebuhr's works are extensive; however, we cite his major works as follows: Does Civilization Need Religion? (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1927); Leaves From the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (New York: Willett, Clark and Company, 1929); The Contribution of Religion to Social Work (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932); Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932); Reflections on the End of an Era (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934); An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935); Beyond Tragedy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1937); The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volumes I&II (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941, 1943); The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944); Discerning the Signs of the Times (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946); Faith and History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949); The Irony of American History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952); Christian Realism and Political Problems (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953); Pious and Secular America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); The Structure of Nations and Empires (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959); A Nation So Conceived (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963); Man's Nature and His Communities (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965); The Democratic Experience (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969). For further works of Niebuhr, consult: D.B. Robertson, Reinhold Niebuhr's Works: A Bibliography (Maryland: University Press of America, 1983).

²We are not attempting to give a comprehensive discussion of Reinhold Niebuhr and his thought in this chapter. Space and the direction of this thesis does not allow. However, we do find Niebuhr to be an excellent foil for Barth, and in this manner we will be using the critique of Niebuhr to (1) outline the general critique of Barth's ethics and (2) provide a launching point for our own critique of Barth.

Niebuhr, we first find it necessary to give a brief biographical overview of the early Niebuhr.³ What were some of the primary forces that shaped the young Niebuhr, and how did they impact^{of} the development of his theology?

Although Niebuhr never considered himself a theologian,⁴ from the time of his birth he was surrounded by Christian doctrine, both in his father Gustav Niebuhr and the denomination in which the elder Niebuhr served: The German Evangelical Synod of North America. As was the case with Barth, Niebuhr's first formative influence was his father,⁵ a man who combined personal piety with freedom in his theological studies. Gustaf Niebuhr was

liberal in his conviction that the Gospel was social as well as individual, that the Christian had to work for social improvement, not simply religious conversion. He was also liberal in his unconcern for doctrinal precision... and...in his ecumenical interest, his determination to break down artificial walls between denominations. But... he insisted on the divinity of Christ, the supernatural inspiration of the Bible, and the centrality of prayer in religious life. He was a pietist, not a fundamentalist.⁶

Niebuhr's father was not alone in his influence on his son; so also was the German Evangelical Synod of North America.

³We believe Niebuhr's early period begins with his background in the German Evangelical Synod, moves to his theological training at Elmhurst College, Eden Seminary, Yale Divinity School and culminates in his parish work in Detroit. These were the years 1900-1928.

⁴In his intellectual autobiography, Niebuhr states that "it is somewhat embarrassing to be made the subject of a study which assumes theology as the primary interest. I cannot and do not claim to be a theologian." Reinhold Niebuhr, "Intellectual Autobiography," in Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall eds., Reinhold Niebuhr: An Introduction to his Religious, Social and Political Thought (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), 3. Hereafter cited as Kegley and Bretall.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Richard Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr, A Biography (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 7.

This organization was a product of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, which combined elements of the Enlightenment and traditional piety.⁷ An indigenous American phenomena that arose out of German migration into the Mississippi Valley after the Civil War, the Synod's main theological positions upheld "the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the Word of God, the sole infallible guide of faith and life and...the interpretation of the Holy Scriptures as given in the symbolic books of the Lutheran and Reformed Church."⁸

Although the German Evangelical Synod of North America's roots were closely tied to two major reformation traditions (Luther and Calvin) and adhered to a distinctly Prussian model of union, the Synod placed itself within a governmental framework characteristically American. This union of Luther and Calvin -- the Lutheran "innerlichkeit" and the moralism of American Calvinism -- became central in Niebuhr's own search for truth. Luther's thought was particularly significant for Niebuhr because it modified his theology and understanding of "the relation between Gospel and social ethics...without changing his essential social concern."⁹

⁷William G. Crystal, ed. Young Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1977), 19.

⁸F.H. Graeper, "The German Evangelical Synod of North America," in The Evangelical Church (St. Louis: Eden Publishing House, 1912), 30-31. Like most frontier faiths, the Synod cared less about "fine points of dogmatic theology than about inner spirituality and practical results....The Evangelical Synod was typical of much nineteenth century German and American Protestantism in its relative neglect of the intellectual content of faith and its pietistic stress on heart. The believer aspired above all to experience the immediate presence of Christ; doctrine was secondary." Fox, 4.

⁹John C. Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," in Kegley and Bretall, 62.

In the fall of 1907, Niebuhr left his family in Lincoln, Illinois,¹⁰ and headed to the small denominational college, Elmhurst, in Chicago. Upon graduation in 1910, Niebuhr went to Eden Theological Seminary in Whellston, Missouri, where he studied in a more traditional setting and flourished academically. At Eden, Niebuhr's love for theology and desire for further study was kindled, and in 1913, Niebuhr entered Yale University.¹¹

At Yale, Niebuhr began to formulate his early theological thought. Primary to his early theology were the concepts of personality and experience, and their relation to revelation: for Niebuhr, certainty in religion had to find its base in human need and the actual experience of belief. At the most basic level, humanity needed two things: "an assurance that the divine 'personality' has a place in an apparently 'impersonal universe,' and an assurance of personal contact with that eternal contact."¹² For Niebuhr, as for most liberal Protestant thinkers, personality was directly related to self-sacrifice and giving.¹³ There was, therefore, no rational explanation or validation for religious belief. Niebuhr asserted that religious ideas were "...based upon what man believes to be necessary

¹⁰Lincoln Illinois was a country town and commercial center of 9,000 in Logan County. Roughly one third on those in Lincoln were either born overseas or were children of immigrants.

¹¹Niebuhr attended Yale from 1913-1915.

¹²Fox, 30.

¹³Richard Fox notes that Niebuhr's preoccupation with personality was typical of Protestant thinkers in both America and Germany, as it was the banner under which evangelical and modernist liberals could unite. Confronted in the nineteenth century by Darwin's theories and Biblical Criticism, these two groups turned to personality as a lifeline. The essential human being would not be subject to the laws of nature: humanity occupied a privileged realm of spirit that scientific naturalism could not touch. See Fox, 30ff.

for the existence of personality in the universe...it is an induction based upon facts. Future knowledge may change our conception of the nature of the facts from which we start or may prove our induction to be false but the proceedings have been entirely justified."¹⁴ Niebuhr firmly believed that personality was key: Christianity was a religion of a person and not a book.¹⁵

More than any other concept, what arose from Niebuhr's schooling was the idea of personality and the importance of personal struggles in the larger scope of God's plan and dealings with humanity. This premise would be catapulted into the realm of praxis as Niebuhr entered his pastoral post at Detroit's Bethel Evangelical Church in 1915.¹⁶

At Bethel, as Niebuhr encountered the exhilaration and frustrations of parish work,¹⁷ he began to question many of his liberal presuppositions. Like Barth, much of Niebuhr's frustration arose from the horror of the First World War. For Niebuhr, however, what was even more disturbing than the war was the peace, as expressed in the Treaty of Versailles. Disillusioned by what he believed to be selfish and destructive conditions of revenge, Niebuhr began to rethink positions associated with liberal thought. Liberalism lacked

...the spirit of enthusiasm, not to say fanaticism,
which is so necessary to move the world out of its tracks.

¹⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Validity and Certainty of Religious Knowledge," B.D. Thesis, Yale Divinity School, 1914: 35-36.

¹⁵See Niebuhr's M.A. Thesis, "The Contribution of Christianity to the Doctrine of Immortality," Yale Divinity School, 1915.

¹⁶Bethel Evangelical Church was founded in 1912 by 13 lay persons, most of whom were middle class German-Americans, and was designed to serve Detroit's North-West residential frontier.

¹⁷See Reinhold Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic (New York: World Publishing Co., 1957), 45ff.

[It] is too intellectual and too little emotional to be an efficient force in history. It is the philosophy of the middle aged, lacking the fervency of youth and its willingness to take a chance and accept the challenge....We need something less circumspect than liberalism to save the world.¹⁸

Although Niebuhr was not abandoning his liberal roots, he was searching for a different kind of theology placed between traditional liberalism and orthodoxy, both which he felt fell short of the theological task. In his diary, Niebuhr underlined this frustration: "It seems pathetic to me that liberalism has too little appreciation of the tragedy of life to understand the cross and orthodoxy insists too much on the absolute uniqueness of the sacrifice of Christ to make the preaching of the cross effective."¹⁹ Niebuhr's unrest with liberalism and orthodoxy is significant: no longer was he satisfied with a classic liberal 'optimistic' view of humanity; rather, he began to see the element of the tragic in human life and its impact on theology.

Niebuhr's sense of the tragic is best described as the separation between what is real and ideal. Stressing the brokenness of human life and juxtaposing it with the idealism inherent in liberalism's quest for a new society, Niebuhr posited

¹⁸Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Twilight of Liberalism," The New Republic June 14, 1919: 218.

¹⁹Niebuhr, Leaves from the Notebook of a Tamed Cynic, 107. Niebuhr's view of orthodoxy was primarily structured vis-a-vis his background in the Reformation theology of Luther and Calvin as expressed by the German Evangelical Synod. See Young Reinhold Niebuhr, ed. William G. Crystal (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1977), 19, 23. See also Bennett in Kegley and Bretall, 62. Niebuhr's later views on orthodoxy would be shaped primarily by the continental "neo-orthodox" theologians such as Barth and Brunner. In a letter to John Bennett, Niebuhr, referring to Barth and Brunner wrote, "I have never thought of myself in their category. I think when it comes to the crux I belong to the liberal tradition more than to theirs" Letter dated March 13, 1943 in Fox, 214. Helpful in understanding Niebuhr's critique of orthodoxy are his An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (London: SCM Press, 1935) and The Nature and Destiny of Man vols. I&II (London: Nisbet and Co., 1941 & 1943). Hereafter cited as NDMI and NDMII.

a new starting point for his theology. He addresses the dialectic of the tragic in this way: "Christianity's view of history is tragic insofar as it recognizes evil as an inevitable concomitant of even the highest spiritual enterprises. It is beyond tragedy insofar as it does not regard evil as inherent in existence itself but as finally under the dominion of a good God."²⁰ However, despite his frustrations with liberalism and his newly found place for the tragic in his theology, even in 1925, Niebuhr still believed religion's role was to project ideal ends into society: service, benevolence and sacrificial love.²¹ By embracing the role of the tragic and fusing it with his liberal leanings, Niebuhr concluded that the most effective way to reconcile life as it was experienced, with the presence of God in the world, was to unite the concepts of love with some form of a democratized industry and socialization of property as the solution to the social problem. Much of this thought came in direct relation to Niebuhr's pastoral work as well as his confrontation with Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company over its oppressive work conditions and pay policy. From 1925, Niebuhr attacked, with vengeance, industrialism and its impact on humanity's personality.²²

The need for the establishment of a form of justice in social relations came to the forefront of Niebuhr's thought, taking the form of a polemic against Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company. Aware of Ford's unfair labor practices,²³

²⁰Beyond Tragedy (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1938), x-xi.

²¹See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Can Christianity Survive?," Atlantic January, 1925: 87-88.

²²Especially powerful is his argument within the pages of Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

²³During Niebuhr's years in Detroit, the population grew three-fold, from 1/2 to 1 1/2 million, a large proportion of the population being Afro-American. Industrialists took advantage of this statistic and hired Afro-American laborers at

Niebuhr began to confront social injustice.

For Niebuhr, Ford symbolized "America's technical genius and social ineptitude,"²⁴ and while Niebuhr was not opposed directly to Ford the man, Niebuhr was disillusioned by the abuses of an industry Ford had almost single-handedly created. Niebuhr's fight was against industrialism:²⁵ its emphasis on over efficiency and production and the lack of interest in stimulating worker's creative energy had destroyed, in Niebuhr's view, the human personality he had defended since his days at Yale. Niebuhr argued that the machine and industrialist's obsession with efficiency had numbed the worker's intellect, taking away the joy of creative work, thus diminishing the critical element of personality. Niebuhr believed that the entire industrial process could be used to enhance personality if men such as Ford would cooperate:

We should try to save the machine process for the use of personality....if some of the efficiency of industry is sacrificed for the sake of inducing democratic procedure in the factory, it may be possible to give the worker some sense of personal relationship to the entire manufacturing process, and some satisfaction in the total product management.²⁶

The encounter with Ford, as well as with the labor movement in general, heightened Niebuhr's awareness of the problems associated with power --

extortionist wages with little or no benefits. See Reinhold Niebuhr, "How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?" The Christian Century December 9, 1926, 1516-1517.

²⁴Ronald Stone, Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet to Politicians (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1981), 27.

²⁵See William Hutchison, The Modernist Impulse in American Protestantism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976).

²⁶Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Effects of Modern Industrialism on Personality," Student World 20 (October, 1926): 304-305.

specifically social collective power. Niebuhr began, therefore, to formulate the concept that within society, the only norm towards which to strive was the equal distribution of power. Henry Ford represented the antithesis:

The hope of an ethical civilization rests not upon the possibility of making power completely ethical, but upon the possibility of creating enough intelligence and conscience among the holders of power to make a gradual equalization of power possible....The fact that Henry Ford has been accepted by the American public at his own evaluation is the best proof of the general incompetence of the American mind and conscience for the intricate problems of modern industrial society.²⁷

The frustration that arose for Niebuhr centered around the dichotomy of Ford's technical brilliance and social irresponsibility, coupled with American society's enthusiastic embracing of the advancements of an industrial civilization without thought for the consequence of human struggle.²⁸

Issues of industrial relations catapulted Niebuhr into formulating an ethic that could accommodate the immediate frustrations of humanity in its sin with the greater realities of responsibility before them -- Niebuhr would find himself asking the question, "what kind of ethic works in a cruel and unjust world?" as he left the

²⁷Reinhold Niebuhr, "Henry Ford and Industrial Autocracy," The Christian Century (November 4, 1926): 1355.

²⁸Niebuhr complained in the pages of The Christian Century that "if Ford is the symbol of an America with its combination of sentimentality and shrewdness, he is also the symbol of an America which has arisen almost in a generation from an agrarian to an industrial economic order and now applies the social intelligence of a country village to the most complex and industrial life the world has ever known." ("How Philanthropic is Henry Ford?, 1516-1517). Again, in June of 1927, Niebuhr stated "In our day of enlightenment it is possible for a man to amass billions and be praised at the same time for the astuteness of his business mind and the generosity of his impulses, even though the groans of his workers may be heard above the din of his machines. Will we ever acquire enough social intelligence to match our mechanical achievements?" Reinhold Niebuhr, "Ford's Five-Day Week Shrinks," The Christian Century (June 9, 1927): 714.

pastorate of Detroit and headed to the academic world of Union Seminary in New York.

When Niebuhr arrived at Union Seminary in 1928, he continued to wrestle with issues of collective justice. By the 1930's, America was in the midst of a depression -- economically and socially, the country was in shambles. Clearly Niebuhr knew that liberal theology, especially as espoused in the Social Gospel of Shailer Matthews, Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, as well as the secular liberalism of Locke, Jefferson, Mill and Dewey was not effective in meeting the needs arising from the social disorder in which American found itself. Niebuhr believed that the Social Gospel²⁹ served only to make religion an adornment of conventional society and despite its service motif, did not deal with issues of exploitation. Secular liberalism, that argued that social disorder lay in a cultural lag whose alleviation awaited an enlightenment vis-a-vis such vehicles as educational opportunities, failed to meet social challenges because, according to Niebuhr, secular liberalism did not deal realistically with the complex issues involved in collective justice.³⁰ For Niebuhr, the moralism of the Social Gospel and the rationalism of secular liberalism proved irrelevant, since neither addressed the central ethical issue of collective justice -- namely, the "necessity arising when

²⁹The term Social Gospel refers to "a type of social Christianity which grew up in the last half of the nineteenth century and early decades of the twentieth century. It involved a mixture of social and theological liberalism....and may be characterized as the response of morally sensitive Christian's to the vast new problems of industrial America. It was an effort to bring what was conceived to be Christian morality to bear upon social problems ranging from corruption in government and business to immigration, housing and labor organizations." John A. Hutchison, "Two Decades of Social Christianity," in Christian Faith and Social Action, ed. John A. Hutchison (New York: Charles Scribners Son's . 1953), 8.

³⁰See The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr, ed. Nathan Scott, Jr. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974), xii.

large numbers of men are the victims of social and economic disinheritance of serious reassessment of the established allocations of power."³¹

Niebuhr's response to the problem of collective justice was to embrace a Christian-Marxist interpretation of ethics in order to confront the mounting inequalities in America. With the adoption of the Christian-Marxist approach, Niebuhr would begin to clearly formulate the basis for his ethics.³²

In addressing Niebuhr's Christian-Marxist approach, clarification is necessary in order to understand what Niebuhr means by an ethic rooted in a Marxist perspective. Within the pages of Moral Man and Immoral Society,³³ Niebuhr makes it clear there are certain aspects inherent within Marxist ideology he finds compelling -- the focus on injustices and inequities of class systems,³⁴ the organic nature of society in which class conflict becomes the seat of dynamism.³⁵

³¹Ibid., xii-xiii.

³²We believe there are three decisive periods in Niebuhr's ethical development: (1) The pre-Marxist period that existed from the time of Niebuhr's education at Yale (1913-1915) to the beginnings of his pastorate in Detroit (1925ff). (2) The Christian-Marxist period from 1928-1936. (3) The re-orientation of a radical Christian-Marxism to a more pragmatic, conservative base. This period is marked by Niebuhr's focus on sin and the movement of the social-ethical from the problem of workers seeking change to the ability to deal with the complexities of a mixed economy.

³³Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932) was written by Niebuhr primarily in response to his frustration over the lack of an applicable ethic to question of collective justice. Niebuhr states that the thesis of the book is "that a sharp distinction must be drawn between the moral and social behavior of individuals and of social groups...and that distinction justifies and necessitates political policies which a purely individualistic ethic must always find embarrassing....The ultimate purpose of this task is to find political methods which will offer the most promise of achieving an ethical social goal for society." From: Moral Man and Immoral Society, xi, xxiv.

³⁴Ibid., 144, 149.

³⁵Ibid., 152ff.

However, Niebuhr does not embrace the Marxist interpretation of history³⁶ nor does he affirm the moral cynicism arising from a Marxist analysis.³⁷ For Niebuhr, hope was to be found in the Judeo-Christian religion: while a Marxist analysis poignantly revealed social injustices in society as well as the collective and often immoral power inherent in groups, Niebuhr upheld a Christian interpretation of a Marxist ideology.³⁸

Therefore, Niebuhr began to formulate an ethic whose content was based on principles he saw lacking in society: justice and love.

Because for Niebuhr social collectives are incorrigible and self-regarding, justice must act as the appropriate norm for the ordering of society and power must be distributed equitably within the body politic.³⁹ This justice is found in what Niebuhr terms a 'rational' ethic; prompted by reason, it aims at justice and attempts to place the needs of others in equal stature to the needs of the self.⁴⁰ However, this rational ethic must exist in tension with a religious ethic -- that which aims and emphasizes love.

For Niebuhr, the tension that exists between individual and collective justice created a dualistic ethic that found much of its impetus in a Marxist analysis of

³⁶Ibid., 155-156.

³⁷Ibid., 160. Charles West points out that the picture of revolutionary Marxism was not that of "the closed system of power and ideology centered in Soviet Russian which today goes by the name of Communism. His encounter was rather with the ideology of a social class whose insights expressed, he believed, a valid judgement on present society." Charles West, Communism and the Theologians (London: SCM Press, 1951), 122.

³⁸Ibid, 123.

³⁹Ibid., xxv.

⁴⁰Ibid., 57.

society. But in formulating a Christian ethic, Niebuhr needed to create a theological base for his critique of society and his passion for collective justice. For Niebuhr, much of his Christian-Marxist analysis began to undergo a modification: thoroughly convinced that a strong proletariat was not the answer to injustice, increasingly aware and disturbed by the Communist influence⁴¹ (particularly in Europe), Niebuhr returned to the question that prompted the writing of Moral Man and Immoral Society: what is the moral responsibility of the Christian in the face of injustice? Niebuhr believed the moral person was one who upheld and fought for justice: his concern was less with the classes and structures that framed individuals; (as he had been in Moral Man and Immoral Society) now he concerned himself with how justice worked itself out in society within the realm of moral responsibility.⁴²

For Niebuhr, moral responsibility as a marker for ethical behavior calls the Christian to live within history but not be swayed by historical or cultural trends. The Christian must think and act responsibly as he/she seeks to live justly within society. This call to responsibility finds its base in what Niebuhr terms the love ethic of Jesus. Keenly aware that this ethic is unattainable by humanity, Niebuhr believes the norm of love must be sought by humankind in spite of its limitations: the seeking of an approximation of love's norm inspires humanity to act responsibly in society and therefore justly, balancing power in such a way as to

⁴¹Reinhold Niebuhr, An Interpretation of Christian Ethics (London: SCM Press, 1936), 145. Hereafter cited as ICE.

⁴²Niebuhr discusses this idea in great detail within the pages of ICE. He criticizes both the failure of liberal and orthodox theology to provide society with a norm for ethics. For this critique see pages 149-208.

create mutually satisfying relationships.⁴³ The law of love, therefore, compels humanity to stand under the reality of its sin, understanding, however, there is always the possibility of a higher good. The law of love is a scrutinizer of humanity's intentions.⁴⁴

The paradox humanity faces in living under the norms of love and justice is found in humanity's constant betrayal of love's norm.⁴⁵ Niebuhr emphasizes that the Christian view of history passes through 'the sense of the tragic to a hope and assurance that is beyond tragedy.' For Niebuhr, the cross acts as the ultimate symbol of the paradox of human sin and God's willingness and ability to overcome evil. He states, "The cross, which stands at the center of the Christian world view, reveals both the seriousness of human sin and the purpose and power of God to overcome it."⁴⁶

Niebuhr's commitment to examining the paradox between love and the betrayal of love arose from the painful reality of the outbreak of World War II and Japan's invasion of China. Within the context of the war, the reality of human tragedy became more pronounced than ever. While Niebuhr had previously embraced the sinfulness of humanity, with the war came a new appreciation for the locus of sin -- it was pervasive in all classes and aspects of society.

Niebuhr's move away from liberal optimism and the reshaping of his radical Christian Marxism had reached a new plateau: with his espousal of the universal

⁴³See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Socialist Decision and Christian Conservatism," Radical Religion, Spring 1938.

⁴⁴ICE, 70ff.

⁴⁵See Reinhold Niebuhr, Beyond Tragedy (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1938).

⁴⁶Ibid., x-xi.

sinfulness of humanity, Niebuhr began to modify his concepts of justice and love in order to address ethical questions in a multi-sinful, economic and cultural society. He did this by developing a theological anthropology⁴⁷ in which he expanded his analysis of sin and its relationship to the ethical norms of justice and love.

Despite humanity's inability to conform to the indiscriminating selfless love of agape, Niebuhr is not content to do away with agape as the norm of life because it is not a possibility within history. Niebuhr retains agape through the reality of the cross, a symbol that displays humanity's own true nature:

The norm of agape revealed in the Cross is not an alien norm imposed in external, authoritarian fashion. On the contrary, he is seeking to show that the agape of the Cross is verily of law of man's true nature. In this sense, the Cross clarifies, but does not create, a norm which is given by the very constitution of selfhood.⁴⁸

For Niebuhr, humanity cannot understand its true nature except as it understands itself from an external vantage point: the cross. The cross, argues Niebuhr, points us not to the historical possibility of agape, but to its relevance as a norm for humanity's life; the law of love is therefore, "clarified but not created by the Cross."⁴⁹

If the cross does not point us to the historical possibility of agape, how is the law of love related to a historical reality? For Niebuhr, the connection between the unhistorical and historical is found in the norm of justice. For Niebuhr, justice

⁴⁷Niebuhr's theological anthropology is best understood in his work The Nature and Destiny of Man, v.I&II (London: Nisbet and Co., Ltd., 1941, 1943).

⁴⁸Harland, 20.

⁴⁹Ibid.

and love are always interrelated, like two sides of one coin. Justice is the social embodiment of love; love is the fulfillment and negation of justice

Love is thus the end term of any system of morals. It is the moral requirement in which all schemes of justice are fulfilled and negated. They are fulfilled because the obligation of life to life is more fully met in love than is possible in any scheme of equity and justice. They are negated because love makes an end of the nicely calculated; less and more of structures of justice. It does not carefully arbitrate between the needs of the self and of the other, since it meets the needs of the other without concern for the self.⁵⁰

Love demands justice and prompts humanity to seek justice in society; justice embodies love and so manifests itself through its obedience to the claim of love. Although Niebuhr is quick to point out that justice is always negated by love, he also argues that love redeems justice through the vantage point of the cross that fulfills what has been destroyed by sin. Love acts as the motivator for justice, keeping it balanced and giving it the redemption it needs to work effectively within society. Thus for Niebuhr, in the face of the radical sin that permeates the human race, justice is the norm that is, in his mind, attainable, although love is the ideal and perfect norm. The tension between these two norms must always be maintained:

For to understand the law of love as the final imperative but not to know about the persistence of the power of self-love in all of life...results in an idealistic ethic with no relevance to the hard realities of life....to know both the law of love as the final standard and the law of self-love as a persistent force is to enable Christians to have a foundation for a pragmatic ethic in which power and self-interest are used, beguiled, harnessed, and deflected for the ultimate end of establishing the highest and most

⁵⁰The Nature and Destiny of Man, v.I, 313.

inclusive possible community of justice and order.⁵¹

The Nature and Destiny of Man I&II represent the culmination of the development of Niebuhr's ethics: justice and love become the norms by which humanity seeks, both individually and corporately, to live their lives within society -- lives characterized by egalitarian standards and the equitable distribution of power -- goals only achievable beyond the tragedy of human sin, but given hope in the Cross of Christ. For Niebuhr, ethics is a part of his theological anthropology: beginning with questions of injustice, Niebuhr sought to establish justice, creating a theological base for his ethical criteria.

Intriguing parallels exist between Barth and Niebuhr. Both were raised in an atmosphere that upheld theology as highly important, both had fathers who impacted^{or} their life decisions; as young pastors both encountered industrial struggles and the disillusionment with certain aspects of the First World War, and were forced to reassess their theology. Yet two men with similar backgrounds landed theologically in completely antithetical places. We believe the primary reason for this difference, and the reason Niebuhr is so critical of Barth, lay in how each man approached the doctrine of revelation.

As stated previously, we believe Niebuhr's (and other critics of Barth)⁵²

⁵¹Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Social Action," in Christian Faith and Social Action, ed. John A. Hutchison (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1953), 241.

⁵²It would be incorrect to state that all critiques of Barth are based on differences surrounding Barth's approach to the doctrine of revelation. Certainly there are other areas and focal points of critique (for a scathing critique of all of Barth's theology see Cornelius Van Til's "Barth's Christology" International Library of Philosophy and Theology ed. Marcellus J. Kik [Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company]) However, in the case of Niebuhr, we believe his critique stems primarily from a difference in revelatory emphasis. Therefore, we will be focusing on this aspect of his paradigmatic critique.

polemic against Barth's ethic is one of theological, not ethical reflection; more specifically, one of revelation. We believe that as Barth's doctrine of revelation shaped and defined his approach to ethics, so too, did Niebuhr's. Within that framework of revelation, therefore, we find our starting point for Niebuhr's critique.⁵³

For Niebuhr, the doctrine of human nature plays the determining role in the development of an ethic. While revelation is the first datum of human experience for Barth, for Niebuhr, "human experience in society, as a reality independent of all preconceptions of its meaning and incapable of being reduced to any system of

⁵³For further helpful discussions on Niebuhr and his ethics see the following: John C. Bennett, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Social Ethics," in Reinhold Niebuhr: An Introduction to his Religious, Social and Political Thought, ed. Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956); Joseph Bettis, "Theology and Politics: Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr on Social Ethics After Liberalism," Religion in Life 48 (1979): 53-61; June Bingham, The Courage to Change (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961); Edward J. Carnell, The Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951); Kenneth Durkin, Reinhold Niebuhr (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989); Richard Fox, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); James Gustafson, "Christian Ethics," in Religion, ed. Paul Ramsey (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965); "Theology in the Service of Ethics: An Interpretation of Reinhold Niebuhr's Theological Ethics," in Reinhold Niebuhr and the Issues of Our Time, ed. R. Harnes (Oxford: A.W. Mowbray and Co., Ltd., 1986); Gordon Harland, The Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960); Charles W. Kegley and Robert W. Bretall, eds. Reinhold Niebuhr: An Introduction to his Religious, Social and Political Thought (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956); Paul Lehmann, "The Changing Course of Corrective Theology," Theology Today 13 (1956): 332-357; Paul Merkley, Reinhold Niebuhr: A Political Account (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1975); D.B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism 1919-1941 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1960); Priscilla Richards, Annotated Bibliography of Reinhold Niebuhr's Works (New Jersey: American Theological Library Association, 1984); D.B. Robertson, Reinhold Niebuhr's Works: A Bibliography (Maryland: University Press of America, 1983); Arthur Schlesinger Jr., "Reinhold Niebuhr's Role in Political Thought," in Kegley and Bretall.

rational coherence,⁵⁴ is the base of all thought. Reason is constantly involved in a dialectical struggle with ideology⁵⁵ and therefore, truth, as contained in Christian revelation, includes and recognizes this tension: while humanity can never fully know the truth, humanity continually imagines and lives as if it has apprehended and mastered truth.⁵⁶ Therefore, Niebuhr's origin for his doctrine of revelation lay in human ability to intuitively know some kind of truth, but an inability to fully comprehend it.⁵⁷

According to Niebuhr, revelation is comprised of two distinct, yet united principles: the personal-individual (general), and the social-historical (special).⁵⁸ Niebuhr insists that the first type of revelation, the personal-individual, is a universal experience of all humanity, meaning that the knowledge of God is not an aspect of supernatural grace but a constituent element within humanity.⁵⁹ All of humanity, therefore, experiences personal-individual revelation: "the testimony in the consciousness of every person that his life touches a reality beyond himself, a reality deeper and higher than the system of nature in which he stands....The soul

⁵⁴Charles C. West, Communism and the Theologians (London: SCM Press, 1958), 140.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶NDMII, 225.

⁵⁷We can see how this position is antithetical to Barth's, which has as its starting point in no form of human understanding but in God's sole act of initiation.

⁵⁸NDM I, 136. See also Kenneth Hamilton, "Revelation's Supreme Dimension," Canadian Journal of Theology 10 (1963): 150.

⁵⁹NDM I, 281f. This idea of knowledge inherent within humanity is closely related to Brunner's natural theology as well as to strands of Thomistic thought. Niebuhr stated, "...the creation is contemplated as pointing to a Creator, already known in man's moral experience." NDM I, 143, 146.

which reaches the outermost rims of its own consciousness must also come into contact with God, for He impinges on that consciousness."⁶⁰ Here we see Niebuhr's connection to Schleiermacher, in terms of the consciousness and its leading humanity to a reality of a type of dependence.⁶¹

The personal-individual realm of revelation contains three main aspects: (1) a sense of reverence for a majesty and a dependence upon this ultimate source of being⁶² (2) a sense of moral obligation laid upon individuals from beyond and of moral unworthiness before a judge⁶³ (3) the longing for forgiveness.⁶⁴ The first two elements are the catalysts for the third dimension of revelation, which cannot be completed in the personal-individual realm alone: there must be a place which reveals the merciful, forgiving knowledge of God. This 'place' is the social-historical.⁶⁵

While all humanity experiences a general form of revelation, no matter how vague or undefined, special revelation is, by its very nature, not a universal

⁶⁰NDM I, 136-137.

⁶¹Niebuhr does not employ the term 'utter dependence' but does credit Schleiermacher with influencing his concept of consciousness, although Niebuhr does not adhere fully to Schleiermacher's thought. See NDM I, 137, where Niebuhr writes "Schleiermacher describes this experience of God (the consciousness and its relation to God) as the experience of 'unqualified dependence.' This is one of its aspects but not its totality. It is one of its aspects because there is, in all human consciousness, at least a dim recognition of the insufficient and dependent character of all finite life, a recognition which implies the consciousness of the reality upon which dependent existence depends. An equally important characteristic of the experience of God is the sense of being seen, commanded, judged, and know from beyond ourselves."

⁶²NDM I, 141.

⁶³*Ibid.*

⁶⁴*Ibid.*

⁶⁵NDM I, 154.

phenomenon, because while all long for forgiveness, many are not assured because the assurance of forgiveness has, as a part of its content, the context of faith. Niebuhr calls faith the correlate of revelation,⁶⁶ their mutual relation being so close that revelation is not known or complete save its relation to faith.⁶⁷ For Niebuhr

the revelation of God in Christ, the disclosure of God's sovereignty over life and history, the clarification of the meaning of life and history, is not completed until man is able, by faith, to apprehend the truth which is beyond his apprehension without faith....It is a truth capable of apprehension by faith; but when so apprehended there is a consciousness in the heart of the believer that he has been helped to this apprehension.⁶⁸

Therefore, the revelation of God in Christ (social-historical revelation) not only gives humanity more information about who God is, but it also, most importantly, initiates for Niebuhr the relationship of God as 'Thou'⁶⁹ that for Niebuhr means the final revelation of the personality of God, i.e. the mercy and forgiveness so acutely missing in general revelation, and the full revelation of God Himself in Christ. This unique relationship, in which God reveals Himself to humanity is for Niebuhr, God's final word to humanity,⁷⁰ a word that explains the beginning, the present order, and the end of history.⁷¹ Within the social-historical, the question of the dialectic of revelation is addressed, for the climax of the Biblical revelation

⁶⁶NDM II, 54.

⁶⁷Ibid.

⁶⁸NDM II, 54.

⁶⁹See NDM I, 153.

⁷⁰NDM II, 69.

⁷¹Reinhold Niebuhr, Faith and History (London: Nisbet and Co., 1949), 119.

of divine sovereignty over history is "in the self-disclosure of a divine love, which, on the one hand, is able to overcome the evil inclination to self-worship in the human heart and which, on the other hand, takes on the evil of history into and upon itself. These two facets of love establish the two most important aspects of the Biblical interpretation of history."⁷²

The relationship that exists for Niebuhr between the personal-individual and the social-historical aspects of revelation is rooted in Niebuhr's unique combination of the idea of a point of contact and an adherence to certain aspects of natural theology. In his approach to the point of contact, Niebuhr is like Emil Brunner and unlike Barth, in that Niebuhr believes there to be a *justitia originalis*: an original righteousness not obliterated by sin, which is available and present within all humanity.⁷³ Niebuhr defines humanity's essential nature in this way:

To the essential nature of man belong, on the one hand,
all his natural endowments and determinations, his

⁷²Faith and History, 142. Niebuhr goes on to assert that this love has more than just a historical dimension -- it contains the revelation of divine mercy that overcomes the contradictions of human life. (Faith and History, 154). Moreover, special revelation not only serves to reveal the Thou of God in Christ but also establishes the norm of all Christian ethics. See William A. Greenlaw, "Revelation and the Problem of Apologetics: An Exploration in the Theology of Reinhold Niebuhr," Dialog 15 (1976): 255.

⁷³NDM II, 289. Earlier in this work Niebuhr states, "If it be true, as we have maintained, that no sinful self-centeredness can ever destroy the structure of freedom and self-transcendence in man, it must follow that there is some inner testimony from the very character and structure of the human psyche against the strategy of sinful egotism. The finite mind has some understanding of its own finiteness; and therefore, it cannot escape an uneasy conscience over its sinful effort to complete its own life about 'itself and its own.' (Luther) This is the point of contact between grace and the natural endowments of the soul which even Luther, despite his doctrine of total depravity, admits and which Karl Barth seeks desperately to deny. As long as there is such a point of contact there is something in man to which appeal can be made; though it must be admitted that men may be driven to despair, rather than repentance, either by the events or the appeals which shake the self-confidence of the sinful self." NDM II, 121

physical and social impulses, his sexual and racial differentiations - in short his character as a creature imbedded in the natural order. On the other hand, his essential nature also includes the freedom of his spirit, his transcendence over natural process and finally his self-transcendence.⁷⁴

Niebuhr continues his argument by stating that sin does not destroy the structure by which humanity is humanity, nor does sin eliminate the sense of obligation towards the essential nature of humanity.⁷⁵ Although this kind of thought may ring of a Thomistic adherence to natural law, Niebuhr is quick to refute any kind of natural law theory that does not look beyond the world to understand the world. While individuals have, for Niebuhr in some measure, an experience beyond themselves, reason, for example, is able to exercise only a minimal empirical function in the face of conflicts of interest⁷⁶ and cannot alone prove the meaning of human life in history. Thus, Niebuhr adheres to a relative form of natural law but tempers it with his 'suspicion of humankind.'⁷⁷

Where natural theology works for Niebuhr is primarily in its adherence to the point of contact: because Niebuhr upholds a view, which despite sin, still believes in an innate presence of the imago dei within humanity, Niebuhr has a

⁷⁴NDM I, 287.

⁷⁵Ibid., 289.

⁷⁶West, 141.

It should be noted here that while Barth disallowed any form of cultural disciplines to inform the theological task, he did view them as useful when held under the microscope of theology. For example, Barth would affirm the contribution of philosophy but only as it is informed and interpreted by theology. Of course, this very idea is what irritated Niebuhr and led to what we perceive to be, at one level, an accurate questioning of the role of human freedom and responsibility, for it seems that Barth's absolutism relegates humanity to the role of a pawn in an heavenly game of chess -- a pawn unable to strategise, let alone move, except by the hand and act of God.

great deal of room for the place of input from sources other than Christian theology. He does, in fact, insist upon the place and relevance of any norms which come out of the broad sweep of a classical, European or modern cultural history. In no way, however, is Niebuhr arguing for a theology based only on reason and nature -- he is not. However, he does see a place for a point of contact based on an imago tarnished rather than destroyed by sin. Theologian Charles West describes this modified form of natural law as that which all humanity the capacity to understand its relativity and sin. But, West argues, there is no incorruptible natural truth for Niebuhr and no unqualifiedly good aspect of man.⁷⁸ Thus, for Niebuhr, the point of contact allows for humanity's active participation within history rather than simply focussing on what God has already done, negating, at one level, any input from humanity other than that which affirms only God's eternal work.

Niebuhr is a helpful paradigm for assessing Barth because Niebuhr approaches the theological task from such a different point of origin, thus presenting us with a different set of questions and perspectives. For Niebuhr, theology was best expressed in terms of the real and ideal, whereas Barth thought in terms of the real and unreal.⁷⁹ In his doctrine of human nature/revelation, we

⁷⁸West, 246.

⁷⁹George Hunsinger states that "Niebuhr's concept of the real was ground in his anthropology of sin so that love, being unattainable in its essential fullness, could only be conceived as a critical but elusive ideality....Whereas Niebuhr's thinking about reality was anthropocentric, Barth's was theocentric. It was God who set the terms for what was real....What for Barth was the touchstone of reality (love) was for Niebuhr the 'impossible-possibility,' whereas what for Barth was the 'impossible-possibility' (sin) was for Niebuhr the touchstone of reality." George Hunsinger, How to Read Karl Barth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38-39.

see Niebuhr's starting point for his evaluation of Barth, a point that will ask difficult and pointed questions to the Barthian ethic.

Niebuhr's critique highlights several key issues regarding Barth's ethics, primarily those surrounding absolutism and eschatology, best expressed in Niebuhr's criticism of Barth's response to communism, with particular reference to Hungary. In order to understand Niebuhr's critique of Barth, we must first briefly examine Niebuhr's view of, and polemic against communism.

Charles West points out that at least since Niebuhr's genesis as a teacher, he viewed communism as a religion.⁸⁰ Central to the communist "faith" was a pessimism regarding the present and an eschatological vision of a classless society. For Niebuhr, communism's approach to its faith is "dogmatic rather than scientific. Like all vital religions it engages the entire human psyche and offers its interpretation of life and the world in order that it might challenge to action in conformity to its truth."⁸¹ In this sense, communism is a religion, but not, according to Niebuhr a 'high' religion⁸² because communism does not give attention to the freedom and destiny of individuals nor does it address issues of time and eternity. For Niebuhr, communism is a 'religion' limited to history and the temporal world.

⁸⁰West, 132.

⁸¹Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Politics and Communist Religion," in Christianity and the Social Revolution, ed. John Lewis (London: 1936), 461ff.

⁸²Niebuhr ascribes the following attributes to high religion: transcendence (i.e. the knowledge of an absolute who has a will higher than that of humanity, not limited to human history), the love that validates human personality in all lives, and the knowledge of repentance and grace. For further insight see Reinhold Niebuhr, Reflections on the End of an Era (New York: Charles Scribners Son's, 1934). See also Charles West, 134ff.

Niebuhr's polemic against communism is two-fold: first, Niebuhr argues that the utopian ideology inherent within communism removes the controls on the conscience of a ruling group because of communism's inadequate doctrine of humankind. Because a Marxist analysis of society presumes the proletariat to be the sinless carrier of revolution, communism has no resource for self-reformation: the power that the proletariat gains from the revolution within society does, in fact, become a form of what Niebuhr calls an unbalanced power -- a dangerous self-righteous power. Because Niebuhr adheres to the idea of the collective evils of society, he cannot, in good conscience, or in congruence with his theology, affirm communism. Indeed, he must take a vehement position against communism for this reason: although the elimination of economic oppression resulting from capitalism will advance humanity to new levels of maturity, humanity will not move to new levels of frictionless unity and tensionless innocence.⁸³ This centralization of power to what Marxism believes to be the 'sinless proletariat' will, therefore, end only in an imbalance of power that will, for Niebuhr, end in tyranny.⁸⁴

Second, Niebuhr opposes communism because its utopianism has a seductive appeal to liberal and idealistic views. Niebuhr describes communism as

⁸³See Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Idea of Progress and Socialism" Radical Religion (Spring, 1936): 28-29.

⁸⁴Niebuhr argues that "the real ideological content of modern communism is...the power structure based on this dogmatism in a managerial society in which a political party holds a dangerous amount of power....The important point is that the ruthless power operates behind a screen of pretended ideal ends, a situation which is more dangerous and more evil than pure cynical defiance of moral ends." Reinhold Niebuhr, The Democratic Experience (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1969), 10 and Christian Realism and Political Problems (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), 43.

a very modern kind of religious apocalypse; for it contains the dearest hope of all typical moderns, Marxist or non-Marxist. That hope is that man may be delivered from his ambiguous position of being both creature and creator of the historical process and become unequivocally the master of his own destiny. The liberal culture has been informed by similar hopes since the 18th century.⁸⁵

Because of its appeal to idealism, argues Niebuhr, communism is particularly attractive to liberal minds. Understanding that Western Liberalism had held to the hope of creating 'perfect' people by eliminating the social sources of evil and purifying human reason through such techniques as education, as well as the desire to form a universal human will that would be informed by a universal mind, liberal thinkers in the West could, according to Niebuhr, be allured into the utopian ideology of a Marxist interpretation of society. However, where liberal's in the West had always been ambiguous as to how power might be related to 'universal values' of humanity, communism was not nearly as vague or ambiguous. Niebuhr reveals that communism, in contrast to Western liberalism is distinguished by a sharper, more precise definition of (1) the elite, who act as a surrogate for humankind⁸⁶ (2) schemes for endowing the elite with actual political power⁸⁷ (3) the end towards which history should move,⁸⁸ (4) the readiness needed to sacrifice every value of life for the achievement of its ends.⁸⁹

Herein lay the tension for Niebuhr: liberalism, with its great hopes and its

⁸⁵Reinhold Niebuhr, The Irony of American History (New York: Charles Scribners Son's, 1952), 66-67.

⁸⁶The Irony of American History, 67.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

ambiguous plans for the implementation of those hopes was free from the cruelties that, according to Niebuhr, had permeated communism -- primarily because of its combination of utopianism and fanaticism. Niebuhr views utopianism as a "consequence of fleeing from the cross-purposes in history to an imaginary ideal future of a heaven on earth."⁹⁰ Fanaticism, he argues, is "the consequence of ascribing ultimate significance to proximate and historically contingent ends and goals."⁹¹ This utopianism and fanaticism generates a sense of meaninglessness in history and provides a rationalization for acts of tyranny in the name of creating an ideal society. For Niebuhr, a utopian society at any cost, is by far a too high price to pay.

Niebuhr's polemic against communism arose out of his concern for communist dogma and utopian ideology. For Niebuhr, the evil of communism arose from political as well as spiritual elements;⁹² the combination of these factors proved to Niebuhr that power and pride within society, specifically within a Marxist analysis of society, "is responsible for turning the illusory dreams of yesterday into the present nightmare, which disturbs the ease of millions...in our generation."⁹³

Bearing in mind Niebuhr's strong opposition to communism, we now turn to his critique of Barth, that found its basis in Barth's approach to the issue of

⁹⁰The Democratic Experience, 11-12.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²John C. Bennett emphasizes this point: "Communism...creates a vast totalitarian empire and threatens the political and spiritual and cultural freedom of other nations. It is this fact that makes political resistance to communism urgent." John C. Bennett, "The Church Between East and West," in Christian Faith and Social Action, 78.

⁹³Christian Realism and Political Problems, 47.

communism, specifically in Hungary.

On October 23, 1956, a rebellion against Russian despotism occurred that ended in a bloodbath for the Hungarian nation. For Reinhold Niebuhr, this act of Russian tyranny was enough to destroy "permanently, whatever prestige is still adhered to the Communist ideology in Eastern Europe and among intellectuals and neutralist theologians of the Continent."⁹⁴ One such neutralist was Karl Barth.

For Niebuhr, Barth's 'quietism' on the Hungarian situation was puzzling, if not exasperating. Barth had strong links with the Hungarian Reformed church, particularly in the area of advising and counseling its leaders. His most active role came during his tour of Hungary, where he lectured to pastors, professors, students and church leaders.

According to Barth, while the political situation in Hungary was less than adequate, he perceived the Hungarian Christians to be less concerned with the Russian influence that the West believed

...I discovered they did not share the nervousness about the Russians, the 'peoples' 'democracies' and the whole problem of Eastern Europe....They are not so frightened and despairing as one might imagine from a distance.... I met no responsible Reformed Hungarian who considered it right from a Christian point of view to take the line of fundamental, out and out political resistance. My impression is that they will not be silent when they are forced to speak.⁹⁵

Barth's concern for the Hungarian Reformed Church was two-fold. First, he was clear that in facing the political crisis of the Russian oppression, the

⁹⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why is Barth Silent on Hungary?," in Essays in Applied Christianity, ed. D.B. Robertson (New York: Meridian Books, 1959), 183.

⁹⁵Karl Barth, "The Reformed Church Behind the Iron Curtain," in Against the Stream (London: SCM Press, 1954), 103-104.

Hungarian Christians not align themselves with the activity of the Roman Catholic Church that was promoting nationalism as a religious-political statement of opposition.⁹⁶ Second, Barth's call to Hungarian Christians was one of spiritual growth and perspective: for Barth, the role of the Church in the midst of political change is to be interested in that change, but to first and foremost uphold the concerns of the Church. Thus for Barth, the political change in Hungary could only be understood under the "greater eschatological change of Jesus Christ."⁹⁷ Believing that political changes lie within the realm of the 'now and not yet' of eschatology, Barth views their significance only within the realm of Heilsgeschichte and therefore, encourages the Hungarian Reformed Church to do so as well, looking upon the changes in a political system as an opportunity to 'change' the Church: to ask itself the question, where does the Church need to perform acts of penance?; how can it better serve its call to witness to the world as well as its own fellowship?; how, in midst of political change can the Church take occasion to 'revise the foundations of its own activities?'"⁹⁸ Barth admonished the Hungarian Church to unjudgementally

summon all involved in political changes to humility and modesty with one another and to the praise of God... and call them to humanity, that is, to a situation in which they not only dispute but are tolerant with one another.⁹⁹

Thus, in approaching the Hungarian situation, Barth refused to urge the Hungarian

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Karl Barth, "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," in Against the Stream (London: SCM Press, 1954), 79.

⁹⁸Ibid., 84.

⁹⁹Ibid., 93.

Church to speak or act out against communism under the assurance that no 'absolutely good or absolutely evil' government would appear in history, a position Niebuhr categorized as religious truism and political irrelevance.¹⁰⁰

Niebuhr's greatest frustration lay in his critique of Barth's misunderstanding between Nazism and Communism. Niebuhr argues that Barth did not understand fully the evils of communism and came to the rather capricious conclusion that Communism could not be as evil as Nazism because Communism did not contain a spiritual crisis

Communism, as distinguished from Nazism, has not done, and by its nature cannot do one thing; it has never made the slightest attempt to reinterpret or falsify Christianity, or to shroud itself in a Christian garment. It has never committed the basic crime of the Nazis, the replacement of the real Christ by a national Jesus, and it has never committed the crime of anti-Semitism. There is nothing of a false prophet in it.¹⁰¹

Therefore, for Barth, the difference between Communism and Nazism is based around the first Commandment. While National Socialism attempted to replace the God of the first Commandment, Communism does not. It is godless and therefore the role of the Christian is not to rise against it, but rather to preach the good news of Christ. For Niebuhr, such an attitude rings of blatant ignorance: according to Niebuhr, the "Marxist dogma....denies the possibility of making ethical choices....it is this potent dogma that color and confuses judgements and...is partly responsible for the neutralism of European intellectuals...and it colors the attitude

¹⁰⁰Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Moral and Political Judgements of Christians," The Christian Century 19 (July 6, 1959): 101.

¹⁰¹Barth, "The Church Between East and West," in Against the Stream, 140.

of such diverse intellectuals as...Karl Barth."¹⁰² Barth's insistence on disavowing moral principles¹⁰³ reflects, for Niebuhr, Barth's absolutism in approaching ethical questions.

Barth's absolutism in addressing the issue of communism leads to an isolationism and subjectivism within ethics. For Niebuhr, Barth's failure to deal with the evils of communism ~~now~~ confirmed the irrelevance of Barth's ethic, for humanity cannot "protect the truth of the gospel by separating it from all the disciplines of culture and all the common experiences of our ethical life."¹⁰⁴ How, argued Niebuhr, can an ethic be sensitive to the daily needs of life if it chooses to place itself, in a sense, above that life?¹⁰⁵ How can God's interaction with humanity have any relevance if it is only an interaction based primarily on an ahistorical event, transcending any cultural or historical impact? In dismissing the place of human achievement outside of revelation, in insisting on absolutism, Barth has, according to Niebuhr, created a vacuum within which the church functions, and one which, in facing human need, is incapable of acting. In his Amsterdam

¹⁰²Niebuhr, Christian Realism and Political Problems, 52-53.

¹⁰³Because Barth believes that in approaching ethics each situation is to be approached in light of a 'fresh hearing' of the Word of God, he will not accept any kind of structure of moral principles. This concept Niebuhr finds extremely irritating, if not useless.

¹⁰⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Quality of Our Lives," The Christian Century (May 11, 1960): 571.

¹⁰⁵Niebuhr stated that "we cannot, in short, make the Christian faith relevant to the collective problems of our day without more modesty in recognizing past mistakes, present difficulties, and the need of religiously neutral instruments of judgements. We cannot achieve this modesty if we insist on regarding the Christian faith as a simple panacea for all human ills, individual and collective." From "The Moral and Political Judgements of Christians," 103.

address, "The Christian Witness in the Social and National Order,"¹⁰⁶ as well as within the pages of an article in The Christian Century, Niebuhr stated his concern this way:

It is true that...repentance is always required as evil always flourishes. But it is wrong to preach this Gospel *sub specie aeternitatis* as if there were no history with its time and seasons....Yesterday they [Barthians] discovered that the Church may be an ark in which to survive a flood. Today they seem so enamored of this special function of Church that they have decided to turn the ark into a home on Mount Ararat and live in it perpetually.¹⁰⁷

Because Barth refused in the Hungarian situation to make comparative judgements (i.e. Barth's unwillingness to distinguish between moderate opposition to communism and primitive anti-communism), Niebuhr concludes that Barth's ethic ends in a subjective, complacent approach toward Communist tyranny, particularly in Hungary,¹⁰⁸ a complacency that Niebuhr believed arose from

¹⁰⁶This address was delivered at the meeting of the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in the summer of 1948.

¹⁰⁷Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Christian Witness in the Social and National Order" in Christian Realism and Political Problems (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1953), 108-109. Also, "We Are Men and Not God," The Christian Century October 27, 1948. 1139.

¹⁰⁸Niebuhr saw the incongruousness of Barth's positions in statements made by Barth like the following: "I am of the opinion...that the Church today, contrary to its action between 1933-1945, ought to stand quietly aloof from the present conflict and not let off all its guns before it is necessary, but wait calmly to see whether and in what sense the situation will grow serious again and call from speech." Karl Barth, "The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change," 117. What Niebuhr finds disappointing is Barth's complete disregard for the evil of Communism, as well as his unwillingness to engage politically in the Hungarian dispute. Niebuhr makes a good point when he queries Barth's understanding of the issues.

Barth's eschatological approach to ethics.¹⁰⁹

Barth's eschatology, as the key to understanding what he terms as divinely determined freedom, engages the question of human responsibility vs. the command of God. Niebuhr argues that Barth is too eschatological in his thinking - the eternal perspective has "overshadowed and obscured the temporal reality of man's need."¹¹⁰ Where this critique is crucial is in approaching the area of responsibility and, therefore, freedom. For Niebuhr,

the freedom which man has in Christ is a freedom from the distortions of pride and self-interest and from the ideologies which cover them, to see the neighbor as he is, in the social reality which stands under God's gracious providence. It is therefore a freedom which affirms human experience, and so far as it is relative and objective, human thinking about that experience, by virtue of its standard and source in Christ. This is a freedom which is in no sense a substitute for the careful understanding of the social and political situation in which the Christian has to act, but frees the Christian for this understanding.¹¹¹

Barth's eschatological approach severely limits human freedom¹¹² and is, for

¹⁰⁹See Reinhold Niebuhr, "Barthianism and Political Reaction," in Essays in Applied Christianity, 1154. See also Donald B. Meyer, The Protestant Search for Political Realism 1919-1941 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1960), 247.

¹¹⁰Klem, 72. Niebuhr believed that "Karl Barth's theological framework is defective for wise political decisions for two reasons: the first is that he is too consistently 'eschatological' for a 'nicely calculated less and more' which must go into political decisions. The second defect...is his extreme pragmatism which disavows moral principles....Barth's view makes no provision for discriminating judgements, both because of its strong eschatological emphasis and because of the absence of principles and structures of values." (Reinhold Niebuhr, "Why is Barth Silent on Hungary?" in Essays in Applied Christianity, 186ff.

¹¹¹West, 316-317.

¹¹²Niebuhr does credit Barth's eschatological approach in its effect on East German Christians: "In fairness to Barth, it must be said that his approach to things has been more creative in East Germany, where Political resistance is absolutely impossible because of the weight of the Russian military upon that

Niebuhr, incongruous with Barth's theology. If, as Barth argues, divine determination is true freedom and if this freedom is freedom to act responsibly -- to live life as a reflection of what lies behind election, that is grace, and treat others under that same elective grace -- how could Barth be silent regarding the Hungarian situation? How could communism reflect in any way, shape or form, God's grace, when in fact, the situation in Hungary was proof enough that an absolute monopoly of power leads to grievous injustices? Barth has failed Niebuhr in his inability to understand communism and its propensity toward evil. Barth's absolutism and eschatological approach to ethics has blinded him to the pressing need in Hungary, paralyzing the Protestant Christians from determining choice and action in the ethical realm.

While Barth upheld the sacredness of the first Commandment on his attack on National Socialism, he did not remain congruent theologically or ethically in dealing with communism, for is not the proletariat and the utopian dream of society a replacement for the real Christ and God's kingdom? Is not the secular religion of communism with its dogma and 'despotism' a form of idolatry? For Niebuhr, Barth's inability to see the parallels that exist between Nazism and Communism acts, therefore, as a reflection of Barth's lack of political ethic:

In each case a different element of his theology predominates. In no case does he adequately relate them to produce a fully convincing political ethic. In one situation we are confronted with an unmodified declaration of crisis and status confessionis against the political demons of our day, and in another we find

Soviet outpost. There Barth's eschatological emphasis has inspired a kind of religious resistance which has permitted the East German Christians to bear witness to their faith and to assert their dignity...without raising false hopes and fears in the political realm." "Why is Barth Silent on Hungary?," 188. See also Karl Barth, "Einen Brief an einen Pfarrer in der DDR" Evangelischer Verlag Zollikon, 1958.

counsel to wait, reserve judgement, and remember that God's grace rules even the demons....Barth seems...to neglect his responsibility for that difficult empirical analysis of real human relations.¹¹³

Niebuhr's dissatisfaction with Barth's ethic began long before the issue of Hungary ever arose. In fact, Niebuhr's critique of Barth spans 30 years, beginning in 1928 after the publication of Barth's The Word of God and the Word of Man arrived in America. Over the period of these 30 years, Niebuhr's critique focussed on two main issues: what he perceived to be Barth's absolutism and eschatological emphasis within theology and ethics. The only modification of Niebuhr's critique came after a visit to Barth in 1947; writing of his meeting with Barth, Niebuhr stated that he "disassociated Barth from the Biblicist literalism or fundamentalism...[that] seems to grip his followers."¹¹⁴ Despite this reprieve, Niebuhr's frustration was re-ignited at the 1948 meeting of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, where Niebuhr again criticized Barth's eschatological approach to questions of economic and political injustices.¹¹⁵ By 1960 Niebuhr had no use for Barth or his theology: "I record these developments without too much animus because Barth has long since ceased to have any effect on my thought."¹¹⁶

Barth's response to Niebuhr's critique varied. Little was said about Niebuhr's attack on Barth's theology until the Amsterdam Assembly where Barth

¹¹³West, 313.

¹¹⁴Reinhold Niebuhr, "European Impressions," The Christian Century (May 12, 1947): 2.

¹¹⁵See Reinhold Niebuhr, "We are Men and not God," The Christian Century (october 27, 1948).

¹¹⁶"The Quality of Our Lives," 570.

rebutted Niebuhr

It is obvious that, so far as Niebuhr is concerned I did not express myself clearly. I clearly did not succeed in expressing my quite simple thought and quite simple purpose in such a way that my meaning as it travelled from my brain and manuscript to the ear and thought world of Niebuhr, conveyed what I intended. When I read his exposition, I cannot help recalling the concave mirror in which I recently saw my reflection in the Musee Crevin in Paris, and I did not know whether to laugh or cry.¹¹⁷

For Barth, much of the confusion surrounding his position came from what he believed to be a misunderstanding of Continental theology by the Anglo-Saxon world.¹¹⁸

It would be incorrect to state that Barth was silent when confronted by Niebuhr's critique—he was, in fact, anything but silent when Niebuhr attacked him on his position in Hungary. Labeling Niebuhr as a 'hard boiled' Western politician who wanted him to accept a primitive form of anti-communism, Barth argued that his position on Hungary was absolutely congruent with his theological approach; given the opportunity, he would not have changed his decision to 'remain silent'

...my stand on the Hungarian problem proved highly offensive in my homeland and perhaps elsewhere too....I maintain that the positive way taken by the Hungarian Reformed people is preferable to the glory they might win as standard-bearer for the so-called "Christian West...." We shall see who was right in the long run.¹¹⁹

Realistically, Niebuhr's critique of Barth did little to change Barth's approach to theology and ethics. Perhaps Niebuhr's polemic served primarily to

¹¹⁷Karl Barth, in The Courage to Change, 341.

¹¹⁸We will be investigating this concept in our next chapter.

¹¹⁹Karl Barth, How I Changed My Mind (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1966), 57.

emphasize the differences between Anglo-Saxon and Continental theology; perhaps Niebuhr compelled Barth to create his 'special ethics' as a means to address claims of olympianism and absolutism. One thing is clear: Niebuhr does point out significant challenges to Barth's ability to maintain a political ethic. But there is more to examine that Niebuhr's critique allows. Not only does Barth's absolutism and eschatological emphasis serve to limit the practicality of his ethic, but also his doctrine of church and state,^{and} history, as well as his unwillingness to accept any form of norms as well as the role of the Holy Spirit within ethics.

CHAPTER SIX

How Well Does the Barthian Ethic Serve Us?

In his critique of Barth, Reinhold Niebuhr presents us with a helpful paradigm for assessing the Barthian ethic. Believing that Barth's ethic is too eschatologically based and absolutist, Niebuhr concludes that Barth's ethics simply do not work. In discussing Barth's approach to Communism, Niebuhr emphasizes not only the 'loftiness' of the Barthian ethic but also the seeming incongruity.

While we find Niebuhr's critique helpful, we believe there are several other areas that must be discussed in an examination of Barth's ethics. These areas include Barth's approach to the relationship between church and state, his doctrine of history, the place of norms within ethics and the role of the Spirit in guiding Christians as they make ethical decisions.¹

I. The Relationship Between Church and State

Barth's approach to questions of the relation between church and state (the political/ethical realm of life) is grounded in his view of history²; the combination of the two, *Bundesordnung* (church and state), which belongs to the sphere of redemption is the driving force behind the structure of social responsibility. Moving away from the classical Lutheran doctrine of Two Kingdoms,³ Barth

¹These four areas cannot be analyzed in great detail in this chapter. However, we will be focussing on the element of each we deem most significant as we critique Barth's ethic.

²Later in this chapter we will be discussing how Barth's view of history impacts his ethics.

³The doctrine of Two Kingdoms asserts that there exist two separate kingdoms in which a human is subject: heaven and earth. Humanity is, therefore, subject to the spiritual and civil realms, the eternal and temporal. Ancient Reformers like Martin Luther made it clear that two Scriptural principles must be established in the relationship between church and state: (1) the divine sanction of civil

sought to establish a link between the two realms in which humanity functioned. Barth's frustration with the classical Reformed position was that it did not have what he perceived as a strong enough gospel foundation; that is to say, for Barth, a Christological base as the grounding between the 'secular' and the 'sacred.'⁴ Therefore, because Barth bases his view of responsibility within ethics as a corollary of God's grace,⁵ his approach to how the church and state function

government and its independence from church control, (2) the limits of civil power that cannot extend to the realm of conscience, where each individual is accountable only to God.

For Luther, humanity was to "distinguish between the sphere of sin where force operates in the name of Law; and the inner life of evangelical freedom where God operates in the name of grace." [J.S. Whale, The Protestant Tradition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 295]. Luther attributes completely different functions to the church and state, and while the two are not in conflict and can exist side by side, Luther calls for a strict adherence by the church and state to their God ordained roles. These realms are not totally isolated from one another; in fact, they are complementary. Yet the consummation of their relationship will not occur until the eschaton, and Christians must constantly be wary of what Martin Luther coined the 'devil's' attempts to confuse the two realms of the sacred and secular, for "on the one hand the secular power may seek to control the Church and dictate what is to be believed and taught; or the pope may seek to assert that all earthly authority flows through him." Duncan B. Forrester, "The Political Teaching of Luther, Calvin, and Hooker," in History of Political Philosophy, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: Rand McNally and Co., 1963), 285.

Barth's approach to the doctrine of Two Kingdoms was not to refute the existence of two kingdoms but to establish how they are integrally connected (in terms of their inward and vital relationship) rather than placed only side by side.

For further discussion on the doctrine of Two Kingdoms, see Paul Althaus, Paulus und Luther über den Menschen, 1938; Gerhard Ebeling, "The Necessity of the Doctrine of Two Kingdoms" and "Reflexions on the Doctrine of Law," in Word and Faith (London: SCM Press, 1963); Johannes Heckel, Lex charitatis: Eine juristische Untersuchung über das Recht in der Theologie Martin Luthers (Abh. d. Bayer^{AKad} Wiss. Phil-hist. Kl. Neue Folge, Heft 36 [1953]). See also Martin Luther, Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (London: James Clarke and Co., 1953).

⁴See Karl Barth, Church and State, trans. G. Ronald Howe (London: SCM Press, 1939), 6ff.

⁵See CD II/2, 552ff.

~~consequence of God's grace, his approach to how the church and state function~~
within society is worthy of examination.

A. The Role of the State

For Barth, the state acts as a tool whereby limits are set on the capacity of sinful humanity to destroy time and common life. As such, the state functions as a parable of the heavenly kingdom, "capable of reflecting indirectly the truth and reality which constitute the Christian community,"⁶ forming the outer circle of humanity's existence in grace, concentric with the inner circle of the church. The state is not, however, the kingdom of God, but an order of redemption that God uses in a world not yet fully redeemed.⁷ Barth makes it clear that although the state may be seen as a parable of the divine kingdom, the state can never become fully holy: deification of the state is impossible because the full eschatological expression of the kingdom of God cannot belong to any earthly dominion. This fact results in two significant points: first, as the state can never be fully deified, neither can it be fully diabolical. No matter how evil a state may be, every state "possesses its imperishable destiny in the fact that it will one day contribute to the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem and will inevitably bring its tribute thither."⁸

Second, as the state is to reflect the heavenly kingdom (and the church is

⁵See CD II/2, 552ff.

⁶Against the Stream, 33.

⁷Barth states that the state is "an order of divine grace inasmuch as in relations to sinful man as such, in relation to the world that still needs redeeming, the grace of God is always the patience of God. It is the sign that mankind, in its total ignorance and darkness...is yet not forsaken but preserved and sustained by God. It serves to protect man from the invasion of chaos and give him time: time for the preaching of the gospel; time for repentance; time for faith." Against the Stream, 21.

⁸Church and State, 42.

to aid in nurturing this reflection), the state's primary role becomes that of building up society in such a way that the state functions as an external means of grace and a sign of how individuals are to serve one another in the civil community.⁹ The decisive functions of the state therefore, include government, legislation and justice, the provision and protection of national labor, the promotion of free learning, education and culture, and a concern for the freedom of action and expression of individuals and groups, in so far as this concern can be understood as an affirmation of the purpose of the state. Lastly, and most importantly for Barth, the state is to publicly acknowledge and support the church as the society in which "the recollection of the ultimate purpose of the state particularly resides."¹⁰

As a sign of redemption, the state derives its task, promise and power from God alone: "The power of the State as such, belongs originally to Jesus Christ; that in its comparatively independent substance, in its dignity, its function and in its purpose it should serve the person and work of Jesus Christ and therefore the justification of the sinner."¹¹ When the state loses sight of the root of its power - - Jesus Christ -- when it renounces its true substance, dignity and purpose, only then does the state become demonic. For Barth, this transition takes place when the state seeks to take over the role of the church, attempting to replace the true gospel of Jesus Christ with a worldly gospel, that is, the 'gospel' of the state itself. When the state, through overt or covert means, claims what belongs to the church, the

⁹Ethics, 445.

¹⁰Ethics, 520.

¹¹Church and State, 29. See also CD II/2, 721; Ethics, 448.

state rejects its God-given mandate. Only when the state acts as a safeguard to society, guarding and enforcing the concepts of order, freedom, responsibility and community in an egalitarian fashion, will the state fulfill its true role. Therefore, for Barth, the state acts justly when it protects and maintains the relative and provisional freedom of individuals and the peace of the community.

Barth believes the state finds its place as it embraces its unique relationship with the church, in which the state affirms and protects the right of the church to fulfill its task: the preaching of the gospel. Barth states that "the Church must have the freedom to proclaim divine justification. The State will realize its own potentialities, and thus will be a just state in proportion as it not merely positively allows, but actively grants, this freedom to the Church."¹² Thus, the state experiences fulfillment only as it understands and accepts its distinctive inter-relationship with the church. Before examining the ramifications of this relationship, we must first explore briefly how Barth views the church and its function.

B. The Role of the Church

Like the state, the church is, for Barth, an order of redemption and witness to divine justification.¹³ The church is a fellowship of believers, united under the common bond of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, as well as a universal community without limits or competition with other communities. The primary functions of the church are those of divine service, which include for Barth, the transmission

¹²Church and State, 83.

¹³Barth calls the church a witness to the "act in which God in Jesus Christ established and confirmed His original claim to man and hence man's claim against sin and death....The Church is witness of the fact that the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost." Against the Stream, 35-36.

of the Biblical witness to Christ in the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments (worship), pastoral care, Christian nurture and education of youth, evangelism and missions, and theology -- the self-examination of the church on its "origin, on the promises and warnings of history, on its nature, and on its central and also its peripheral task."¹⁴

Apart from its divinely appointed functions, the church ought to be a 'seeing' community in that the church knows of God's gracious plan for humanity in a way to which the civil community is blind. Therefore, the church has a unique relationship to God in a way that the state does not, in that the church, vis-a-vis God's revelation in Christ, understands the greater purpose of creation and society. However, just as the state can never be deified, Barth is clear to elucidate so also the church cannot, out of its knowledge of revelation, create a Christian form of the state. Like the state, the church finds its meaning, purpose and power only in Jesus Christ and is to mirror the message of God's gracious revelation in Christ to the world. For Barth, the center of the church is "outside itself, like the center of a beam of light. The outer and inner brilliance of this light depend utterly on the source, the grace of a living God."¹⁵ Therefore, while the state and church form outer and inner concentric circles respectively, both are reliant upon a third larger, all encompassing circle: Jesus Christ.

Understanding its being as rooted in the love and mercy of God -- a reflection of God's revelation in Christ to humanity -- the church is to make choices and undertake practices that impart the active grace of God within society.

¹⁴Ethics, 518.

¹⁵West, 294.

Politically, this process is accomplished as the church helps society search for the most fitting system of political organization. In this way, the church is involved in the political process and reminds the state of the primary and indisputable fact that the state is unable to remind itself: the fostering of its connection with the order of divine grace and redemption. Thus, the church acts, even in its political activity, as an arm of proclamation of God's plan and purpose for society : over and above any cause, the church is to place its emphasis and interest in humanity.¹⁶

The primary way that the church serves the state and upholds God's justice in society is, according to Barth, through the preaching of the gospel and through prayer for the state.¹⁷ As the church proclaims the good news of Jesus Christ and prays for the state, the church reminds the state of its temporary nature and responsibility to God, thereby moving the state towards becoming an allegory of the heavenly kingdom, capable of reflecting directly and indirectly the truth and reality that constitute Christian community. For Barth, the way in which the state is able to become this parable of the kingdom is through the inter-relationship with the church, and the church's inter-relationship with the state.

C. The Inter-relationship of the State and the Church

Barth makes it clear that while the state and church are different, they function most fully in an association of inter-dependence. This special relationship is defined so that the church maintains a unique responsibility (as it has a special

¹⁶Against the Stream, 35. Barth makes it clear that "man has not to serve causes; causes have to serve man."

¹⁷Church and State, 62. See also: CD II/2, 726; Against the Stream, 34; "Letter to an East German Pastor," in How to Serve God in a Marxist Land, 69.

relation to the truth in Christ) for the independent functioning of the state. Because the state is without divine revelation and therefore leans towards injustice,¹⁸ the church has the important role of witnessing to the ephemeral nature of the state. In so doing, the church serves the state by reminding the state of the true function God has given to it. Lest the state forget its God-given order and purpose, the church is present as a force of exhortation.

Although the church, because of its knowledge of revelation and eternal authority,¹⁹ is superior to the state, the church is still subject to the governance of the state. Because the state has been established by God as a means by which humanity's tendency toward evil and destruction of human freedom may be checked, the church is called by Barth to respect the authority of the state. What Barth means by this respect for authority is that Christians are called to carry out what is required of them for the establishment, preservation and maintenance of the civil community for the execution of its task.²⁰ However, the church is not called to blind submission. The subjection required by Christians

cannot mean that they accept and take upon themselves responsibility for those intentions and undertakings of the state which directly or indirectly are aimed against the freedom of the Christian message. Of course it must be understood that even then the 'subjection' will not cease. But their subjection... will consist in becoming its victims, who in their concrete action will not accept any responsibility who cannot inwardly co-operate....All this will be done not against the State, but as the Church's service for

¹⁸Barth believes that because the state is without revelation, the state is neutral, pagan and ignorant, authoritarian by habit, inclined towards tyranny and anarchy. See Church and State, 66ff.

¹⁹Ethics, 449; CD II\2, 720.

²⁰Against the Stream, 24.

the State!²¹

Yet because the church is called to respect the divine ordinance of the state, the church, even in the midst of injustice must esteem the state -- expecting the best from it, the church submits to the state trusting that the state will give legal protection for the proclamation of the Gospel.

Herein lies the complexity of the relationship between the state and the church: the state cannot become the church, and the church cannot become the state -- to do so would be to deny the true existence of both. Therefore, church and state live together in a kind of creative tension. Barth proclaims the role of the state as an order of redemption established to foster and keep peace in society, at times by force; the church is to submit to this authority and, in so doing, reminds the state of God's eternal purpose. However, when this authority of the state challenges or repudiates the truth of the Christian message, the church is to 'serve' the state, primarily through the ministry of preaching and intercession. This call to preaching and prayer does not mean, for Barth, that the church is to work with the state in a spirit of acquiescence, particularly in the face of injustice. It does mean, that according to Barth, the most informed ethical response to an unjust state is to heed the greater sovereign power of God as witnessed in the gospel and prayer: "If the state has perverted its God-given authority, it cannot be honored better than by this criticism which is due it in all circumstances. For this power that has been perverted what greater service can we render than that of intercession?"²² In answering practical ethical questions, Barth's call to

²¹Church and State, 67-68.

²²Church and State, 69.

proclamation and intercession -- while important -- is less than satisfying. In fact, in the case of communism, this bidding to pray against an evil state seems incongruent with Barth's earlier approach to the evils of the National Socialism in the 1930's.²³

Barth's view of the relationship between church and state impacts ^{on} his ethics in several ways. First, because Barth places the state and church under the order of redemption, difficulties arise when his ethics face the task of analyzing human relations. If all humanity stands under the order of redemption, then who among us has the ability to render judgments about ethical or non-ethical behavior. Because of Barth's all encompassing doctrine of divine grace, a doctrine of church and state arises that seemingly creates a politically powerless church, except in the realm of intercession. However, in the case of Hungary and even East Germany, intercession could have been one of several tools of ethical response rather than **the** only tool. Unfortunately, in his desire to protect the sovereignty of God, Barth negates the viability of human input within the realm of ethics. But human life and decisions are far more complex and complicated. In placing his entire doctrine of church and state under the umbrella of God's all enveloping grace, Barth seems to have forgotten that God can work within "human structures of power, order and justice....[he] neglects his responsibility for that difficult empirical analysis of real human relations, especially in politics, which the Christian just because of his faith,

²³Clearly, Barth's stand against the National Socialists was one of his greater contributions to ethics. Based upon the Nazi desire to replace Christ as Lord, Barth called the state a form of evil and called Christians to view it as such. Yet in the case of communism, equally evil in its denouncement of any God at all, Barth is far less polemical in his writings. We, like Reinhold Niebuhr, find this incongruity intriguing and join in the challenge to Barth to give us more than a conceptual approach to ethics, which often does little to outline practical ways to resolve ethical dilemmas.

should take more seriously than others."²⁴

Another way that Barth's view of the relationship between church and state impacts his ethics relates to his notion about a 'just' state. Because of Barth's insistence upon the state as being an order of redemption, he negates the concept of a truly evil state. Clearly, this position arises out of Barth's doctrine of revelation and ordering of gospel over law. Because Barth's view of revelation is first and foremost a God-initiated and sustained event -- because from eternity the YES of God (gospel) is the first word of God to humanity (even before the NO of law) -- Barth believes that the transcendent, omnipotent, sovereign God overrides any kind of unjust or evil state. Thus, because from eternity God has, for Barth, already achieved a victory over evil, a fully demonic state is impossible. While the state may have elements of evil within it, there is no such thing for Barth as a purely diabolic state. Barth states that

...we shall not meet a perfect Christian state until the day of judgement, nor the devil's state either. We shall be always moving between the two. And so, even if the State begins to show signs of the beast from the abyss, as Christians we shall not immediately clutch at the ultima ratio: Yes or No - consent or martyrdom. Just because we are Christians we shall be free to wait a little and give ourselves time to examine the whole situation in detail.²⁵

Barth's refusal to admit the power and depth of evil -- his oversight regarding the strength of a 'state' religion over human lives -- permits Barth to neglect questions of inequity. In his approach, Barth seems to have dismissed the reality of individuals who suffer injustice, torture, perhaps death, all in the cause of 'just state.' Barth's 'just state' is, in a sense, an oxymoron, leaving little room for

²⁴West, 313-314.

²⁵Against the Stream, 98.

political action and large gaps for political injustice.²⁶

Barth's doctrine of church and state is helpful in underlining the unique relationship between the two. However, the translation of his theology to praxis, reveals that Barth's approach to church and state leaves us with little that is tangible in solving ethical problems, primarily because of his doctrine of history.

II. Barth's Doctrine of History

As discussed previously, Barth's view of church and state is highly influenced by his view of history. This relationship "must always be understood as historically dynamic, never endowed with a moral or social being of its own apart from history."²⁷

Barth bases his entire view of history on one principal concept: all events must be defined not through some form of human reason or will but through their starting point -- God's gracious, eternal election in Jesus Christ. History thus finds a concrete reality in God's freedom to choose for humanity: because God initiates relationship with humankind, thus breaking the eschatological barrier between time and eternity, all history is encompassed within what Barth terms "created time," the form by which humanity enters into relationship with God -- the very same form that Barth calls history.²⁸ For Barth, history falls within the category of

²⁶William Pauck, commenting on Barth's concept of church and state stated, "I do not find Barth's doctrine of the 'righteous state' acceptable...It is derived from his concept of revelation and thus placed on too narrow a base. This opinion can be proved...by the fact that he cannot find a proper interpretation of the Soviet state." William Pauck, "Comment by Pauck," *Christendom* 8 (1943): 469.

²⁷Ibid., 291.

²⁸Barth distinguishes between eternal time and created time. Eternal time can be considered, in fact, as God's time that enfolds all time. However, the created time that exists within eternal time has a different emphasis: created time is the time of God's revelation, the time that God gives to humanity, the time that defines

eternal time, yet exists as created time:

What is meant is the history of the covenant of grace instituted by God between Himself and man; of the sequence of the events in which God concludes and executes this covenant with man, carrying it to its goal and thus validating in the sphere of the creature that which from all eternity He has determined in Himself.²⁹

Thus we see that for Barth, history is truly the story of God's eternal covenant of grace with humankind.

Barth recognizes, however, that there do exist human attempts to define history through reason and other machinations that he believes are based in humanity's rejection of the will, the word, and the work of God. For Barth, this willful disregard for God's history characterizes humanity's struggle to understand history.³⁰ Barth calls this human attempt at defining history *Weltgeschichte*: that which is determined by human pride and places humanity as the subject, creator and endower of meaning for all events. This type of history must be understood, argues Barth, in light of *Weltgeschehen* -- that which "happens in the world of God's creatures...the objective reality of the events which make up the history of man on earth, his life cycle, his attempts to set up order, his sinful destruction of

our relationship with God. Created time is, therefore for Barth, historical time.

²⁹CD III/1, 59.

³⁰Barth emphasizes this point: "It is our true history (incomparably more direct and intimate than anything we think we know as our history). Jesus Christ comes to us. In Him we are quite alone, torn away originally and finally from the whole world of fairy tale and myth, taken right beyond all our empirical and ideal pictures of ourselves....It is the knowledge of this Other....It is a matter of the knowledge of His history, which will always be a strange history although it is our history." CD IV/1, 548-549.

order, his relations with his neighbor and the rest."³¹ Because all history is for Barth, *Heilsgeschichte*, *Weltgeschehen* does not conflict with God's eternal purposes because *Weltgeschehen* reflects

God's faithfulness, that He orders creaturely events under His Lordship into and under the event of the covenant and the grace of his salvation, and lets them serve it; that he adds them to the coming of his kingdom, in which the whole reality which is different from himself gains its historical substance, and lets them have a part in this coming.³²

Therefore, for Barth, *Weltgeschehen*, or human activity within God's eternally ordained covenant of grace, is a tool God has chosen to use in history. In this way, human events have constitutive meaning for events in the history of the Covenant.

The greatest point of importance for Barth in discussing the role of *Weltgeschehen*, is the passion and resurrection of Christ. In Christ's Lordship, history finds its true meaning; while the Christ event is not dependent on *Weltgeschehen*, Barth argues that Christ's life, death and resurrection define history

The Christian Church knows that not only itself but the whole world exists...between the action God has already taken and the action he has still to take for man through his only Son. Political changes, along with all other changes...are significant because they take place in this framework. The beginning and goal of what we call world history is at all events the history of God's salvation of man.³³

Therefore, Christ is the be-all and end-all of human existence and the content of

³¹West, 263. West points out that *Weltgeschichte* refers not to the events that lie in the hand of God as such (i.e., those events that make up the history of humankind), but to these events in so far as humanity is their subject.

³²CD III/3, 47.

³³*Against the Stream*, 78.

all history -- He is the past as well as the present and future -- the One who bridges the gap between time and eternity.

Barth's entire approach to history significantly impacts his doctrine of church and state. Because Christ is the fulfillment of all history, the church is precluded from becoming an end in itself -- its role is to reflect and bear witness to the Christ event. Yet although the church cannot function outside of the parameters of its given role (i.e. prayer, faith and obedience), the church does live in the world and is called to function in a dynamic and open way. Barth states that the test of the church's true faith is the nature of the church's confession of Christ to the world, a confession that at times must be concretely political. However, Barth continues to remind Christians that in the face of an already redeemed history (through the victory of Christ over evil), the outcome of history has previously been decided. Thus, when facing political/ethical issues in the present, the Christian must not speak of history in eschatological/apocalyptic terms. Rather, the Christian is to understand and accept that

confronted in his life with many *kairoi* which call for his decision; a decision which is not a matter of indifference but takes on the quality of life and death, of choice for or against God in the situation concerned, [In spite of the crises that may ensue,] there is no protection for the being of the Church against such crises and temptations.... Yet the security of the Church lies in the fact that Christ is faithful when we are unfaithful, and that he does not leave himself without a witness in the world, that he can create and recreate the congregation.³⁴

Barth's position creates for the church a difficult dilemma: although the church is called to make a decision, this decision is, in effect, taken away by

³⁴West, 268.

Barth's view of history and Christ's Lordship therein. Thus, while the church is not to be distracted by changes in the political order (such as Communism in Hungary), because of the great change of Jesus Christ, the church is to proclaim the YES of God to the world by sharing the good news of reconciliation and by interpreting historical events through the lens of God's eternal grace and judgment.

We believe this approach disarms the church. Faced with the challenges of an unjust state as were the Hungarians in the 1950's, the church is called to proclaim the truth of Jesus Christ -- and we are not denying Christ as the ultimate source of truth -- yet the church is unable to inflesh this truth through specific ethical action. The paradox of Barth's position is that although the church is to uphold the sovereignty of God in history by fulfilling its role as a herald of the revolutionary eschatology of Jesus Christ, the church is also able to declare political crises within history such as Nazism, but can seemingly address them only through prayer. In his attempt to maintain the sovereignty of God, Barth has, in a sense, rendered the church impotent. This result is not necessary.

Charles West astutely suggests that Barth's doctrine of history and the Lordship of Christ does not have to result in a powerless church. West argues:

On the one side we need treat no conflict in history with anxious pride, as if the victory depended on us. God is not so dependent on his creatures, that our acts of disobedience or of foolishness bring him into inner insecurity or risk the failure of his gracious purposes with us....On the other hand our life and death is involved whether or not we take this concrete present seriously as participants in God's act....From the one side comes freedom from illusion and anxiety.... From the other comes that inner participation, the critical urgency of love, which can alone give this truth expression.³⁵

³⁵Ibid., 279-280.

Had Barth applied this model to his approach to Communism, we might have discovered a different application than the position taken by Barth: because the Christian believes that God ultimately holds events in His hands, believers could have been empowered to act independently and boldly within the Communist society -- even to the point of speaking the truth in love. Naturally, there is an implicit risk involved in speaking out within the confines of an unjust state. However, if Barth takes his eschatology seriously in making ethical decisions, then this approach ought to be central in his thought. With a sovereign God who has already decided the outcome of history, risk, in Barth's eschatology, takes on a new meaning. But Barth does not elucidate clearly enough the practicalities of implementing his eschatology to ethics. He does not take the step of application far enough: focusing too intently on the theology, Barth overlooks the importance of providing tangible handholds for application. In Barth's fear that the authority of God might be challenged by valuing human participation in the ethical event, it would seem that Barth discounts the significance of application.

George Hunsinger comments upon Barth's dilemma in the article, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some Further Considerations."³⁶ Hunsinger argues the important point that Barth assigns conceptual priority to *meditatio*³⁷ over *applicatio*. Accordingly, Barth's primary task was to ensure that *explicatio* (exegesis) and *meditatio* were accomplished properly. Only then could and would

³⁶George Hunsinger, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some Further Considerations," *Studies in Religion* 7/2 (Spring, 1978): 167-191. Hereafter stated as "Some Further Considerations."

³⁷Meditatio refers to a "critical and confessional reflection on the concepts implicit in the language of the Church about the God who loves in freedom." Hunsinger, "Some further considerations," 181-182.

the *applicatio* proceed aright. However, as Hunsinger quite rightly argues, one cannot assure that on the basis of 'right' theology, the right praxis will be created.³⁸

Barth seems to misunderstand that not all individuals are as quick or able as he seems to be at making the transition from *meditatio* to *applicatio*. Perhaps in Barth's mind the movement from one to the other is simple and occurs with little or no thought. But in our opinion, the average human being would not take the time nor the effort to produce the kind of work Barth upholds in the *explicatio-meditatio-applicatio* model. We are not arguing that humanity is lazy or ignorant. However, we do believe that Barth's expectation for humanity may not be realistic.

Therefore, Barth's doctrine of history fails us ethically because it does little to aid in the kinds of crises human beings face each day. Ethical dealings are ones that engage the question of both moral thought, and moral action. Surely in the case of Hungary, the actions of the Communist government were not morally upright. Clearly, Barth's sequence of *explicatio-meditatio-applicatio* did not stand in Hungary: 'right' *meditatio* in the case of Hungary resulted in, incongruously, a very different *applicatio* than in Germany in 1933. Barth cannot base his ethics on ideology alone; he must also look to the act that arises from the ideology.

Furthermore, Barth's doctrine of history does little to help individuals find a reference point for making ethical decisions. While it was helpful and certainly appropriate and necessary to encourage Hungarian Christians to pray, Barth does

³⁸Hunsinger continues by stating that Barth "never overcame his idealist notion of sequence. One reason, then, why Barth neglected to state fully the ethical criteria for political application would seem to be the irreversible sequence he envisioned from *meditatio* to *applicatio*...Barth was so enamored with the primacy of actualism that his political argumentation never reached its full fruition." *Ibid.*, 183.

not provide much insight into how an individual Hungarian Christian might find the starting point for his/her ethical action within an immoral and unethical political structure.³⁹ While his doctrine of history may be intellectually engaging, it fails to wrestle with the very complex and complicated relationships which humanity faces.⁴⁰ Barth would have fared better by moving 'philosophical systems and movements of culture' to concrete persons and their very real and pressing problems -- a move that we believe could have been achieved by Barth's willingness to accept a revised form of norms within ethics.

III. The Place of Norms within Ethics

When discussing the place of casuistry and norms within ethics, and Barth's aversion to them, we must first briefly define our terms. When speaking of casuistry, we are referring to "the reasoned application of law to concrete cases [which] determines with all possible exactitude the limitations of law or the bearing

³⁹Robert MacAfee Brown presents the challenge in this way: "...do not the moral indignities, the callous disregard for human life, the gradual warping of the original Communist ideology...the rule of the few over many-do not these and a dozen other realities of the communism of the 1950's make necessary a more penetrating kind of criticism than anything Karl Barth has yet offered us?" Robert MacAfee Brown, "Introductory Essay," in How to Serve God in a Marxist Land (New York: Association Press, 1959), 36.

⁴⁰Helmut Gollwitzer presents a more satisfying conclusion in relating crisis and history. According to Gollwitzer, while affirming the confessional element inherent within Barth's approach to ethics, Gollwitzer calls individual christian's to 'test the spirits' -- to examine how different people and groups relate to the command of God and see which confess or do not confess Christ. As the Christian synthesizes theological commandments with political praxis, the Church will be able to give direction for political life that moves forward, revitalizing forgotten values. Gollwitzer thus refines, rather than replaces, Barth's thought. For further discussion of Gollwitzer's position see Die Christliche Gemeinde in der politischen Welt (Tübingen, 1954).

of law upon particular cases."⁴¹ Norms, according to ethicist James Gustafson, are "a source of principles and axioms, a transcendent point of criticism in living out the actualities and ambiguities of life in history."⁴² In refuting casuistry⁴³ as an option within Christian ethics, Barth puts forth three principal arguments. Those who adopt casuistry, Barth argues, make the following errors: (1) the moralist sits himself/herself on God's throne, (2) the objectively untenable assumption is made that the command of God is a universal and (3) Christian freedom is destroyed.⁴⁴

For Barth, casuistic ethics completely destroys the base of his theology: God's revelation in Christ and sovereignty over humanity. Moreover, in Barth's view, to adopt casuistry within ethics is to stand against God's command, for moral generalities of any kind are not the command; in them, humanity seeks to be judge

⁴¹Henry Davis, S.J., Moral and Pastoral Theology, 4 vols. (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1938), Vi. 2-3. This definition is obviously not all inclusive. However, it provides a starting point for our discussion of casuistry. Overall, casuistry functions in such a way that moral principles are applied to particular cases in order to determine whether an action is morally correct.

⁴²James Gustafson, Christ and the Moral Life (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 234. Paul Lehmann defines the authentic norm of ethics as "one which validates behavior in terms of its transvaluative concreteness. The norm takes the form of validating judgment, the ethical force of which is not its logical generality but its acknowledgement of the transforming power of a concrete exception." Ethics in a Christian Context (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 242. Transvaluation means, for Lehmann, that the ethical inadequacy of accepted norm and values has been exposed by ethical insights and directives integrally related to the concrete situation of decision. (see 122, 243).

⁴³Barth stated that "the way of casuistry is basically unacceptable, however enticing it may seem and however convenient it would be both for spiritual advisors and above all for troubled souls if this way could be followed." CD III/4, 8. Barth gives an interesting summary of the history of casuistry in CD III/4, textual notes, page 7ff.

⁴⁴CD III/4, 10-13ff.

and master of their own lives and fate.⁴⁵

We believe that in his attempt to 'protect' the sovereignty of God and the 'freedom' of the Christian life, Barth fails to answer this question adequately: how does the command of God become concrete and specific in concrete and specific ethical issues? Barth attacks universal moral principles, primarily because they are too general. Yet in his own ethical position, Barth himself is general and vague. In his concern to uphold God's ultimate and eternal first word to humanity, Barth emphasizes that there is a divine power to which humanity must respond. But does this reality render any human attempt to discern what God is saying meaningless? We believe not, for norms of some kind are necessary not only to provide a helpful means for ethical reflection and action but also to combat relativistic tendencies.⁴⁶ Surely Barth is not lobbying for relativism! But Barth's

⁴⁵Ethics, 83. Barth continually discusses this point: the command of God is not a principle of action revealed to humanity and imposed upon it. Nor is the command a collection of principles that humanity must expound and apply to the best of its knowledge or according to the persuasion of others. (See Karl Barth, The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV/4, Lecture Fragments [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981], 33). Again Barth argues in the Church Dogmatics: "There is no such thing as casuistical ethics: no fixation of the divine command in a great or small text of ethical law; no method or technique of applying this text to the plentitude of conditions and possibilities of the activity of all men; no means of deducing good or evil in the particular instance of human conduct from the truth of this text presupposed as a universal rule and equated with the command of God." (CD III/4, 9-10).

⁴⁶A question arising from Barth's disallowance of norms is this: if we have no norms, are we indeed left with a form of relativism? Historically, ethical relativism emerged under the "aegis of the positivist, pragmatist and instrumentalist movements of the latter part of the 19th and first half of the 20th centuries.... The original version of ethical relativism is that of Protagoras, who taught in effect, according to Plato, that moral principles cannot be shown to be valid for everybody and that people ought to follow the customs of their own group" Lehmann, 191. For further discussion on ethical relativism, see the following: William James, The Meaning of Truth (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1914), 190ff; R.B. Perry, The Moral Economy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), 83ff; Paul Ramsey, Basic Christian Ethics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950).

dilemma arises over his strict adherence to an ethic of command that argues that there is only one good: God's grace and sovereignty as exhibited in Christ and communicated ethically in the command.⁴⁷ However, in an attempt to clarify this command, Barth develops what we believe to be his own type of casuistry: special ethics.

Barth believes that special ethics provides the answer to the problem of vagueness within his command ethic. Accordingly, special ethics

looks at man as this particular man at this particular time and place, who yesterday selected and decided and acted on the basis of the possibilities available, who does the same today in different circumstances, and who will do the same tomorrow in different circumstances again. It is concerned to see and show how far this specific, concrete, special and even very special action of man can or cannot be called a good action, that is, an action that corresponds to the divine claim, agrees with the divine decision, and conforms to the divine judgment.⁴⁸

Therefore, special ethics serves as a preparatory tool to the ethical event and functions to display the sovereignty of the divine command, the faithfulness of God to Himself and to humanity, and the uniqueness of each event as it takes place in relation to other events in time and history. As special ethics performs this task, argues Barth, the limits between God's sovereignty and human freedom will become clear.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Relativism would argue that there is no "good" only "goods." See Lehmann, 191.

⁴⁸The Christian Life, 4.

⁴⁹Barth believes that special ethics not only deals primarily with the vertical dimension of relationship with God but also examines the horizontal relationship, i.e., the human to human ethical contact and conduct. In this connection between the vertical and horizontal, humanity experiences the ethical event and the constancy and continuity between divine command and human action. See CD III/4, 17ff.

Thus, whereas the question of general ethics deals with the fact and content of human sanctification and action as affected by God's command, special ethics deals with the varying emphases and standpoints within this sanctification and action. Because for Barth the ethical event always takes place in varying spheres and relationships, the historical outline of particular event must be traced and the question, "what is the command of God and the corresponding right action" must be asked.⁵⁰ Where special ethics does its most illuminating work is as the pointer to this historical outline; in so doing, special ethics provides "a definite lead in the direction of the answer...not the answer itself; not a definition or determination of this event...but a reference to it...a directive, or rather a series of directives, which give guidance to the individual in the form of an approximation to the knowledge of the divine command and right human action."⁵¹

Barth's special ethics are, in reality, a form of casuistry.⁵² However, because Barth's aversion to casuistry was so strong, he disguised his casuistry in the form of special ethics. Perhaps his aversion was a part of his 'corrective' theology.⁵³ However, we believe a revised form of casuistry can operate within

⁵⁰Ibid., 30.

⁵¹Ibid., 30-31.

⁵²While we are not arguing that Barth's special ethics are casuistic in the sense of a system of 'reasoning,' we do believe they are casuistic in that they act as a means to interpret God's command in all cases and the specific conditions of these cases. For an interesting discussion on casuistry in Barth, see George Hunsiger, "Karl Barth and Radical Politics: Some Further Considerations," Studies in Religion July 2, 1978, 167-191.

⁵³We believe that one reason Barth was so unyielding in his thought was his self-adopted role as a 'corrector' of what he perceived to be a theology which had gone awry.

Barth's ethic. Dr. Nigel Biggar⁵⁴ posits that had Barth acknowledged a form of casuistry "properly engaged in the process of modifying old and generating new rules in order to find appropriate ways to express a given principle in the light of new, morally significant data"⁵⁵ in a fresh and vital way, Barth might have answered the charge of vagueness in his ethics.

This type of revised casuistry is what we believe Barth attempts to expound in his special ethics but refuses to admit. Had Barth acknowledged this form of casuistry, we believe he could have remained true to his theological position yet opened the door to an ethic with a praxis to which individual can adhere, rather than simply an etherial command that hovers in the tension between what is real and what is ideal. Biggar argues, and we concur, that had Barth "conceived of normative ethics as intrinsically open to revision and of the command of God as corrective in relation to it...[Barth] could have conceived of God's command as contradicting normative ethics, not in order to strike it dumb, but rather to teach it to speak differently."⁵⁶

Barth's acceptance and utilization of a kind of casuistry informed and refined by God's command would have made his ethics far less difficult to apply

⁵⁴Dr. Biggar of Oxford University provides a helpful insight on this concept of a revised casuistry. We are indebted to his article, "Hearing God's Command and Thinking About What's Right: With and Beyond Barth," in Reckoning With Barth, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: A.W. Mowbray and Co. Ltd., 1988), especially 116-117.

⁵⁵Ibid. Here Biggar cites Paul Ramsey's essay, "The Case of the Curious Exception," in Norm and Context in Christian Ethics, eds. Gene Outka and Paul Ramsey (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1968), 67-135. See also K.E. Kirk, Conscience and Its Problems: An Introduction to Casuistry (London: Longman, Green, and Co., 1927) 106-129.

⁵⁶Ibid.

and would not, in our opinion, compromise Barth's basic adherence to the sovereignty and freedom of God, for if God is truly sovereign over all, is not His sovereignty great enough to accommodate an ethic that includes norms, no matter how potentially human? Indeed, we believe that had Barth utilized a revised form of norms and emphasized more clearly the role of the Spirit within ethics, this question could be answered with a resounding yes.

IV. The Role of the Holy Spirit in Ethics

For Barth, the Holy Spirit functions primarily in the realm of revelation.⁵⁷ Within revelation, the nature and work of the Spirit is two-fold: first, the Holy Spirit is the Lord who sets humanity free; and second, the Spirit of God appropriates to humanity its adoption as God's children. As humanity receives the Spirit, humanity becomes children of God.⁵⁸ For Barth, the Biblical concept of revelation is "itself the root of the doctrine of the Trinity. The doctrine of the Trinity is simply a development of the knowledge that Jesus is the Christ, or Lord."⁵⁹ Therefore, the Spirit's significance must, for Barth, be rooted in the Word of God, in Christ. If the Holy Spirit does not have its grounding in the Word of God, the Spirit cannot, for Barth, have significance for revelation and consequentially for ethics.

In revelation, the work of the Holy Spirit is primarily to communicate the

⁵⁷For a more in depth discussion of the Holy Spirit and the Trinity, see the following in Barth's work: CD I/1: 350ff, 450-473; CD 1/2: 250 (especially relating to the filioque clause) 781ff; CD II/1: 48, 141, 250ff, 326ff, 528; CD II/2: 101, 227-250, 347f, 549; The Epistle to the Romans: 157ff, 315, 456ff; Ethics: 49-61; The Göttingen Dogmatics: 125ff, 165, 215ff; The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life: 89-94, 181, 291ff.

⁵⁸CD I/1, 456.

⁵⁹Ibid., 334.

message of God's grace: in the Holy Spirit humanity can grasp and comprehend God and thus enter into fellowship with Him.⁶⁰ The importance of the Holy Spirit lies in what Barth describes as the contrast between grace and sin. Barth places special emphasis on the reality of the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, of God's Son in the flesh, who was crucified for humanity -- the Spirit of the Word of the Father -- spoken to humanity.⁶¹ Herein lies the work of the Spirit: humanity's eyes are opened, and humanity is thus able to come before God in surrender and acknowledge Divine lordship and sovereignty. Therefore, in light of the Spirit's work, humanity is, according to Barth, (1) free to receive the work of God in its life,⁶² (2) provided with the evidence and guarantee that the Spirit is participating in God's revealing action,⁶³ (3) claimed by God.⁶⁴ The Holy Spirit's presence also acts within the Church as the Gospel is proclaimed. As a result, Christians are provided with an arena whereby, through the guidance of the Spirit, they are able to understand and appropriate God's command as they seek to act ethically.

Clearly, for Barth, the Holy Spirit has no specific task (outside of its revelatory role) within ethics because his doctrine of revelation forbids it. Thus, the Holy Spirit acts only as an arm of revelation, which in turn, acts as an ethical guide. In the lectures, "The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life,"⁶⁵ Barth

⁶⁰The Göttingen Dogmatics, 173.

⁶¹See The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, 39ff.

⁶²CD I/2, 198.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵These lectures were given by Barth in response to the critique that he had no theology of the Holy Spirit and that he had Roman Catholic leanings. They were delivered at Elberfield on October 9, 1929.

articulates the role of the Holy Spirit in this way: "the fundamental significance of the Holy Ghost for the Christian life is, that this, our participation in the occurrence of revelation, is just our being grasped in this occurrence which is the effect of the Divine action."⁶⁶

Despite the Spirit's sole connection to the Word of God, and thus to revelation, Barth does believe that the Holy Spirit (as an agent of revelation) acts in the ethical realm in several key ways. First, in order for humanity to hear the Word of God, the Holy Spirit must give humanity the gift of faith.⁶⁷ The Spirit, therefore, is the operation of God in faith, providing faith with context which is, for Barth, not a thing existing within the realm of time. The Spirit is the miraculous factor in faith, which places the love of God in the hearts of men and women and produces what Barth calls a 'human heart' that God is able to love.⁶⁸ Faith cannot, for Barth, be possible except through Christ and the Holy Spirit -- faith is awakened by God's Spirit and therefore becomes true faith.⁶⁹ Because the Spirit functions to ignite within humanity the flame of faith, the Spirit also opens humanity's ears to hear the Word of God.

For Barth, this action of the Spirit is highly significant for the ethical realm: as people through the Holy Spirit hear the Word of God, the ethical reflection of

⁶⁶The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, 19-20.

⁶⁷See The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, 24. Barth argues that humanity cannot embrace its life as a Christian life if the Holy Spirit is not at work: "In the Holy Ghost the man exercises faith: the Scriptural proclamation of the revelation of God meets him and points him his way as creature." Ibid, 27.

⁶⁸The Epistle to the Romans, 158.

⁶⁹Berkower, 148. Barth makes this clear when he says that "no one else but the Holy Ghost will make faith, in its hiddenness, into actual faith. Certainly our spirit will not." From The Holy Ghost and the Christian Life, 52.

these listeners is, in Barth's words, "not lost in the darkness of human ignorance."⁷⁰ The grasping of humanity by the Holy Spirit frees believers to hear God's command and act ethically: only as a recipient of the Holy Spirit is humanity able to come under the command and act accordingly.

Thus, Barth believes that as an arm of revelation, the Spirit grants to humanity the awakening of faith, which in turns leads to the hearing of God's Word, and thus His command, resulting in ethical reflection and action. In our opinion, this progression of thought does not go far enough, nor does it take seriously enough the role of the Spirit in the lives of individuals, particularly the inner testimony of the Spirit as a means by which humanity gains a framework of guidance in its ethical choices. We are not arguing that Barth ignored the inner testimony of the Spirit -- he did not. He explains the relationship between ethics and the inner testimony of the Spirit in the following manner:

Even in this last form, then, the question what shall we do, what is the good, leads back to the other question with which all ethics must begin, the question of who we are, whether we are those who have heard the Word, i.e., to whom it has been told and who have let it be told them. If we are, then how can we fail to tell ourselves and thus answer the problem of ethics by pointing to the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit?⁷¹

Barth's approach to the inner testimony of the Spirit relegates the Spirit to a means of underlining God's revelation that upholds the role of ethics. We believe this thought falls short. Barth does not tell us, for example, how the inner

⁷⁰Ibid., 27.

⁷¹Ethics, 516. Clearly, Barth acknowledges the inner testimony of the Spirit, but it seems to be superseded by his insistence upon over-emphasizing ethics as purely a reflection of God's grace. he states this later in CD II/2: "Do this -- not because...an inner voice now requires this of you....But because in so doing you may and will again live of and by my grace." CD II/2, 587.

testimony, the intercession of the Spirit, works for us in the practical day to day ethical dilemmas. Barth seems to use the Holy Spirit as yet another reminder that humanity is, through its own machinations, unable to discern ethical thought or move towards ethical action.

Could Barth, instead, emphasize the role of the Spirit as a 'guide' to humanity in its effort to make ethical choices? We believe that had Barth given more attention to the way in which the Spirit acts as an intercessor and guide to humanity, Barth's ethics could have functioned in both the eschatological realm and the present: as God's Spirit guides humanity, humanity is able to engage in the ethical decision making process -- perhaps through a system of revised norms -- still honoring God's sovereignty. Barth's thoroughgoing Christology seems to limit the role of the Spirit, a role that could be a significant link between Barth's sovereign God and human ethical problems.

In order to complete our critique of Barth, we believe that in addition to the four areas previously mentioned, one further area must be discussed: the Anglo-Saxon misunderstanding of Barth. In discussing this 'misunderstanding,' we believe it necessary to examine two major areas of thought: (1) the historical/cultural factors that made the appropriation of Barth's theology to the Anglo-Saxon world extremely difficult and (2) the seeming inability of Barth's dialectical theology to translate into the Anglo-Saxon world.

A. Historical/Cultural Differences between Europe and the Anglo-Saxon World.

When Barth emerged onto the theological scene in 1919, Europe was ripe to receive his message. The transcendence of God and the distinction between time

and eternity "shook the theological foundations of Europe. Emotional, energetic and explosive...[it] fell like a bomb on the playground of the theologians."⁷² A major factor that catapulted Barth into the center of the theological and intellectual arena in Europe was, as we have mentioned previously in this work, the devastation of the First World War. Post-war Europe, and particularly Germany, was left disillusioned with liberal Protestantism. Not only had optimism been shattered, but Europeans also began to question romanticism and ethical idealism;⁷³ ideas that had once been bastions of Europeans theology were now being abandoned. Barth's theology provided one alternative.⁷⁴

Despite its reception in Europe, Barth's theology did not take root in the Anglo-Saxon world until the late 1920s. This time lapse is best understood by a brief examination of the historical and cultural impact of World War One.

Naturally, the First World War left deep scars. The experience of the war left Germany and Great Britain in a political state of alienation: Germany underwent a social and cultural crisis;⁷⁵ Britain also experienced a state of trauma associated with the horror and loss involved in war. But most significant for Barth

⁷²Voskuil, 61.

⁷³For a very helpful discussion on post-war German attitudes, see Richard Lempp, "Church and Religion in Germany," Harvard Theological Review 14 (1921): 30-52.

⁷⁴Clearly, not all rationalist, idealist or other philosophical and theological movements embraced Barth. However, Barth's strong attack on nineteenth century liberalism did appeal to many.

⁷⁵Richard Lempp, in chronicling the social consequences of the World War One reparation for Germany, stated that many in the Anglo-Saxon world "have little idea of the terrible sufferings of my country, or of the hopelessness of the future which the peace of Versailles has set before us; nor can they easily imagine the mood of the nation which...has at last been broken in body and spirit." Lempp, 30-31.

was the impact of the war on religion. The consequences of defeat for German society and churches -- Protestant and Roman Catholic -- was devastating, primarily because the war uncovered both these groups "unashamed commitment...to the cause of German political and cultural imperialism."⁷⁶ In Britain, the war further contributed to the gradual marginalization of religious belief in society

At a mere general level, the established Church, concerned like all Christianity, with explaining the significance of death in this world and life in the next - seemed unable to cope when confronted with so much mortality and grief....But to neither the soldier at the front nor to the bereaved at home, baffled and numbed by the cataclysmic events in which they were caught up, could the Church offer plausible explanation or abiding comfort.⁷⁷

For Americans, the war, while painful and certainly difficult, had less of a sense of devastation -- for America, the war was, in many ways, 'over there,' and very few seemed to understand the tragic dimensions of the war. However, with the Great Depression, a wider "range of thinkers began to see that a bourgeois civilization was deep in crisis."⁷⁸

Thus, the historical impact of the war left German theology ready for a change: liberal theology had left theologians disenchanted and frustrated; the ground was fertile for new theological input. In Britain and America, the soil still

⁷⁶Roberts, 102. See also Klaus Scholder, The Churches and the Third Reich (London: SCM Press, 1987). Chapter one especially gives an excellent description of the disarray in the church that ensued after the loss of the war.

⁷⁷David Carradine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death, ed. Joachim Weley (London, 1981), 218-219.

⁷⁸S.E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 877.

needed to be tilled and prepared: limitations of the post-war peace, as well as cultural factors, delayed the transmission of Barth's work.⁷⁹

The cultural considerations that detained the acceptance of Barth's theology in the Anglo-Saxon world centered around differences in cultural and political convention: in a letter to Karl Barth, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, Barth's primary English advocate - adumbrates the possible barriers to Barth's theology:

We are separated by the very real barrier of a different language, a different political tradition, a different quality of piety and impiety, a different structure even of theological and untheological heritage. And you well know that there are still wider divergences lying behind all these things.... And yet...the problem of faith is the same problem.⁸⁰

In America, the cultural limitations were even greater than in Britain. Simply stated, the nature of the American spirit impeded the transmission of a tradition from Europe: America was far too interested in the practical and pragmatic; unprepared for ponderous, deep thinking, the young nation of America was hardly primed to receive or understand a distinct theological culture such as Germany or Great Britain. Far removed from Reformation soil, the American Christian sought a history that was unique and unrelated to European influences.⁸¹ The 'maverick' style and approach to life upon which America prided itself simply did not lend itself immediately to Barth's thought.

⁷⁹It should be noted that the reception of Barth's theology in Britain was primarily due to Scottish enthusiasm for Barth's work. J.H. Morrison, Norman Porteus, John McConnachie and others were key in promoting Barth's influence.

⁸⁰Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, "A Letter from England," in Theologische Aufsätze Karl Barths zum 50 Geburtstag, ed. E. Wolf. (München, 1936), 525-527.

⁸¹Homrighausen, 286-288.

Both Britain and America's reception and assimilation of Barth's theology occurred in its most mature form after Douglas Horton's translation of The Word of God and the Word of Man in 1928, Sir Edwyn Hoskyns translation of the second edition of Der Römerbrief in 1933, and the appearance of the Church Dogmatics on Anglo-Saxon soil. Previous to these events, historical and cultural differences between Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world impeded the acceptance and cultivated the misunderstanding of Barth's theology.

B. The Anglo-Saxon Struggle with Barth's dialectical theology.

Despite Barth's widespread reception in Europe, the response to his theology in the Anglo-Saxon world was slow in coming.⁸² One reason for this lag was Barth's dialectical method in his approach to theology: the paradoxical message, coupled with strange language made it exacting to spur interest and discussion of Barth's theology. The dialectical premise so central to Barth's theology -- his doctrine of revelation with its emphasis on the transcendent God -- was often interpreted as leading to skepticism and subjectivism, particularly within American evangelical circles.⁸³ Moreover, dialectical methodology proved to be

⁸²In discussing the Anglo-Saxon world, we are limiting our discussion to Great Britain and America. It should be noted that Barth's reception in Great Britain came long before that in America. British journals began to publish assessments of Barth's theology by the mid-twenties. See Adolf Keller, "A Theology of Crisis," The Expositor 3 (March 4, 1925): 164-175, 245-260; H.R. Macintosh, "Recent Foreign Theology," The Expository Times 36 (November, 1924): 73-75; John McConnachie, "The Teaching of Karl Barth: A New Positive Movement in German Theology," The Hibbert Journal 25 (April, 1927): 385-400. One of the first theologians to initiate America to Barth was Gustav Krüger, who delivered a series of lectures on Barth at Union Seminary in New York in March, 1926. See his lecture, "The 'Theology of Crisis': Remarks on a Recent Movement in German Theology," The Harvard Theological Review 19 (July, 1926): 227-258.

⁸³Howard John Loewen argues that evangelicals in America were particularly suspicious of Barth's dialectical method because they believed it promoted skepticism and subjectivism. Evangelicals believed that Barth's emphasis on the

a stumbling block and source of misinterpretation: the paradox of "the 'Word of God' as, at once, the necessary and impossible task of theology could not remain a stark methodological proposal within the given structures and context of assimilation."⁸⁴

Not only was the dialectical method difficult to incorporate, but the language of Barth's theology was also strange for Anglo-Saxon readers. Described by Elmer Homrighausen, an American pastor who had cultivated an interest in Barth, Barth's language was "like thunderclaps and lightening flashes;" Barth "dazed his readers more than enlightened them."⁸⁵ With language that was philosophical and explosive, many in the Anglo-Saxon world (particularly in

primary transcendence of revelation resulted in an extreme disjunction between eternity and time. Furthermore, this dialectical method rang of subjectivism: Barth's view of revelation seemed to make the knowledge of God dependent primarily on repeated personal decision.

We would argue that this evangelical constituency, represented by theologians such as Carl Henry, Cornelius Van Til and Gordon Clark, misunderstand Barth's dialectic -- certainly in their suggestion that the dialectic leads to a disjunction between eternity and time. Indeed, Barth's dialectic sought to bridge the gap between eternity and time! For further discussion see Howard John Loewen, "The Anatomy of an Evangelical Type: An American Evangelical Response to Karl Barth's Theology," in Church, Word and Spirit, eds. James E. Bradley and Richard A. Muller (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 243-246.

⁸⁴Richard H. Roberts, A Theology on its Way? (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 129. The philosophical constructs of paradox and dialectic convinced many theologians that Barth's thought was "opaque, convoluted and irrational." [Dennis N. Voskuil, "America Encounters Karl Barth: 1919-1939," Fides et Historia 12,2 (1980): 68. Most concerned in America about Barth's method were liberal theologians who feared Barthianism was an uncritical return to traditionalism. See Voskuil, 67ff. As early as 1929, American theologian H. Offerman suggested that Barth's dialectical method was the greatest obstacle in understanding his theology. With its contradictions, and antitheses, Offerman argued that Barth's theology was simply untranslatable. See H. Offerman, "The Theology of Karl Barth: an orientation," Lutheran Church Quarterly 2 (1929): 271-288.

⁸⁵Elmer Homrighausen, "Barth and the American Theological Scene," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 46 (August, 1936): 290.

America) shut their theological doors to Barth.⁸⁶

Therefore, not only historical/cultural barriers but also theological conceptual barriers, such as the dialectic, made the transmission and acceptance of Barth's theology arduous in the Anglo-Saxon world. However, while Barth may have been misunderstood at some level by the Anglo-Saxon world, clearly his theology gained a firm foothold, at the latest, by the late 1930s. Nevertheless, this acceptance does not excuse what we believe to be shortcomings within his approach to ethics. We do believe that Barth's ethic is helpful in reminding humanity that in approaching the difficulties of ethical questions, there is a divine, eternal being greater than ourselves who is for humanity and who possesses a greater plan for its destiny than humankind might imagine or attempt to build. However, we propose that Barth's doctrine of church and state, his view of history and his unwillingness to work with a revised form of norms and accentuate the role of the Holy Spirit within ethics seriously limits his ethical praxis. Barth's ethic calls for a revision that incorporates some level of active human participation (other than simply responding to the command of God) within ethics. We believe that in spite of Barth's insistence on God's sovereignty (and thus, no human ethic), a 'human' ethic guided and directed by a belief in God's sovereignty would not displace a sovereign God. If Barth's commitment to God's absolute sovereignty and freedom is as strong as he espouses it to be, then should not Barth accept God's ability to work within humanity -- and its attempt at solving ethical dilemmas -- despite human limitations? Or is Barth's sovereign God, not sovereign enough?

⁸⁶In America, Barth's language was particularly strange. Americans, with their emphasis on practicality, often viewed Barth's language as too complex and strange, fraught with concepts untranslatable to the American mind. For further discussion see Homrighausen, 290ff.

Conclusion

In June of 1965, Karl Barth made the following remark regarding the uncompleted Church Dogmatics: "There is a certain merit to an unfinished dogmatics -- it points to the eschatological character of theology!"¹ Truly, the content of Barth's theology can be described as an eschatological event whereby God radically breaks into the world and makes his presence known in a saving way. As such, Barth's theology points to God's sovereignty and authority, as well as God's remarkable relationship with humanity, a relationship characterized by God's grace.

Because Barth's theology revolves in such a significant way around his eschatology, so too, do his ethics; in fact, ethics is dogmatics. Throughout his writings on ethics one theme resounds: ethics as dogmatics is a working out of the sovereignty, grace and command of God in our lives. No other discipline -- not philosophy, science, psychology or even ethics in and of itself -- is able to make accurate statements about God. Speaking about God's relationship to humanity and humanity's response, this dogmatics is not based on human design or machination, but is centered on God's initiation and cultivation of relationship with humanity. Humanity's role is to respond and live according to the act of God. For Barth, God's action is primary and humanity's reaction, while significant, is secondary in approaching all of theology.

We would be incorrect to say that Barth arrived at this position quickly. He did not. Barth's process of rejecting liberalism and religious socialism and finding a new theology that adequately expressed his views required years of

¹Karl Barth, How I Changed My Mind (Edinburgh: The St. Andrew Press, 1969), 86.

painstaking study, discussion and deliberation. However, we have argued that by 1924, Barth had framed within his work the structure of his theology that would not, in its basic form, changed for his entire career. There have, however, been modifications to Barth's theology. Two such examples are Barth's dropping of the use of the concept of orders of creation as a result of the German Christian use of the idea to promote National Socialism, and his attention on the human characteristics of God, found in the book, The Humanity of God.

Based on a lecture given to an audience of Swiss pastors in Aarau in 1956, The Humanity of God, did not say anything radically different than what had been said in the Church Dogmatics but the piece of work did elucidate more clearly the place of the characteristics of the 'human' God than what had been said in the dogmatic lectures. The Humanity of God focused on one primary issue: "There must be positive acceptance and not unconsidered rejection of the elements of truth, which one cannot possibly deny to it, even if one sees all the weaknesses. It is precisely God's deity which, rightly understood, includes his humanity."² Barth's discussion of God's humanity was a revision, but not a major change in thought. Barth himself commented that "A genuine revision does not amount to a retreat after second thoughts; it is a new advance and attack in which what was said before has to be said again, but in a better way."³ In no way was Barth negating the polemic -- God is God -- that he guarded since its inception in the late teens and early twenties of the Twentieth Century. Rather, Barth modified and developed a theology and ethic we believe to have been established by 1924.

²Karl Barth, The Humanity of God The Fontana Library, 1967, 42.

³Ibid., 38.

We have argued that the key to understanding the unique relationship between Barth's theology and ethics lay in his doctrine of revelation and his theological ordering of gospel and law. The development of Barth's doctrine of revelation culminated in his adoption of the anhypostasis-enhypostasis Christological formula, in which Jesus was able to be fully human, and yet divine. For Barth, this Christological formula allowed for God to enter into history fully, yet still maintain the divine incognito so crucial for Barth's understanding of God's sovereignty. With the newly found approach to Christology, espoused in the Göttingen Dogmatics of 1924, Barth created the base for all of his theology, and therefore, his ethics.

Barth's doctrine of revelation not only provides the key to unlock his theology and ethics, but his ordering of gospel and law also establishes a means to understand his thought.

Barth's inversion of gospel and law parallels the development of his doctrine of revelation, providing a means to understand his theological ethics. In approaching the question of law-gospel, gospel-law, Barth adopted the form of an inversion: rather than espousing that the law brings humanity to a knowledge of God, Barth argued that God's grace is what brings humanity to a place where it can begin to know God through the pre-existent, eternal Son, Jesus. Barth had to invert the classical Lutheran position, primarily because of his insistence upon revelation as a purely God-initiated event: even the law, argues Barth, could be manipulated by humanity to become a means to reach God on its own merits.⁴ Thus, the first word God must speak to humanity is one of gospel, of grace. This

⁴"Gospel and Law," 18-20.

order maintains and protects God's sovereignty for Barth, and refuses to allow for any human 'interference' in the revelatory event.

Because ethics is dogmatics, it must find its roots and meaning in theology, and therefore for Barth, in God's revelation in Christ. Since God reveals Himself to humanity through the pre-existent logos -- the person of Christ -- Barth argues that God's first word to humanity is a word of grace -- God speaks a Yes to humankind long before a No is ever heard.

Barth's doctrine of revelation and ordering of gospel before law has two major implications for his ethics. First, Barth must adopt a command form of ethics. Because Barth is so vehement about God's sovereignty, he must espouse an ethics that places God in a 'power position.' This position is best found for Barth in the ethic of command: God commands humanity to act in such a way that is reflective of the grace humankind has experienced in God's initiation and cultivation of relationship. Because God is sovereign, states Barth, the command is always fresh and specific for each situation, heard within the context of the community of faith and the Creeds and Confessions of the Church.

Second, Barth's ethic implies that the word spoken to humanity is a gracious one. Here Barth finds himself in the quandary of how to reconcile a commanding God with an ethic of goodness. How can an ethic that seemingly deprives humanity of choice, responsibility and freedom be a good ethic? For Barth, the choice responsibility and freedom that God gives to humanity is found in embracing the election -- internalizing the covenant relationship that God has initiated -- and living life in such a way that human actions are a reflection of the reality of grace. This concept works in the short run but in the long run leaves humanity lacking when it is faced with difficult and complex decisions within the

ethical realm. Barth's ardent adherence to defending the sovereignty of God limits humanity's ability to make critical decisions rooted in the practical. Where Barth fails us ethically is not so much in the command ethic, but in his unwillingness to place beside it some kind of norms -- norms that, we might add, could be accountable to and refined by the sovereign command of God.

Barth seems to have taken us ethically to the edge of a cliff, without instructions on how to cross the gorge in order to get to the other side. We are left short of a solution, except that we know that there is a God who, according to Barth, is involved in our daily affairs and is sovereign over them. While this may be a suitable answer for Barth, not all of humanity are content to live in the tension of knowing that God is interested and involved, but confused as to appropriate that truth to their lives.

Reinhold Niebuhr elucidated this oversight of Barth's admirably. Insistent that Barth's ethics were too eschatologically based and absolutist, Niebuhr argued, primarily with reference to Barth's position towards communism in Hungary, that Barth's ethics were olympian. Clearly Niebuhr's sensitivity to questions of injustice drove his polemic against Barth. But Niebuhr raises the question of Barth's inability or omission of application within the ethical realm. We have argued that Barth's ethic fails us because it is based in a theology of revelation that disallows for human participation in history (i.e. his doctrine of church and state). Had Barth's doctrine of revelation, in its relation to ethics, allowed for a reformed type of norms held under the scrutiny and sovereignty of God, we believe the Barthian ethic might have completed the movement from *explicatio* to *meditatio* to *applicatio*.

Could we have misunderstood the Barthian ethic? Are we incorrect in our

interpretation that without a type of norms which stand in tandem with the command of God, Barth's ethics work only on a very general level? We believe not. While Barth is certainly a polemical theologian whose theology must, at one level be seen as a corrective to the theology of the nineteenth century,⁵ he was not simply a reactionary theologian -- to call him such would be a misnomer. Barth was a theologian of action, in the sense that he responded to what he perceived to be askew in nineteenth century theology and attempted to improve upon it. But in his attempt to improve upon what he deemed to be missing, Barth closed himself off to any possibility that had even the slightest tone of human involvement in revelation and thus in the ethical question.

The irony of Barth's position is found in his strict adherence to the sovereignty of God. Barth continually argued that for theology to remain untainted (although Barth would admit that human attempts to speak of God, even his own, fall short of doing God justice),⁶ God's sovereignty must be protected. Therefore, Barth cannot in good conscience, accept any form of ethical norms, even if they act in correlation with God's command. But isn't God's sovereignty great enough to handle norms created by humanity? Cannot God's sovereignty work with or in some cases, despite the work of human minds and hearts?

We believe that in defending the sovereignty of God with such enthusiasm, Barth in fact lessens God's sovereignty. God must be fully sovereign. But if, as Barth argues, God is, how can any human machinations foil God's ultimate design and plan for humanity? Would it not be better if humanity could, with a full

⁵We believe this corrective element accounts for the heavy tone of Barth's work.

⁶See "The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry," 186.

knowledge of its limitations and God's ultimate control, attempt to understand and live ethically through means that might give more definition? Or is humanity destined to waffle in the unknown and undefined? Assuredly, Barth's aversion to norms and casuistry revolves around his concern that humanity not attempt to define, box and limit God, but perhaps the use of the former does not always result in the latter. Perhaps Barth ought to have had a bit more confidence in God's sovereignty and ability to right what is wrong or work in any situation, for if God is as sovereign as Barth defends him to be, then God ought to be able to inspire and work within a humanity -- even an imperfect one -- that is seeking to live as God intended to the best of its abilities. God must be able to work within this context, or God is not the sovereign God that Barth upholds, for a truly sovereign God is able to work in all situations, no matter how tainted or marred by human failings. This is, we believe, the God in whom Barth believes, but in his attempt to 'protect' this God, Barth, ironically, commits the very 'sin' he fought throughout his entire career: human attempts to define, and at some level, control God.

We would hope that God is bigger than Barth's defense seems to allow and would uphold the truth spoken by Barth himself, that "the main thing is the knowledge that God makes no mistakes and the proteus mirabilis has no chance against him."⁷

⁷Karl Barth to John Godsey, January 25, 1966.

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