‘Thy Word is All’:
Karl Barth’s University Exegetical Lectures, 1921-1928

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Abstract

This thesis argues that Karl Barth's exegetical lectures of the 1920s were guided by the need to reckon with the Bible's claim to authority and to understand how this authority was derivative of the sovereign authority of God made known in revelation. The authority of the Bible communicates God's claim on creatures and so obligates those who read it to recognise and respond to the moral and spiritual reality that is disclosed in its pages. Initially, these themes are located in Barth's first two exegetical lectures in Göttingen. It is argued that in these lectures Barth shows a tension between God's transcendence in revelation and the personal relationship of faith. This claim is substantiated by a historical excursus on Barth's use of the distinction between the 'two principles' of Protestantism, which is how he orders the priority of Scripture throughout his career. It is argued that there is a persistence of 19th-century anxieties about scriptural authority within the church in Barth's thought, which are traced through his teacher Wilhelm Herrmann's understanding of revelation. These issues are carried over into his exegesis in the first half of the 1920s, yet a growing awareness of the meaning of Christ's history as the object of faith mitigates earlier tensions. This line of thought culminates in Barth's lectures on John, where he works through the implications in his exegesis of Jesus Christ revealing the electing God. This allows for a more positive account of the relationship of witness and revelation than had previously been possible. This position is contrasted with Barth's colleague Erik Peterson. Finally, the significance of this account of revelation for Barth's understanding of the authority of Scripture as the authority of the neighbour is shown in relation to Barth's exegetical lectures from the late 1920s.

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We say amisse,
This or that is:
Thy word is all, if we could spell.

–George Herbert, 'The Flower'

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Lastly, I hope this work will be to the glory of God and the service of the church.

Abbreviations

ADT	*Die Auferstehung der Toten*
BP	'Erklärung der Bergpredigt'
B-Th	*Karl Barth-Eduard Thurneysen Briefwechsel*
CD	*Church Dogmatics*
ChrD	*Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*
EkEJ	*Erklärungen des Epheser- und des Jakobusbriefes*
JE	*Erklarung des Johannes-Evangeliums*
PB	*Erklärung des Philipperbriefs*
TrB	*Die Theologie der reformierten Bekenntnisschriften*
UCR	*Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*
VA	*Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten*

Introduction

This thesis argues that Karl Barth's exegetical lectures of the 1920s were guided by the need to reckon with the Bible's claim to authority and to understand how this authority was derivative of the sovereign authority of God made known in revelation. The authority of the Bible is part of its service in the work of salvation, by which it communicates God's claim on creatures and so obligates those who read it to recognise and respond to the moral and spiritual reality that is disclosed in its pages. In the period under review, this is complicated by Barth's understanding of the eschatological character of divine presence and, as I will argue, his changing view of how the Bible is best understood as communicating the divine claim. By his published lectures on Philippians, however, I will show that Barth has moved to a materially consistent account of the Bible's authority, making Scripture's claim on the reader morally and spiritually compelling.

1. The Place of the Bible in Barth's Theology

Barth's exegetical lectures of the 1920s remain some of the least known of his work, an obscurity compounded by coming under a domain that remains of secondary interest to Barth studies, the Bible. Despite Barth's repeated insistence that the Bible and its exegesis was primary in his thought, Barth scholarship has as a rule not made it central when seeking to characterise his theology as a whole. The two developmental accounts of Barth's theology that have dominated Anglo-American Barth studies for the nearly 50 years since Barth's death are a case in point. The work of Thomas F. Torrance, which did much to bring Barth's thought into English-speaking scholarship during the middle part of the 20th-century, is impressed by the high place of the Bible in Barth's thought. Torrance draws attention to the 'careful, laborious exegesis'[1] that was pivotal in shaping Barth's theological convictions after the first World War, and argued that the Bible was the 'primary datum' in Barth's theology.[2] Yet Torrance's main claim about Barth's significance as a theologian was that he moved successfully from a 'dialectical' phase dominated by an idealist framework of thought to a 'realist' phase. The latter is characterised by a commitment to the thorough rationality of God's self-revelation in Christ, enabling theology to go about its business with a methodological rigour akin to the hard sciences.[3] The Bible, for all its primacy, becomes an

[1] Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: SCM Press, 1982).
[2] Torrance, *Early Theology*, p. 119.
[3] Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990).

intermediary to a set of methodological commitments that turn on the analogy of faith and God's Trinitarian being as wholly rational.

Torrance charted the shift in Barth's thinking along the coordinates set out by Hans Urs von Balthasar, whose influential account of Barth's development holds that he moves from a dialectical to analogical form of thinking by the end of 1920s.[4] A serious challenge was posed to this narrative made in English-speaking scholarship by Bruce McCormack in the mid-1990s, whose work marked a turn in Barth studies.[5] Drawing on the scholarship of Michael Beintkner and Ingrid Spieckmann, McCormack offered a thoroughly researched genetic account of Barth's intellectual development that showed the persistence of dialectics in Barth's thought, even as the highly contrastive, critical rhetoric associated with the second edition of the Romans commentary faded from view. Barth, on McCormack's reading, holds to a 'critical realism' in which God's veiling and unveiling in revelation means that knowledge of God is always indirect and qualified. Barth is thus, for all his commitments to dogmatics, a modern theologian.

Whether or not this narrative is wholly convincing, and whether or not the conflict between dialectic and analogy is a genuine one, competing genetic accounts of Barth's development have determined how much of the subsequent debate about Barth's legacy, and particularly how his early academic writings have been framed. In McCormack's account, the exegetical lectures delivered by Barth throughout the 1920s play a vanishingly small role in tracing his development, and the two editions of *Romans* are 'the writing of a new theology in the form of biblical commentary'.[6] McCormack has redressed this imbalance somewhat in later essays,[7] but it remains the case that when the terms are set by developmental questions and shifting thought forms, Barth's iterative attention to biblical texts will remain at best of secondary interest.

The exception to this rule in Anglo-Saxon Barth studies is the work of Hans Frei and the 'post-liberal' school whose genesis is in part due to Frei's reading of Barth. Frei's influential, though unpublished, Yale PhD thesis on Barth's break with liberalism traced a

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[4] Han Urs von Balthasar, *Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. Edward T. Oakes, SJ (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992).
[5] Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realist Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Developoment 1909-1936* (Oxford: OUP, 1997).
[6] McCormack, *Critical Realist*, p. 138.
[7] See, e.g. Bruce McCormack, 'The Being of Holy Scripture is in Becoming', in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Vincente Bacote, et al. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 55-75, and 'The Significance of Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis of Philippians', in Karl Barth *The Epistle to the Philippians: 40th Anniversary Edition*, trans. James W. Leitch (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), pp. v-xxv.

development that in its broadest terms parallels von Balthasar's.[8] However, Frei's work was particularly sensitive to the way in which Barth's own manner of argument developed in response to talk around what Frei would later call the 'unsubstitutable individuality' of Jesus Christ.[9] Doing so, Frei argued, meant that Barth did not simply return the Bible to its pride of place as the source of theological knowledge, but required that the exegetical task be determinate for theological method. This must be so, because theological knowledge is responsive to, but can never reproduce, the active self-revelation of Jesus Christ. This is the substance of the biblical witness, that the narrated history of Jesus Christ is not one among many, but the history that encloses and determines all others. Doctrine is a necessary but temporary step back from this narrative in order to summarise and clarify the commitments entailed by it, but it must always be drawn back to tracing Christ's narrative in its inscripturated form.[10] On this reading, Frei could see Barth as part of a move against a broad trend in theological hermeneutics since the Enlightenment that sought to make the biblical narrative explicable within a broader picture of the world set by philosophy and the natural sciences.[11] Frei argued that this was a decisive reversal of what had been the Christian way of reading the Bible, which was to see one's own world and narrative within the biblical one.

On my own reading of Barth, I find there is something not quite right about Frei's portrait of him. Where Frei errs is not in his presentation of Barth as committed exegete, but in the consequences he draws for the rest of the theological task. Peter Ochs has spoken of the 'intrinsic vagueness'[12] of Scripture that post-liberal theologians have maintained in the wake of Barth for the salutary recovery of 'the voice of Scripture within the church'.[13] It is not clear that intrinsic vagueness would be an encomium for Barth, or that it was inherent to his understanding of the interpretation of Scripture. More proximately to Frei's work, David Demson has argued cogently that Frei misses a key feature of Barth's mature account of Christ's presence, which is that it is always accompanied by a particular set of human

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[8] Hans Wilhelm Frei, 'The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909-1922: The Nature of Barth's Break with Liberalism', unpublished PhD Thesis (Yale University, 1956).
[9] Hans W. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Basis of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 1997), p. 186.
[10] See Hans W. Frei, 'Karl Barth, Theologian', in *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. by George Hunsinger and William C. Placher (New York: OUP, 1993) pp. 167-176.
[11] Frei develops this argument at length in The *Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1974).
[12] Peter Ochs, *Another Reformation: Post-Liberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2011), p. 60. 'Vagueness' is a term of art drawn from Ochs reading of Charles Pierce, see Ochs, *Pierce, Pragmatism and the Logic of Scripture* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), esp. pp. 160-245.
[13] Ochs, *Another Reformation*, pp. 17-18.

witnesses, the apostles.[14] Barth is more conscious than Frei is that Jesus Christ's presence is 'definite', and so is his reshaping of the world. The latter chapters of this study trace how Barth works his way toward an understanding of this 'definite presence'.

Given Frei's reading of Barth, and his own commitments, it is not surprising that some of the early work on Barth's reading and use of Scripture came out of the 'Yale school' and largely affirmed the basic sense that Barth's exegesis was unsystematic by design, and could at best be evaluated on a case by case basis.[15] Studies that took a broader view of Barth's work, especially of the *Romans* commentaries and academic texts from the 1920s, have both widened the frame of reference of Barth's exegesis and been less satisfied with 'post-liberal' accounts of it. Richard Burnett has argued through a close reading of Barth's drafts for the preface of *Romans I* that, despite what the laconic preface that Barth actually used would suggest, he did have in mind some definite hermeneutical principles at the time of writing *Romans*, whose basic character would persist in his later work.[16] While Burnett is on good ground to push back against some of the characterisations of Barth's hermeneutics as 'ad hoc',[17] his own presentation is perhaps too dependent on the preface drafts, and makes relatively little of Barth's actual reading of Paul. As a result, his claims about the relative importance to Barth of the hermeneutical principles he uncovers are less convincing than they might have been. More successful on this front are the works by Helmut Kirschstein and Donald Wood. Kirschstein offers a capacious view of Barth's engagement with the Bible, from his early 'break' with liberalism in 1914 through to the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. He is aided by making use of a range of academic writings from the 1920s as well as, unusually, discussing some of Barth's exegetical lectures from that time. If the details of his argument do not always convince, his approach to the material moved in the right direction by recognising the constant inner-penetration between Barth's exegetical, historical, and dogmatic work.[18] Similarly, Donald Wood's monograph on Barth's theology of interpretation is nimble enough to follow Barth's thought through the variety of domains

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[14] David E. Demson, *Hans Frei and Karl Barth: Different Ways of Reading the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), pp. ix-xi; pp. 97-110.
[15] See, David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (London, United Kingdom: SCM Press Ltd, 1975), Mary Kathleen Cunningham, *What is Theological Exegesis?: Interpretation and Use of Scripture in Barth's Doctrine of Election* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press, 1989), and Paul McGlasson *Jesus and Judas*: *Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991).
[16] Richard E. Burnett, *Karl Barth's Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principals of the* Römerbrief *Period* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999).
[17] Burnett, *Theological Exegesis,* p. 5, citing Cunningham, *Theological Exegesis,* p. 14.
[18] Helmut Kirschstein, *Der souveräne Gott und die heilige Schrift. Einführung in die Biblische Hermeneutik Karl Barths* (Achen: Shaker Verlag, 1998).

in which Barth developed it, though except for *Romans* he largely sticks with dogmatic and historical texts. Wood makes clear how Barth's reading of the Bible is both set within the broader field of God's saving activity, yet equally his exegesis is not a deduction from a pre-determined set of theological commitments. It is an active part of God's work, and the Christian response to it must reckon with both the authority and freedom that this implies.[19]

As sympathetic as I am with Wood's overall reading of Barth, as he notes, the textual basis of this field in Barth studies continues to grow, and much remains to be said about Barth's exegesis.[20] The studies mentioned above, when they do take a detailed look at his exegetical work, tend to focus either on *Romans* or on the *Church Dogmatics*.[21] There are two factors contributing to this situation. On the one hand, new texts, often from the first decade of Barth's academic career in Germany, continue to be published as part of Barth's *Gesamtausgabe*. There is simply more available now to scholarship than there was even a decade ago, so it would be somewhat churlish to fault past scholars for failing to give attention to texts they could not have read but for a trip to Switzerland and a taste for puzzling through Barth's tortuous handwriting. However, the relative neglect of Barth's exegetical lectures cannot be due their recent appearance *en masse* in published form, since no such thing has occurred. Indeed, the lectures on the Gospel of John have been available since 1976, and Barth published two of his lecture texts from the 1920s during his lifetime.[22] Rather, in English-speaking Barth studies at any rate, the source of the neglect can be found in the aforementioned dominance of developmental questions. By allowing one's research agenda to be framed in this way, as John Webster notes, one tends to be less attentive to the texts themselves, but filter them through whatever broader developmental line is being pursued. Webster goes on to argue that, ironically, where those developmental accounts search for the sources of Barth's thought, they tend to miss Barth's reading of those sources. For insights into his character as a thinker, then, 'much is to be gained from observing Barth about the business of *commentary*'.[23]

This study takes its cue from this research agenda proposed by Webster. It focuses on close readings of exegetical texts from the 1920s without an overt concern for one or another

[19] Donald Wood, *Barth's Theology of Interpretation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 176-178.
[20] Wood, *Interpretation*, p. 174.
[21] Besides those mentioned above, see Benoît Bourgine *L'herméneutique théologique de Karl Barth: exégèse et dogmatique dans le quatrième volume de la Kirchliche Dogmatik*, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003) and Gerhard Bergner, *Um der Sache Willen. Karl Barths Schriftauslegung in der Kirchlichen Dogmatik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).
[22] On 1 Corinthians and Philippians, as *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (1924) and *Erklärungen des Philipperbriefes* (1928). These appeared in serviceable English translation in 1933 and 1961, respectively.
[23] John Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology* (London: T&T Clark International, 2005), p. 7.

developmental schema, all the while sensitive to cross-currents from Barth's other writings. Two recent studies that broadly follow Webster's direction have shown the fruit of this kind of project. Martin Westerholm, as part of a larger argument about Barth's understanding of theological rationality, has shown persuasively that Barth's reading of 1 Corinthians 15, as set out in his lectures in 1923, was primary in shaping his theology of the resurrection.[24] Christopher Asprey's study of Barth's Göttingen period makes judicious use of the whole range of disciplines in which Barth wrote, including his exegesis, to argue that, far from the dualist that some accuse him of being, Barth was concerned from the beginning with the way God's eschatological presence establishes the human creature.[25]

Asprey's study is important for my own because it opens up a broad line of inquiry into Barth that I pursue more narrowly here. Barth's earliest critics often focused on what they saw as the moral and cultural dangers of Barth's claim that God was 'wholly other' and only eschatologically related to human history. Whether it was Adolf von Harnack 'shuddering' at the divide between his own academic and cultural theology and what he heard in Barth's lecture 'Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas' (1920),[26] or Paul Althaus's more sustained critique of Barth as a dualist,[27] there was a sense that Barth's theology was morally and spiritually destructive to the human person. Webster's work on Barth has done much to solidify Barth's reputation as a moral theologian and argued that this was an important part of Barth's thought even in his earlier theology.[28] Asprey gives credence to this judgment by carefully analysing Barth's texts from 1921-1925 to show that rather than seeking God in absolute separation from the world, Barth was most concerned to show how creatures could be morally and spiritual regenerated by God's activity, with the crucial requirement that such a conception of divine presence not be allowed to fall into idolatry.

This is the salient issue for Barth's reading of the Bible, because, on his account, the Bible claims to have the authority to speak of God, and so obligates its readers to a certain moral and spiritual existence, while at once resisting any suggestion that it speaks *as* God.

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[24] Martin Westerholm, *The Ordering of the Christian Mind: Karl Barth and Theological Rationality* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), esp. pp. 90-136. I will address aspects of Westerholm's reading of the 1 Corinthians lectures in chapter 3.
[25] Christopher Asprey, *Eschatological Presence in Barth's Göttingen Theology* (Oxford: OUP, 2010).
[26] Agnes von Zahn-Harnack, *Adolf von Harnack* (Berlin-Templehof: H. Bott, 1936), p. 532, cited by George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Mich./Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), p. 320.
[27] Paul Althaus, 'Theologie und Geschichte. zur Auseinandersetzung mit der dialektischen Theologie', *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 1/4 (1923), pp. 741-786.
[28] See especially the first two chapters of Webster's *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

The challenge of scriptural authority for Barth is how to think about Scripture's claim on the reader as genuine and directed by God, without thereby taking the text to be oracular. Yet because the claim of God that is disclosed by the Bible is peremptory on the human will and reason, sorting out the terms of Scripture's mediation of God's authority cannot be done in advance of responding to it. A burden of this study is therefore to show how Barth wrestles with precisely this question exegetically, as it is only in the attention to the scriptural text that the claim of God can be heard, and it is also only through this attention that the authors of the text can be seen to differentiate themselves from God.

This was not an unproblematic enterprise for Barth in the early 1920s, and not only because the task itself was beset with moral and spiritual dangers. George Pfleiderer draws attention to how Barth's move from the Safenweil pulpit and the *Romans* commentaries to Göttingen required thinking about how to give instruction in theology. *Romans* was more disposed to making 'disciples' rather than 'students'.[29] Though Pfleiderer's overall reading of Barth's trajectory towards a theology for the 'church elite' is questionable, I do think he is right to say that *Romans* sought to remove any theoretical standpoint from which the reader might stand as a 'spectator', which means that Barth tends to elide the difference between the agent behind the text and the reader of it. The '*tertium non datur*' between God, the sender of revelation, and the reader, its receiver, is the biblical text itself.[30] Barth's persistent attention to exegesis should qualify this judgment, but nonetheless, the aporetic structure of his theology in the early 1920s means that the new moral-spiritual reality that God's presence brings often cannot be articulated beyond the terms of an existential encounter. In some of the earlier exegetical lectures in his time in Göttingen, Barth exhibits this line of thought by describing the communicative act of Scripture as sustained by the correspondence between the movement of faith in the reader and the form of the biblical witness. On the one hand, this reflects Barth's concern to maintain the genuine human character of the Scriptures and its writers by recognising that their own movement of faith is not fundamentally distinct from that of their audience. On the other hand, this way of thinking about Scripture's communicative act is inclined to bypass the textual and canonical character of Scripture. As a result, Barth tends to assert scriptural authority, rather than demonstrating it as an element in God's saving mission. As Barth immerses himself in the Reformed tradition, but more proximally in the continued reading of a variety of New Testament texts, the problematic

[29] Georg Pfleiderer, *Karl Barths praktische Theologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 2000), p. 377.
[30] Pfleiderer, *praktische Theologie,* p. 377.

nature of the gap between Scripture's role in God's reconciling activity and the foundation of its authority becomes apparent. What I will argue is that Barth undergoes a definite, if non-linear, shift during the mid-1920s from an account of the scriptural witness as one which is communicative in its transparency to divine revelation as an eschatological event, to one who is communicative by their indication of the history of Jesus Christ. Correspondingly, this allows Barth to ground the authority of Scripture in obedience owed to the neighbour, as one who represents Christ in his incarnation. This, in highly compressed form, is the argument I will pursue in the following pages.

2. Methodological Considerations

Because of the uneven availability and relative obscurity of Barth's university exegetical lectures, before beginning there are some methodological considerations that should be addressed. The first is the relationship of these lectures to the *Romans* commentaries. As this is a study of Barth's exegesis, the *Romans* commentaries will be conspicuous here by their relative absence. There are several reasons why this is the case. One is formal. Barth published the first edition of *Romans* in 1919 and was soon at work drafting a wholly revised second edition. It was on the strength of this first commentary, as well as the reputation he was gaining through talks and lectures, that he was offered the post in Göttingen. Though the second editions of *Romans* would be published after he had begun lecturing, Barth had sent it to the publishers before the move to the university.[31] The exegetical lectures are thus divided from *Romans* by the move from pulpit to lectern, and the concerns of a Swiss parish to academic life in Germany. Further, while commentarial to a degree, these are lectures, not commentaries as both editions of *Romans* were. As public lectures in a university setting, Barth felt himself more pressed to give an account his own reading in relation to the history of interpretation, which introduces a different style of exposition. Less paraphrastic than *Romans*, yet also free to be more leisurely and fine-grained in his reading of specific passages, Barth adopts the traditional distinction of *Wort-* and *Sacherklärung* to order the expositional task, all the while seeking to make clear the claim of the text on the reader within that framework. While freely admitting that both *Romans* and the exegetical lectures are important instances of Barth the exegete, the formal differences between them allow for separate consideration.

[31] Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief (Zweite Fassung) 1922* (Zürich: TVZ, 2010), p. XI.

Along with these somewhat artificial, if not arbitrary, distinctions necessary for a work of intellectual history, there is the already alluded to fact that the exegetical lectures represent a lacuna in Barth scholarship. As the studies by Webster, Asprey, and Westerholm attest, there is much to be gained from a closer look at these texts, but treatment of them in their own right still remains spotty. The one exception to this rule in recent years has been Nina-Dorothee Mützlitz's work on Barth's reception of Paul.[32] As I advocate in this study, Mützlitz quite rightly argues that any account of Barth's development that does not reckon with his immersion in the epistles of Paul can only hope to be one-sided. Further, that immersion does not stop with *Romans*, but is sustained in the exegetical lectures from the 1920s. Yet Mützlitz's work also illustrates why a more patient attention to the range of the exegetical lectures is necessary. Her concluding judgment that Barth's understanding of theological exegesis was overwhelmingly shaped by Paul should be treated with caution, if for no other reason than that Barth's exegetical lectures from the 1920s are evenly split between Pauline and non-Pauline texts.[33]

I aim to contribute to this more balanced view of Barth's exegetical labours by surveying a representative, if not comprehensive range of his lecture texts. This is largely due to the varying state of the lecture manuscripts. The chronology of Barth's exegetical lectures in the 1920s, along with the state of the texts, are as follows:

Göttingen:

Winter Semester (W.S.) 1921/1922–Ephesians–published posthumously in the *Gesamtausgabe* (2009)
W.S. 1922/1923–James–published posthumously in the *Gesamtausgabe* (2009)
Summer Semester (S.S.) 1923–1 Corinthians–published by Barth (1924)
W.S. 1923/1924–1 John–unpublished, manuscript (Karl Barth Archive (KBA 1671)
S.S. 1924–Philippians–unpublished, manuscript (KBA 1673.1)
W.S. 1924/1925–Colossians–unpublished, manuscript (KBA 1675.1)
S.S. 1925–Sermon on the Mount–unpublished, manuscript and transcription (KBA 1677)

Münster:

W.S. 1925/1926–Gospel of John–published posthumously in the *Gesamtausgabe* (1976)
W.S. 1926/1927–Philippians (2)–published by Barth (1927)
S.S. 1927–Colossians (2)–unpublished, partial typescript (KBA 1675.2)

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[32] Nina-Dorothee Mützlitz, *Gottes Wort als Wirklichkeit. die Paulus reception der jungen Karl Barth (1906-1927)* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner, 2013).
[33] Mützliz, *Gottes Wort* pp. 288-294. Wolf Krötke's description, in relation to Barth's mature theology, of a 'Pauline-Johannine perspective' is more balanced, and reflects the direction of Barth's thought in the 1920s. See Krötke, 'Die Christologie Karl Barths als Beispiel für den Vollzug seiner Exegese', in *Karl Barths Schriftauslegung*, ed. Michael Trowitzsch (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1996), pp. 7ff.

W.S. 1927/1928–James (2)–posthumously published in the *Gesamtausgabe* (2009)

As is clear from this list, Barth began to repeat some of the lecture courses once he moved from Göttingen to Münster. The above list therefore covers all but one of the biblical texts that Barth lectured on in an academic setting, namely 1 Peter, on which he first lectured in Basel in S.S. 1938 (KBA 1686, typescript).[34] An account of the lectures as a whole, in their present state, would therefore require not only a comparative assessment of Barth's revisions, but transcribing those lectures which only exist in manuscript form with accuracy. Particularly the latter task is a specialised one and outside of my competence. Nonetheless, a representative look is possible by attending to all of the published lectures (both by Barth and in the *Gesamtausgabe*) as well as the Sermon on the Mount lectures from 1925, made possible by the archive transcription of that manuscript. This leaves 1 John and Colossians, from the 1920s, untouched. The 1 John lectures were only given once and so only a manuscript version is available. Colossians suffers a similar fate. When Barth began to re-deliver the lectures in Münster, typescripts were often made of them by Charlotte von Kirschbaum. This would have made assessment of the Colossians lectures possible, however, only a fragment of the 1927 typescript exists. There is a typescript of the W.S. 1937/1938 delivery of those lectures (KBA 1675.3), but the ten-year gap between those two deliveries makes assumptions about their overlap speculative, and, for the aforementioned reasons, a sufficiently detailed comparison between the 1937/1938 and 1924/1925 manuscripts was not possible. The other consideration in this regard is the difference between those lectures Barth chose to publish and his original manuscripts. A comparison between the transcriptions of his lecture manuscripts generally and those Barth chose to publish do not exhibit a great difference in style or presentation of the material. At most, the published lectures excise some of Barth's asides on contemporary biblical scholarship, but otherwise appear similar in style and tone to those he gave in the lecture hall. I have therefore elected to simply treat the published versions without comment on any possible changes made from the manuscripts. As will be clear in chapter 5, I do make an argument that the published version of the Philippians lectures is more consistent with Barth's thought in the second half of the 1920s than the first, but this turns on content, not on a comparative analysis of the manuscripts.

[34] This does not include Barth's lectures on 1 Thessalonians. He prepared lectures to give at a conference in Walzenhausen, Switzerland in 1939 for Swiss and German students, but it was cut short after two days by the outbreak of World War II. In any event, only some introductory comments and a lecture outline exists in the archive (KBA 1687).

Since all but two of the texts I will treat were not prepared for publication, a certain amount of circumspection in handling them is required. We do not know, for example, how much they differ from what Barth actually said on any given day. We may like to know if, when re-delivering the lectures on John in the Summer Semester of 1933, while, as von Kirschbaum reported it, under attack by the *Deutschen Christen* and with 'Nazis in sitting in their uniforms' in the audience, he expanded on what is found in the manuscript relating to Jn. 4:22, 'for salvation is from the Jews'.[35] I am not aware of any student notes of sufficient detail to allow us to answer any such questions. Nevertheless, if we cannot say that 'this is what Barth said' with total confidence, we can nonetheless take these lecture notes as whole as a reasonable guide to what Barth was thinking about these scriptural texts during the 1920s.

This brings me to the final methodological issue, which is how these exegetical texts should be treated in relation to Barth's other academic texts from this period. It is not obvious that they should be read, like Barth's dogmatics lectures, as straightforward guides to his thought. They might more reasonably be considered, as could his historical work, as guides to his thought about others. One viable option for scholarship would therefore be to judge the success of his reading. For exegesis as for historical theology, how well-judged is Barth's analysis? How convincing is he as a reader of these texts? There is no doubt that this is a valuable line of inquiry, but it is not one that I pursue here with any consistency. I do find it necessary to occasionally draw attention to where Barth's reading of a passage is particularly novel, and note where scholarship differs. On the whole, though, I have read these texts with an eye to the internal logic of Barth's thought. This is not without its dangers. Most prominently, it may tend to obscure the very thing Barth is so keen to highlight, which is the biblical text in its own right. Secondly, it may simply mistake Barth's commentary for a constructive endeavour, and so undermine my own argument that Barth thought of exegesis as primarily receptive activity. These dangers are not, finally, avoidable, but neither are they prohibitive of the course I pursue. What I aim to do in this study is therefore strike a balance between the recognition that Barth is not a neutral interpreter, neither by intent or by nature, and his affirmation that the biblical text is not a malleable reality. It is in the friction between the two that the interest lies.

With these limitations in mind, I propose to proceed as follows: In chapter 1, I introduce a number of the themes of this study by looking at Barth's first two exegetical

[35] See *EkEJ*, as quoted by Walther Fürst, p. 10.

lectures from his time at Göttingen, on Ephesians and James. In the Ephesians lectures, Barth explicitly raises the question of the relationship between the authority by which Paul claims to speak and the standards of *wissenschaft* expected to be upheld at a university and by extension, ordinary forms of human judgment in general. This sets up the basic challenge of responding to Paul's claim to authority. Barth's discussion of God's blessing and its reflex in human doxology will provide a helpful guide to how Barth thinks of Scripture as being communicative as part of God's sovereign decision for humanity, while also illustrating its aporetic structure. In the James lectures, we find similar themes in a different key. The consistently ethical attention of the epistle prompts Barth's reflections on God's transcendence as the basis of human action, rather than its negation. This is still not an entirely developed thought on Barth's part yet, as can be seen from his discussion of the relationship between Paul and James. There, as part of a provocative reading of the passage on faith and works, Barth's appeal to an under-described notion of canon demonstrates both the ecclesial direction that his exegesis will take, and its present assertiveness.

Chapter 2 is an *excursus* from the exegetical material, necessary in order to give an account of the two streams of theology that inform, and complicate, Barth's exegesis in this period. Barth scholarship has been reminded recently that both his exegesis and his theology more generally was informed by a significant investment in early Reformed thought. In Barth's first statement about the Protestant Scripture Principle, Barth argues for the Reformed priority of the formal principle of Scripture over the material principle of justification by faith, a decision he repeats through to his mature theology. This way of construing the authority of Scripture over theology is, however, more informed by 19th-century debates than it is a classically Reformed heritage. I investigate these more proximal influences to argue that one of the chief concerns in the 19th-century formulations of the two principles of Scripture and justification was the protection of faith from spiritually pernicious authority, which led to a reformulation of Scripture's normativity. Though Barth sets himself against this stream, he nonetheless adopts some of its basic terms through the influence of Wilhelm Herrmann's account of faith as personal relation. In Barth's own discussion of the Reformed Scripture Principle, he reverses the polarity of the 19th-century debate by stressing the danger of faith becoming its own object. Yet, it is this commitment to faith as personal relation that leads to an austerely formal account of Scripture's authority rooted in the doctrine of election. At this stage, Barth plays off election against the material force of Scripture's soteriological aims, rather than show how the former grounds the latter.

How Barth struggles with this tension, and gradually moves towards a more theologically satisfying account, is the focus of chapter 3. This chapter displays a developmental trajectory most clearly, though one that is not charted in a consistent progression as much as is in fits and starts. I cover two of his exegetical lectures and part of a third in this chapter. The lectures on 1 Corinthians, primarily on 1 Corinthians 15, are probably the best known of all the material in this study, though they have only recently figured more prominently in Barth scholarship. My reading of this material focuses on the way Barth's account of the resurrection as revelation both reflects the tendency towards creating an existential encounter with God, which we have seen in past lectures, but also shows a move towards treating it as part of Christ's history, understood as the history of salvation. This thread is picked up in the Sermon on the Mount, Barth's first foray into a Gospel text as a lecturer. Here he is pressed to account for the relationship between Law and Gospel, and by extension, the relationship of Christ to covenantal history. By this point, Barth is operating with a more traditional futurist eschatology, which allows him to see how human history is related to Christ's history, without enclosing it. The significance of this point for the relationship between the biblical witness and salvation history is made clear by Barth's reading of the prologue to the Gospel of John. His construal of the *Logos* and Jesus Christ, and John the Baptist's relationship to Jesus, while exhibiting continuity with what has gone before, shows that the function of the witness is now fulfilled by its reference in relation to Christ's history, rather than exemplifying the movement of faith.

Chapter 4 carries this point forward by remaining with Barth's lectures on the Gospel of John, along with a brief look at some of the Christology of the 'Göttingen Dogmatics'. Here, we see how Barth's developing Christology works to clarify the incarnation's revelational role, while also qualifying that role by Christ's humanity. In the John lectures, Barth is challenged to describe just how Christ in his earthly ministry relates to revelation. Barth wants to set strict limits on the relation between the natures in order to prevent the incarnation from becoming a principle of divine human relationships. In turn, this makes the humanity of Christ the limit of revelation. While Barth does not think Christ's earthly ministry manifests his divinity, he does not assign it a critical function alone. Rather, in his exegesis of the Nicodemus and the Bread from Heaven pericopes, we see Barth reckoning with the meaning of Christ's history as a human one that, uniquely, does not have an immanent teleology. This is a mark of Christ's particularity that both establishes others in relation to himself, and marks him as one who cannot be subordinated to human conceptual

and political structures. I have found it helpful here to interact with Erik Peterson, Barth's sometime colleague. Peterson's own criticisms of Barth centre on Barth's ability to claim genuine authority for his theology, and Peterson's lectures on John continue this criticism in the context of a diametrically opposed reading of John's Christology. Comparison allows us to see both how Peterson represents a real theological alternative to Barth, but also how Barth reads their difference in terms of moral and spiritual advantages of his own reading of Scripture.

Chapter 5 brings the strands of this study together by looking at two of Barth's commentaries from the second half of the 1920s. In the first place, a look at Barth's revisions to his James lectures for their 1928 presentation show both a remarkable continuity with his earlier judgments, but also marked difference in his handling of the passage on faith and works. Principally, Barth shows a much more nuanced account of the canonical authority of Scripture than he did in 1922/1923, drawing on the advances that we have seen throughout the study. The bulk of the chapter, however, is taken up with the published version of the lectures on Philippians. Barth revisits many of the same themes that occupy him in other Pauline literature, but with a far clearer sense of how Christ's history grounds and determines salvation history. Most importantly for our purposes, Barth reads the moral theology of Philippians as that of an ethic of obedience to the authority of the neighbour as the particular 'other' that is theologically secured in the incarnate mission of Christ. Further developed in his Münster *Ethics* lectures, this furnishes the means of putting the authority of Scripture in material connection to Scripture's soteriological mission.

As a rule, I have cited and consulted English translations when available, though all translations are finally my own. Two exceptions should be noted: Geoffrey Bromiley's partial translation of the Gospel of John lectures (*Witness to the Word* (Eugene, Org.; Wifp and Stock, 2003)) and Ross M. Wright's translation of the Ephesians lectures (*The Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2017)). The former does not go beyond Barth's exegesis of chapter one, while the latter appeared in print as I was in the final stages of this thesis. I have not attempted to render Barth in inclusive language, though I have as a rule translated *Mensch* as 'human' rather than 'man'. Lastly, the epigraph is taken from *The Works of George Herbert* edited by F.M. Hutchinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941) p. 166, lines 19-21.

Chapter 1. The Lectures on Ephesians and James

One evening in early 1922, Barth and his Göttingen colleague Emanuel Hirsch went 'round for round' (*Zug um Zug*) from 9 at night to 4 in the morning. As Barth reported it later that day in a circular letter, the argument was largely about the relationship between revelation, the Bible, and the obedience of faith. The letter relays the conversation in the form of eleven theses of Hirsch, along with Barth's own anti-theses. The nub of disagreement is the independence and exclusivity of revelation over against human forms of thought and communication. Many of the points of disagreement, then, concern the proper way to understand the Bible's role in mediating revelation. So when, in the fifth thesis, Hirsch affirms the prominent figures of the Bible as exemplary norms for understanding God's relation to creatures, Barth's response seemingly seeks to undermine their normative status as much as possible:

> *Anti-thesis 5*: The way God in the Bible acts towards the great men of God and the way these men stand in a certain relation to God is not a direct norm for me, [and] not manifest (*anschaulich*) without revelation. For there is only *one* act of God towards humanity and only *one* relation to him that really deserves the name 'act of *God*' and 'relation to *God*', that could as such be a norm for me. However, only a *plurality* of pious *humanness* (*Menschlichkeiten*) is manifest to me, [and] to me are only the *dispersed* (*gebrochenen*) rays of one light. As such this manifestness can only *drape* (*verhüllen*), not reveal the norm, the one, which is necessary for me. If God *reveals* to me through the vehicle of this manifestness the one, the norm, then the *one God* encountered me through the plurality of pious humanness, and then they as such are no longer under consideration.[36]

Hirsch may well have thought, as Adolf von Harnack would later put it to the dialectical theologians: if this is your theology, 'what power to convince and what value does it have?'[37] A close look at Barth's anti-thesis, however, shows that Barth is moved by just how the plurality of humanity that confronts the reader in the text of the Bible may serve God's revelation without competing with it. What Harnack and others failed to see in these polemical points was the basic material for a positive account of God's communication to humanity through, principally, the Bible.

There are three issues in the passage above that are important for Barth's account of Scripture. First, despite the indirectness of the relationship between the manifest humanity and revelation, it may be vehicle for revelation. Under what terms is this so, and what sort of relation is present between this plurality and the individual whom they confront as potential

[36] Barth, 26.2.1922 (circular), in *B- Th 1921-1930*, pp. 42-43.
[37] Adolf von Harnack, 'Fifteen questions to those among the theologians who are contemptuous of scientific theology', in *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology vol. 1*, ed. James M. Robinson (Richmond, Va: John Knox, 1968) p. 166.

apertures of revelation? Second, because revelation can only be given in relation to God, it must, Barth implies, be received in faith. Does this relation exist in abstraction from pious humanity, or is it in some way dependent on it? Finally, the vehicle that may bear revelation can be discarded once the encounter with God takes place. Is this equally true for the text of Scripture?

In this first chapter, these questions will be helpful to frame an analysis of Barth's first two exegetical lecture cycles, on the epistle to the Ephesians and the epistle of James. Barth's move to a post at the University of Göttingen did not initially bring a softening of the core theological convictions about the absolute otherness of God expressed so forcefully in *Romans II*, but it did require a shift in register and put a burden on Barth to articulate not just the distinction between God's revelation and those who may be directed to communicate it, but how such communication occurs. While the 'great men' may not be direct norms, is there a relation to them as potential vehicles of God's revelation that is distinct from other relations? Particularly in connection to the Bible, is there a spiritual-moral relation to scriptural exemplars, including authors, that is unique to them? In other words, do they possess any kind of authority? It is an acute question in Barth's mind, because it opens up a host of questions and challenges to the modern theological project generally and the role of the theological academy more specifically. If being used by God in revelation does confer some kind of authority to those who are so used, it cannot be as a species of another type of human authority and therefore cannot be judged on any terms that would be suitable to it. These questions are also a challenge to Barth as a university professor and demand clarity about the theological terms on which he can legitimately carry out his task.

The question of authority also prompts questions about the social nature of revelation and its mediation. In his more polemical moments, as above, Barth could be taken to suggest that there is simply an encounter between God and the individual, or at least that it is the individual encounter towards which we should aspire. Whether or not there is an ecclesial setting for revelation and its communication is not only germane to Barth's understanding of the nature of revelation, but also to the charge that dialectical theology gives cover to theological authoritarianism. Certainly for someone like Harnack, dialectical theology not only imperilled the *wissenschaftlich* status of the theology faculty, but also the social capacity of Christianity to protect religious egalitarianism. As he wrote in an open letter to Barth: 'if your method should gain the ascendency, [the gospel] will not be taught any more at all, but exclusively handed over to revival preachers, who freely create their own understanding of

the Bible and who set up their own dominance'.[38] Harnack saw in the public character of scientific theology not only the condition of communicating it rationally, but also a check against the manipulation of religious experience by unscrupulous charisma.[39]

Suspicions of Barth's theology as covertly authoritarian (or at least potentially so) find their inverse in the criticism that it too readily admits parity between biblical authors and readers, as he suggests when they 'no longer come under consideration' at the point of eschatological encounter. Early criticisms of *Romans I* see this as a failure of historical scholarship that indicates a lack of moral discrimination. Paul Wernle wondered: since Barth seems to inhabit Paul's mind so easily, is Barth ready in turn to commend all of Paul's moral convictions?[40] The implication is that the critical distance furnished by historical scholarship also preserves the possibility for individual and cultural difference and moral progress. This sort of criticism will get re-purposed by later critics who argue that Barth's notion of the eschatological encounter with revelation requires positing a parity between author and reader that dissolves the difference between them. Not only does this fail to reckon with the possibility that the individual character of the author is important for understanding the revelation that they are tasked to communicate, more generally it flattens out the biblical topography. Finally, if the medium of revelation can be discarded once the encounter with God has taken place, in what sense does Scripture remain an enduring norm for the believer or the church?

Barth's early exegetical lectures in Göttingen addresses all these questions more or less explicitly. In these first lectures, Barth is perhaps more self-conscious about *how* he was doing what he was doing, but not therefore any less bold in unfolding the text. What becomes clear as the argument progresses, is that to do otherwise was to fail to read in the only way that matters.

1.1 Refracted Light: The Epistle to the Ephesians (Göttingen 1921/1922)

The first part of this chapter focuses on Barth's lectures on the Epistle to the Ephesians, delivered in his first semester at Göttingen, the Winter Semester of 1921/1922. Though it never produced a published volume, by the time he delivered these lectures, Barth had at least as intensive an engagement with the text of Ephesians as he had with Romans. He

[38] See Harnack, 'An Open Letter to Professor Karl Barth', in *Dialectical Theology*, p. 175.
[39] The dangers of this kind of authority were in the air; see Max Weber on charismatic authority that included 'personal trust in revelation' in 'Politik als Beruf' (1919), in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*^{2} (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1958), p. 495f.
[40] See Barth's response to Wernle in the preface to *Der Römerbrief 1922*, p. 19 ET, pp. 11-12.

worked through the entire epistle with his confirmation class in Safenwil in 1918,[41] preached through the epistle from May to September 1919[42] (for which he prepared a translation and paraphrase commentary),[43] and finally in early 1920 spoke on Ephesians for a series of Sunday evening "Bible Talks."[44] To whatever degree this background aided him, it is clear from his preparation that not only did he not intend to merely recycle his past work for the course, but he saw the change from pastorate to professor to entail a direct engagement with academic modes of biblical exposition. Barth made a great effort to familiarise himself with recent critical work and deploy it in his lectures, despite the suggestion of his colleague Erik Peterson that this was neither necessary nor advisable.[45] Barth may have felt he needed to prove himself adequate to the academic demands of the position, but there was also a more significant theological reason Barth sought to bolster his exposition with current scholarship. As much as he was disdainful of the theological presuppositions of purely 'historicist' accounts of the Bible and its contents, Barth still wanted to distinguish his own exegesis from impressionistic or hortatory exercises as something teachable.[46] To do so, he needed to show that the biblical text did not exist at a remove from human inquiry, even if in the end it subverted its intentions.

Nonetheless, Barth's deployment of this material is often abrupt, and simply repeats in summary form a great deal of recent scholarship without integrating it into his argument. The inclusion of this material, as well as Barth's own habit of mind, meant that he did not finish commenting on the first chapter of Ephesians until the penultimate lecture, leaving him one lecture to hurriedly summarise chapters 2-6. Nonetheless, these lectures can be usefully read as a whole. Barth was plainly transfixed by the grammatical and conceptual peculiarities of chapter 1 and his treatment of it shows he perceived in it an inner logic. What he found in Ephesians was an arresting account of God's gracious fellowship with creatures that nonetheless sought, often through formal means, to maintain the infrangible distinction between them. Thus, one of the key themes of this study is introduced by these lectures: how God's transcendent lordship is not only compatible with human flourishing, but its necessary presupposition. This stands in the background of much of Barth's earlier theology, and in

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[41] *EkEJ*, p. IX-X.
[42] These sermons can be found in Barth, *Predigten 1919* (Zürich: TVZ, 2003), pp. 173-334.
[43] This commentary is collected in *EkEJ,* pp. 3-44. On these sermons and the preacher's commentary, see Mützliz, *Gottes Wort,* pp. 70-98.
[44] *EkEJ*, p. X.
[45] *EkEJ*, XIII.
[46] Barth remained uneasy about Adolf Jülicher's charge that what Barth was practicing in *Romans* was 'pneumatic exegesis', despite the evident affinity between Barth's style of exegesis in those commentaries and that practice. See *Der Römerbrief 1922*, p. 16.

particular his biblical exposition. Not only is he there confronted again and again by human speech about God as a conceptual problem, he is confronted by the Bible as an instantiation of the moral-spiritual reality of which it speaks.[47] The biblical authors do not merely describe God's acts in history, they also serve to mediate God's sovereign claim to their readers, though not through a natural capacity to do so. At every stage then, Barth's reading is not just asking what is on the page, but how it claims and obligates the reader.

As Barth understands it, Ephesians, and particularly the first chapter, is an extended example of just how this is so. Ephesians 1 is, not without digressions, a sustained examination of εὐλογεῖν 'blessing' (Eph. 1:3). The meaning of God's decisive act of blessing creatures claims creatures in the midst of their existence, and its antiphon in regenerate human conduct is the object of Paul's message. Barth will use this occasion to give careful attention to the language and manner in which Paul expresses the profound occasion of God's entering into relation with creatures, and the lessons to be drawn from Paul's expression of this reality for appropriate creaturely responses to God. To make this argument I will follow Barth's exposition of the text closely here, and consider the contours of 'blessing' under the headings of 1. Apostleship–the agents of blessing; 2. Doxology–the character of blessing both as an act of divine grace and mercy, and the human response to God; 3. Resurrection–the promise and reality of blessing.

1.1.1. Apostleship–the agents of blessing in Ephesians 1:1

It is indicative, thinks Barth, of the interpretive snares created by letting historical-critical questions retain primary interest in exegetical matters that Παῦλος has garnered more scholarly attention than all the other words of the epistle combined.[48] To Barth's mind, the authorship question is not an irrelevant point, but neither is it the most interesting feature of even the introduction to the text by a long stretch, when the nature of Ἀπόστολος is considered. Barth's choice to focus on 'Apostle' over 'Paul' exemplifies Barth's strategy throughout these lectures. He spends some time on the authorship question, though it is largely a report of other scholarship, as Barth does not feel particularly well qualified to add to the scholarly discussion.[49] More importantly to Barth's mind, is that the qualified nature of any historical claim one could make about the text profoundly limits the appeal of the

[47] A conviction, as Donald Wood points out, present in Barth's earliest programmatic writings on Scripture after his 'break' with liberalism. See Wood, *Interpretation*, pp. 4-9, esp. p. 8.
[48] *EkEJ*, p. 45; 50.
[49] *EkEJ*, p.46.

authorship question as one of fact.[50] This is typical of Barth's suspicion of the claims made by historical-critical research in this period. Though in these lectures historical-critical research is often employed somewhat sporadically and inelegantly incorporated into the argument,[51] Barth's relationship to historical criticism is differentiated from the regnant practices of the academy primarily in the subordinate and limited explanatory power to which it is accorded.[52] While in the university context Barth's use of historical-criticism is far more prevalent than in *Romans*, the primary conviction remains the same: God's eschatological acts in history radically relativize history, without necessarily negating it.[53] The authorship question and the audience question are for this reason paired in Barth's mind. Whether or not Ephesians was written by Paul (though Barth thinks it was)[54] or if the intended recipient was truly a church in Ephesus (he declines to say),[55] are comparatively minor issues in the face of someone claiming to be sent by God (Eph. 1:1) speaking to τοῖς ἁγίοις...καὶ πιστοῖς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ ('the holy ones (*Heiligen*)...and the believers/faithful in Christ Jesus).[56] These paired claims provide the first interpretive challenge of the epistle.

Both the sender and the recipient of Ephesians have their existence as creatures in history marked out as paradoxical by God's act towards them.[57] That Paul's apostleship is διὰ θελήματος θεοῦ ('through God's will') and the recipients are 'holy' puts their creaturely existence in terms that are fundamentally not creaturely, nor explicable as such. As an action by God, it can only be known through God: 'And this [determination as holy] is a divine one,

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[50] *EkEJ*, p. 45. The consensus for the past 30 years has been 'non liquet'.
[51] See particularly Ibid., pp. 63-65 for such an instance.
[52] *EkEJ*, p. 50. 'In a century from now, how easily could it be to quite mistakenly want to distinguish a genuine from a fake [Paul] Natorp, when perhaps only words are read and assessed and one ought not to accompany (*mitgehen*), or join in reflection (*mitdenken*) with, what one reads.' Or more caustically, in reference to the difficulties of establishing a consensus on the intended recipient of Ephesians: 'In view of such a performance, the antiquarian theology has no occasion to put too much stock in the certainty of their *method*–to say nothing of their results' (p. 67).
[53] For an account of Barth's perspective on historical criticism in *Romans,* and particularly the role of Barth's doctrinal conviction about God's acts in history for his interpretive decisions, see Wood *Interpretation* esp. pp. 12-14. For perspectives on Barth's relationship to historical criticism throughout his career, see Rudolf Smend, 'Nachkritische Schriftauslegung', in *Parrhesia. Karl Barth zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. E. Busch, J. Fangmeier, and M. Geiger (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1966), pp. 215-237, cf. Jüngel's brief account of Barth's negative response to Smend's suggestion because of the implications of the term 'post-critical' in Eberhard Jüngel, *Barth-Studien* (Zürich-Köln: Benziger Verlag, 1982), p.88 ET, p. 73, as well as George Hunsinger 'Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation: Rudolf Smend on Karl Barth' in *Thy Word is Thy Truth: Barth on Scripture* ed. G. Hunsinger (Grand Rapids, Mich.:Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 29-48 and Hans Frei, 'Scripture as Realistic Narrative: Karl Barth as Critic of Historical Criticism', in *idem*., pp. 49-63.
[54] *EkEJ*, p. 50.
[55] *EkEJ*, p. 66.
[56] *EkEJ*, p. 58. Here, as I will do throughout, I am translating Barth's own translation rather than substituting it for a standard English translation. Where I quote verses for the aid of the reader, they are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (National Council of Churches, 1998).
[57] *EkEJ*, pp. 54; 58-59.

and is therefore a real determination, which is also only guaranteed by God.'[58] In short, the epistle begins *in medias res*, with God's action towards creatures already having occurred. With the presumption of divine action framing the epistle, the following talk about God is therefore not act of detached ascription, but understood in the register of confession and worship.

This register finds its explicit basis in the two 'blessings' of Eph. 1:3, but we can see Barth following the logic of the presupposition of divine action in his exegesis of Paul's claim to apostolicity. The claim of apostleship, argues Barth, is a claim to authority of a unique sort. Paul's own claim to be an apostle 'through God's will' does not stand alongside other claims to authority and even casts all such claims into question:

> When a person dares to say what Paul has said, he necessarily puts himself under suspicion of insolence. Human society has been in all times, if not in practice, yet still basically a well-ordered *cosmos* of more or less recognised necessary and useful functions, as perhaps in the shape (*Gebilde*) of the university it is formed (*abgebildet*) in miniature. But what gives a person the right to speak of *God*, of last things? What allows one to justify the necessity and usefulness of *this* function?[59]

The attack on the domestication of theology to the needs and strictures of the *wissenschaftlich* university is part of Barth's general polemic against 19th-century theology and is not unusual to this context.[60] If it has a particular piquancy here, it is due to the newly minted professor implicating himself, and his own position, in the critique. However, there is a degree of facetiousness in Barth's question, aware as he is that the modern university had indeed found a category for talk about God that could be housed in the human cosmos, namely 'religion'. It is against 'religion' that the apostolic claim to authority is particularly directed, then, because the capacity to judge the legitimacy of Paul's claims is negated by the content of his message, which is asserted to be external to all human endeavours. The apposition of God and 'last things' is designed to make just this point. Prepared by his reading and appreciation of the Blumhardts to associate God with the coming of something

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[58] *EkEJ*, p. 59.
[59] *EkEJ*, p. 54.
[60] Cf. Zachary Purvis, *Theology and the University in 19th-Century Germany* (Oxford: OUP, 2016), pp. 225-228. Nor were such attacks isolated to theological circles, as Fritz Ringer makes clear in his classic study on the crisis of higher education in Germany during this period, *Decline of the German Mandarins* (Hanover, NG: Wesleyan University Press, 1969). This is not to suggest that Barth is simply giving a theologically inflected expression of Weimar-era malaise. Without denying that he was influenced by his cultural milieu, readings of this sort like Richard H. Roberts' 'Karl Barth and Weimar Eschatology' too easily reduce Barth to the sum of one aspect of his cultural environment. See 'Karl Barth and Weimar Eschatology,' in *A Theology on its Way? Essays on Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991).

new, Barth can read Paul here as claiming that speech about God requires a basic rupture of human standards of judgement.[61]

This way of understanding Paul's message prompts for Barth an important digression on the problematic nature of apostolicity. As God only comes with the 'last things', how is the reader to judge the legitimacy of one who speaks of God, and on what could that authority rest? The apostle can be nothing but an exceptional figure:

> But now, what if a person has something to say, which reaches so utterly beyond so-called religion and beyond all known human concerns and needs, that he much more radically encircles the societal order, erected on these [concerns and needs], under a question?...Is it not obvious that such persons immediately expose themselves to the suspicion of insolence, of fanaticism, of nihilism, unless they prefer to obscure this state of affairs and seek somewhere in the framework of ordered human activities accommodation as proper citizens? Paul has preferred to not obscure this state of affairs, not even in contrast to the original apostles, as they themselves could not in contrast to their churchly authority obscure him. He renounces the protection and the preservation afforded him by the authority of men.[62]

Much that is important for understanding Barth's reading the Bible during this period is compressed in this quotation. The rhetorical force with which Barth separates Paul as the apostle from any immanent form of legitimacy, including an ecclesial one, puts a great deal of stress on Paul's isolation in the fulfilment of his office, and the ambiguous–on regular terms–character of that office. Barth's predecessor in this account of apostleship is Søren Kierkegaard, most prominently the latter's essay 'The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle'.[63] It is difficult to ascertain with any certainty what of Kierkegaard Barth had read at this stage, yet while withholding any judgment on whether or not there is a direct link between that essay and what Barth has to say here, the convergences are clear.[64] The apostle is hopelessly exposed to society and subject to its opprobrium because he explicitly sets himself apart from its purposes and standards. Further, this is a feature of the apostolic claim to authority. For Kierkegaard, what is most galling about the apostle is that as a representative of divine authority the apostle commands, and so demands obedience.[65] For Barth it is that he claims to speak of God while rejecting the accepted standards of evaluative

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[61] *EkEJ*, pp. 54-55. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock, 2004), pp. 52-53.
[62] *EkEJ*, p. 55.
[63] Søren Kierkegaard, 'The Difference between a Genius and an Apostle', in *The Book on Adler*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 173-188.
[64] Lee Barrett suggests Barth may have read the essay in question at this point due to the prominence of the phrase 'the infinite qualitative distinction' in *Romans II*. Yet both that phrase, and the characterisation of apostolicity found here, might have been derived from other sources, particularly *Practice in Christianity*, which Barth is known to have read with attention at around the turn of the decade. See Lee C. Barrett, 'Karl Barth: The Dialectic of Attraction and Repulsion', in *Kierkegaard's Influence on Theology. Tome I: German Protestant Theology*, ed. by Jon Stewart (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 7-9.
[65] Kierkegaard, 'Difference', p. 188.

judgment for such speech. Yet in both cases it is a claim to authority without subjecting itself to any known or accepted criteria of legitimacy, and as such, it is functionally self-justifying.

It is notable that Kierkegaard speaks in fairly general categories about apostles, geniuses and society, while for Barth it is quite specifically Paul's claim to authority. On the one hand Barth draws attention to Paul the individual in order to stress that the source of his authority has no institutional location. On the other, Barth understands it to be Paul whose words are being read, and the personal nature of the biblical writings is important for him to secure the Bible's character as address. We will have more to say in later chapters on the significance for Barth of the divine address as determinative of the form of the biblical address, but for now two things should be noted. First, while apostolic authority is not derivable from the personal qualities of the apostle–Paul has no innate talents for apostleship–it does matter for Barth that there is a specific human person behind the texts of Scripture. The authors are not interchangeable divine *amanuenses.* Following this point, we can note secondly that since there is an address from a specific person, there is also an audience that is addressed. As much as the apostolic message is not generic, neither is its object, and it is reckoning with the right way to speak of an address that is to be received, yet admits no standard criteria of reception, which is the tension of much of Barth's exposition of the Ephesians.

The condition of Paul's audience in this way corresponds to his own. 'Holy ones' is the controlling concept of the second half of 1:1, which can be roughly characterised as the 'objective' pole to the 'subjective' one of 'faithful'. The brittle polarities of 'objective' and 'subjective' are heuristic at best, however, because divine and human actions are by definition non-competitive.[66] Nonetheless, to be 'faithful in Christ Jesus' (1.1b) is an act that exposes one as Paul is exposed in his claim to apostleship: 'Where, when and how would faith be an event in the psychological-historical sense? ...We cannot preemptively guard ourselves with the concept of faith–since it would shortly indicate a creaturely guardedness–as if with a gambling chip, which one produces to redeem.'[67] Constrained to be equally recusant of purely creaturely norms and authorities, the apostle and his hearers are equally displaced by the revelation of God's saving presence in Jesus Christ. It is the aim of Paul's letter to demonstrate and communicate the new and utterly distinct spiritual and ethical terms

[66] *EkEJ,* pp. 61-62.
[67] *EkEJ*, pp. 62-63.

of receptivity and action that are fitted to this act. These terms are set out in Paul's 'Doxology'[68] in Ephesians 1:3-14, which occupies the majority of Barth's lecture hours.

1.1.2. Doxology–blessing in gift and response in Ephesians 1:3-14

With the basic presupposition that God's relationship with creatures is displacing, setting the creature in paradoxical terms, Barth reads Paul's pairing of divine and human 'blessings' in Eph. 1:3 as articulating both the nature of God's act of initiation and the appropriate human response in terms that reflect that paradox. Therefore, responding to God's act and responding to it are exhibited simultaneously in Paul's letter. Put somewhat differently: Paul's act of blessing–a responsive act of praise–is inextricable from the communicative aim of the epistle: 'It is a *doxology*, a God-glorifying exclamation of the apostle, directed to his readers with the clear intent to summon them to praise to, so to speak, draw them in to the same basic orientation, from which he speaks to them.'[69]

For Barth, this notion that Paul's communication is not so much the transmission of content, but a summons to occupy the same standpoint in relation to God, will dictate many of his interpretive choices throughout the lecture cycle. Importantly, it puts the methodological and formal features of the text on a par with the semantic. How Paul says things exercises as much control as what he says in communicating his message. This is not merely a point of standard exegetical acumen, but of the theological pressure exerted by the distinction between creator and creature. The primacy and reality of God's action is paramount, but the distinctive requirement for recognising such action is to deny one's creaturely capacity to grasp it. So, the exegetical task for Barth is to show the way in which Paul's description of God's acts is meaningful without asserting that this description is circumscribed by human concepts. Barth reasserts the boundaries of theological knowledge that were at work in his description of Paul's apostleship:

> Not in general, nor directly, nor rational or irrational is the truth of the things spoken of here, and so not [spoken] on the basis of a speculative construction, but also not on the basis of the uncontrollable experience of the so-called pious consciousness. Rather as existentially, indirectly coming from God, not as a single word as such, rather each single word in relation to *the* Word, which is not exhausted by any single word.[70]

Barth's exegesis draws on the interrelation of the Word–God's act of revelation–and the human response to that act–doxology–not as independent features of the text but as unified in

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[68] *EkEJ*, p. 77.
[69] *EkEJ*, p. 77.
[70] *EkEJ*, p. 80.

the communication from Paul to his readers. It is with some artificiality then, to first consider Barth's understanding of the formal features of Paul's letter and the communicative strategies that accord with the ungraspable Word of which he speaks. Yet, considering this in isolation will make the conceptual difficulties surrounding the doctrine of the resurrection, and the nature of God's revelation of his work towards creatures, more clear.

Barth's preferred term for the form of Paul's communication in Ephesians 1 is 'dialectic'. To understand Barth's use of the term here, two things should be borne in mind: First, Barth is primarily interested in the moral and spiritual categories within which the creatures with whom God has established a relationship now operate–being 'blessed' and 'blessing'. So, Barth's use of dialectic in these lectures is best understood as an elaboration of the meaning of 'blessing'. Second, Paul's dialectical talk is part of the *communication* of his message to fellow creatures. Though dialectical speech is 'refracted, indirect, and self-transcending'[71] it is not intended to be obscure, but meaningful. After locating the textual basis for Barth's use of dialectic, we will look at the significance of both of these issues in turn.

On Barth's account, Paul's dialectical language reflects the eschatological reality of God's presence to creatures. Though Barth finds eschatology running as a thread throughout the chapter, the paradigmatic textual instance is 1:3-14.[72] Here, the shifting tenses of past election (1:4-56), the present act of redemption (1: 7-10), and the future goal and realisation of God's works (1:11-14), are grammatically enclosed in a single sentence, which only reflects their more profound material unity 'in him', that is, in Christ.[73] What God has done for creatures is something that is both actively present, and simultaneously that for which the Christian hopes. The unity in tension of past, present, and future in God's act towards creatures is a way of indicating that God acts from eternity and so cannot be pinned down to one temporal moment or another. Hence, Paul's language must strive to reflect this reality by subverting its own reifying tendencies.[74]

These reifying tendencies are indigenous to the fallen nature of the speaker. So, awareness of the fittingness of dialectical language to its object is reflective of the moral and spiritual condition of the speaker. As a mode of description, dialectic shows the speaker's

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[71] *EkEJ*, p. 86.
[72] Cf. Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, pp. 37f.
[73] *EkEJ*, pp. 79-80; 107-108.
[74] Mützlitz argues that Barth simply overlooks the futurist nature of Paul's eschatology here. This is certainly right, but nonetheless, Barth does pick up on a genuine ambiguity in Paul's sentence about how temporal sequence relates to God's acts. See Mützlitz, *Gottes Wort*, p. 95.

willingness to accept God as God's self: free and sovereign and thus to be accepted only on God's own terms. Therefore, dialectical speech about God is a work of the regenerate creature, and so is an act of *faith*. God, who is the 'goal of all dialectical communication...as God must be *believed* and can *only* be believed in....' As the one engaged in dialectical description, so those who are to hear and understand it must likewise do so in a posture of faith and humility. As we noted with apostleship, one of the hallmarks of a fitting response to God's action is a rejection of natural forms of judgment and certainty, and the same is the case with dialectical speech. To receive dialectical speech as genuine is to know that God must be received as '*only* a word, *only* an assurance, *only* a promise', which requires rejecting the desire for concrete, this-worldly certainty. Barth turns over this desire for a greater certainty to reveal its idolatrous source: 'Whoever wants more here, will get less. *Heathen* plerophorie wants more than the blessing of God, it wants tangible, direct, perceptible divine presence–and what it achieves is the presence of gods and idols.'[75]

Barth seems to immediately soften the force of this critical stance by drawing attention to a kind of 'proof' garnered from the structure of dialectical speech. As the terms of speaking and hearing of God are defined by the possibility of receptivity to God's acts, a receptivity that is only in God's power to grant, the root of the indirect, self-subverting quality of dialectical speech is the positive affirmation that God has acted, coupled with the expectation that he will act again. The negative features of Paul's dialectical communication are therefore part of the moral existence of creatures before God, which is lived in anticipation of this work continuing. For Barth here, dialectical speech is generated precisely from this moral and spiritual insight, not primarily from a metaphysical problem that could be resolved with a different philosophical apparatus: 'There is no way we can remove the alien form of [Paul's] communication (*Mitteilung*). His alien form is precisely his unmistakable intelligibility. That here *we* always come away empty is precisely the proof that here *God* is spoken of.'[76]

It is not clear how Barth's critical stance, and the 'proof' of dialectical *aporia* are to hang together. On the one hand, it does seem right to say that Barth understands God to be 'attested in Ephesians not apophatically but by a *positive* theology', but taken together with the more austerely critical position discussed earlier, it does not seem right to say that Paul's language does so 'not by a process of negation…but by supplying a richer conceptual

[75] *EkEJ*, p. 88. 'Plerophorie' is Barth's transliteration of πλεροφορία ('full assurance', cf. Col. 2:2). He may transliterate it because the word does not appear in Ephesians.
[76] *EkEJ*, p. 108.

pattern'.[77] Indeed, it is only by retaining self-negation in language that God can be spoken of positively, because in this way the speaker reflects the moral reality that talk of God presupposes. When read as a proposal about the moral activity of the speaker, rather than the way the content of her speech relates to the form of her speech, Barth may not be flatly contradicting himself. Put differently, the search for certainty as 'heathen' must be taken literally, not figuratively, and so that the 'proof' is not to suggest that the presence of God is conjured up by the declaration of his absence, but more simply that it reflects a moral and spiritual insight that would be only possible if a relation to God was already established.[78] But von Balthasar's claim that in *Romans I* 'to be a self and to recognise oneself as such means distancing oneself from God, and this distancing is sin' also does not quite apply to Barth's reading of Ephesians.[79] Certainly if 'as such' means in total independence from God, then here too, Barth would call that recognition sinful. But it is the recognition of the self's distance from God that is a consequence of the relation with God established by God's self-revelation, not an independent search for the self. Yet, von Balthasar's more general judgment that in the *Romans* commentaries Barth struggles to differentiate between the creature and the sinner in any meaningful way is true here as well. Barth often speaks as though the distinction between creatures and sinful creatures is unavailable, leading to a difficulty in his theology whereby God's relation to creatures seems necessarily determined by the dynamics of reconciliation and redemption. This in turn means the dynamics of faith can at times threaten to determine the scope of God's lordship, rather than the reverse.

While this ambiguity may be a problem, it may also be usefully understood as one of the strengths of Barth's reading of Ephesians. Total depravity means in part that defining the difference between the sinful and the creaturely is, from the creature's side, impossible. No conceptual apparatus is innocent, nor can one employ one without considering how it may in fact be extensions of one's own bid for authority over others and God. In this light, the necessity of a posture of expectation and thus refusal of natural forms of certainty and description makes Paul's prayer for the 'enlightening of the eyes of your hearts' (Eph. 1:18) the logical culmination of the chapter.

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[77] Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, pp. 41-42.
[78] In an essay on Barth's lectures on Philippians, Francis Watson argues that Barth understands 'the text itself' as 'ethical action…arising out of a broader context of human action'. I would agree, with the qualification that this view of the text is present in advance of the Philippians lectures. See Watson, 'Barth's *Philippians* as Theological Exegesis', in Karl Barth *Epistle to the Philippians. 40th Anniversary Edition* (Louisville; London: Westminister John Knox, 2002), p. xxxv.
[79] von Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, p. 65.

1.1.3. Resurrection–the promise and reality of blessing

While Barth spends the bulk of his lecture hours on the 'doxology' of Ephesians 1:3-14, the high-point of the lectures–materially and rhetorically–is his explication of 1:15-23, to which he gives a brief one and a half lecture hours. The motif to which Barth has returned throughout his lectures is the way in which Paul identifies the effects of the divine blessing on creatures through their worshipful response to that blessing. When Paul breaks the long doxological sentence to give his prayer for his audience, it is simply an expression that those who know the blessing of God know it as God's own act, thus given eschatologically, not fixed in history. Barth says, 'What grows in nature, simply grows. What is begun by people always requires further labour. *There* prayer does *not* come under consideration. But prayer *comes* into consideration when the relation to God is dealt with, the εὐλογία πνευματκή ('spiritual blessings' 1:3)'.[80] Both the act of prayer and its object maintain the strict conditions of what constitutes knowledge and relation to God, that is, these are to be had only through God's self. So, Paul prays for the 'Spirit of wisdom and revelation' (1:17)[81] making clear that what Barth thinks Paul is seeking is the transforming presence of God, not an *Erkenntnistheorie*.[82]

At this point, Barth draws a crucial connection between pneumatology, resurrection and revelation. This 'Spirit' that enlightens the creature is the power of God at work in blessing them. So, the way in which God establishes a relation with creatures is identical to the power of God at work in Christ's resurrection. For Barth, it is the resurrection that is the operative moment in Paul's discourse and constitutes the definitive interpretation of what is meant by God's blessing. His reading of Paul puts the resurrection at the centre of God's revelation to creatures, the event in which creatures not only come to understand God's acts towards them but to understand what it means to be regenerate creatures.

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[80] *EkEJ*, p. 135.

[81] *EkEJ*, p. 136. Barth, as Luther, renders πνεῦμα as a proper noun (*der Geist*), which is consistent with Barth's emphasis on the comprehensive control God retains over all aspects of relating to him. Such a translation is not uncontroversial (compare the NRSV: 'a spirit') and grammatically the Greek leaves the question open as to whether or not the πνεῦμα means a human capacity/disposition or divine presence. Barth does not address this (perhaps for lack of time), though he does say that the ἀποκάλυψις is the 'reality of God' (p. 136), suggesting that therefore the πνεῦμα in question must be God's as well. Several commentators argue for the same reading based on the use of ἀποκάλυψις elsewhere in the Pauline corpus. See Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 96 and Jean-Noël Aletti, SJ, *Saint Paul Épître aux Éphésiens* (Paris: J. Gabalda et C^{ie}, 2001), pp. 95-96.

[82] Cf. Jeffry Stout, *The Flight from Authority* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), pp. 143-145. For a version of this reading that mistakes Barth's work as primarily interested in noetic questions, see Alister E. McGrath, *The Making of Modern German Christology. From the Enlightenment to Pannenberg* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 110-113.

> [Paul] means death when he says death, and life when he says life, and both times he means the whole: *God*. The whole of what we call life is subject to death, and the whole of what we call death is subject to life. That step from here to there, this *unheard-of* step, that which we can never take, that step, which is the death of our life and the life of our death, he calls resurrection. Plainly he means *bodily* resurrection, because death is the death of the *body*, and the life that overcomes this death is again the life of the *body*. Whoever says *time*, says body, and whoever speaks of *eternity* in time, says resurrection of the body. Embodiment is materiality (*Dinglichkeit*). Without materiality, there is no individual (*Individuum*). Without the individual, without the subject, there is no relation to God. Everything hangs on taking the relation of the individual to God, God to the individual, the presence of God in time wholly in earnest, as wholly real. But for this very reason: everything here hangs on our knowing that no interpretation that we would like to give of the presence of God somewhat co-insides with its reality.[83]

This depiction of the resurrection as revelation is reflected in passages in *Romans II* and explored at greater length in Barth's lectures on 1 Corinthians, later published as *The Resurrection of the Dead*.[84] Though compressed, Barth's striking assertion that the resurrection of the body is the basis for the particular, the individual relationship to God is worth pausing over. Barth was sensitive to the danger of the individual's history becoming the determining factor in an account of God's acts, and so reducing God to an extension of the self's need. In the resurrection, however, the individual is established from the other side of its history, from beyond the limits of its temporally extended existence. Thus Barth's reading of Paul allows him take the relation between faith and history and argue that because of the resurrection this relation is turned on its head. Faith is thus not subsumed by the meaning of historical events, rather faith is itself the consequence of God's opening up history from 'above' in Christ, which is the reality revealed in the resurrection.[85] By 'resurrection' Paul means 'the event (*Ereignis*) that takes place precisely on the *border* between the possible and impossible, the historical and the unhistorical, time and eternity.'[86] Faith, then is the work of God in the creature that is the same power at work in the resurrection, enabling the creature to see themselves in the new eschatological horizon. So, Barth interprets Christ's exultation and enthronement in 1:20b-23 as the 'positive part'[87] of the preaching of the resurrection that can still only be understood through the resurrection, that is to say, not in any way but hope. As evident as it is that Barth is seeking a way of relating human history to the eschatological redemption promised to it in Christ, it is also evident that this threatens to float above humanity's temporal existence. The coordination of

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[83] *EkEJ*, p. 144.
[84] See *Der Römerbrief 1922*, p. 51 ET, p. 30. I take up the 1 Corinthians material in chapter 3.
[85] *EkEJ*, p. 140.
[86] *EkEJ*, p. 141.
[87] *EkEJ,* p. 145.

the Spirit with resurrection and faith reinforces this notion. In the moment of the Spirit's work, faith is caught up in the same movement of resurrection. Wholly reconstituted by this event, the believer nonetheless remains in anticipation of this event, hence the primacy of hope. There is a real danger that because of the work of the unity of faith and the event of the resurrection in the Spirit, the differences between the believer and reality of resurrection are elided, the very problem Barth is keen to avoid. This prompts Barth to particularly stress the work of resurrection as one of sovereign divine power that distinguishes itself from all other powers: '[b]etween us and the insight into [Christ's lordship] stands the reality of God, the way that can be *no* way.'[88]

The problem that Barth is addressing here recalls the difficulty of distinguishing between the sin and the creature. Barth is aware that when the only horizon is salvation, the relationship between God and humanity can easily get reversed. Also evident is the bluntness of Barth's appeal to the unique sovereignty of God to offset this risk. The placement of the 'reality of God' between the believer and the recognition of Christ as Lord, is a compact expression of Barth's understanding of Paul's agenda in this epistle, which accords with his own sense of where certain strands of 19th-century theology had gone awry.[89] In the context of what Barth says about resurrection, it also suggests how he will prosecute his case. It will emphatically not be through the dissolution of the creature in the face of God's transcendence, but rather reckoning how this same transcendence establishes the creature's moral integrity and its possibilities for fellowship. At the same time, in his presentation, Barth cannot quite get away from an occasional relationship between God's revelatory act and human faith. As much as he does not want to negate human history as the reality of its creaturely existence, Barth is also acutely aware that sin, and sin's capacity to annex all things to the project of its own lordship, is a constant factor with which to contend. The task is understanding how to reconcile these needs in a theologically satisfying manner.

To conclude this section on Ephesians, we can see how the relationship between Scripture's communicative capacity and the broader question of God's eschatological relation to creatures shapes Barth's account of the exegetical task. Given that the human correlate to God's revelation is exclusively faith, Barth is aware that he may be read as advocating a purely spiritual, or enthusiastic, reading of the Bible. Barth is careful to specify otherwise. To follow Paul is not to try to ape his religious experience, but to think critically with him:

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[88] *EkEJ*, p. 146.
[89] This will be discussed further in chapter 2.

> [The doxology of 1:3-14] in a short series of sentences makes exceedingly vivid what kind of unheard of revolution was fulfilled in hearts and minds during the 1st -century, and what kind of impression these people must have had, Paul and his readers, those to whom he evidently confided understanding of such demonstrations. The vision of the incommensurable that occurs here, is here as everywhere, no matter where it occurs, an unsolvable problem for historical considerations...I hope however that I have been somewhat successful in persuading you that it is possible to not only empathize (*nachempfinden*), but critically reflect (*nachdenken*) on this outlook, to set ourselves in contemporaneity (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) with Paul to the point where the object (*Gegenstand*), the incommensurable, Jesus Christ speaks, and must explain himself.[90]

We can see one aspect of Barth's concerns quite clearly. He is careful not to elaborate a mechanism by which the exegetical task achieves its end. The force of the text is not 'of' the text at all, but rather the living Jesus Christ, and to specify the means by which attention to the text brought about divine self-disclosure would be to utter a contradiction. Yet, Barth's commendation of the critical faculty as well as the personal–*nachdenken* as well as *nachempfinden*–registers that this nonetheless is human communication. The text before the reader in Ephesians is the work of a human author, addressed to human readers, and so is patient of a range of human inquiry. What is essential for Barth is that this will not exhaust Paul's message, but rather remind the reader that when God is spoken of, he must speak for himself. The reading of the Bible is enclosed in the same paradoxical condition that characterizes all human action in relation to God.

As a human act, exegesis, then, is aimed at a kind of imitation of the pattern of thought exemplified by the biblical author. As exegesis moves towards solidarity with the messenger, the end of exegesis is waiting on God to speak and presupposes that God has spoken.

1.2 Preacher of Repentance: The Epistle of James (Göttingen 1922/23)

If Ephesians offered Barth the opportunity to explore some of his favourite Pauline themes, then the Epistle of James presented a very different exegetical challenge. First delivered in Göttingen over a period of twelve weeks, with one lecture hour per week, he offered this lecture series again in Münster in the winter of 1928/29, with considerable revision to the 1922/23 lectures.[91] Apparently minimal in its theological commitments, James is also primarily a book of practical moral exhortation, which does not appear hospitable ground for the highly-charged rhetoric of Dialectical Theology. The first time around, he evidently did not enjoy the task a great deal: 'On the Epistle of James…there is not much to say. He is certainly a "witness" who has perceived "it", only that he, against a somehow

[90] *EkEJ*, p. 133.
[91] *EkEJ*, pp. XVI-XVII. We will return to the Münster James lectures in chapter 5.

bogged down Christianity, speaks one-sidedly as a preacher of repentance and always ad hominem, to the individual as such.'[92] This somewhat jaundiced assessment notwithstanding, in his lectures Barth strove to see the virtue precisely in preaching repentance 'one-sidedly'.

Indeed, one of the most attractive things about these lectures is Barth's willingness to think with James, all the way to taking the epistle's side, after a fashion, against Paul in the 'stracks wider Sanct Paulum'. Barth's reading of this passage exemplifies his resolute commitment to let the terms of the individual text dictate its reading, and it serves as a capstone to Barth's exegesis. Whereas in Ephesians the basic theological problematic was how humanity is to be understood as summoned and determined by eschatological existence in Christ, here it is how God is understood as present and determining of the concrete existence of humanity.

By 1942, when Barth came to write the ethics of the doctrine of God in *Church Dogmatics* II/2, he had come to see both the one-sidedness and this focus on the relation between God and moral action with more appreciation: 'There is no New Testament text that presents the Gospel to men so emphatically and unwaveringly, so consistently from the standpoint of the divine claim, as the Epistle of James.'[93] While Barth read chapter 1 of Ephesians as a high-level account of the foundation of Christian existence, James is explicitly concerned with the moral theology which describes this existence. The challenge the text represents to Barth theologically is how its moral exhortation does not become a second, anthropologically grounded domain of ethical reflection that can be leveraged for self-establishment. Much as in the Ephesians lectures, here Barth is as concerned with identifying how this claim can be communicated as he is in the theological structure of that communication. It is to that end that Barth finds attention to the rhetorical mode of James as the 'preacher of repentance' necessary first in order to set up the theological dynamics of the moral exhortation that occupies the bulk of the epistle. In turn, the theological framework of James's ethics leads Barth to offer a provocative reading of the passage on faith works, through which he mounts a criticism of certain habits of theological interpretation.

1.2.1 Preacher of Repentance

Many of the distinguishing features of the Ephesians lecture cycle are visible in the James. A similar structural choice to divide the grammatical and textual questions (*Wort- und Sacherklärung*) from the analysis of the text's argument is maintained, here even more

[92] Barth, 1.23.23 in *B-Th 1921-1930*, p. 134.
[93] *CD* II/2, §37 p. 588.

formally in the Ephesians lectures.[94] Barth spends the entirety of the first lecture hour outlining the various positions in the debate over the authorship of James and the date of its writing, and while he concludes that the epistle is best thought of as published sometime in the first century C.E.[95] and that no genuine certainty about the identity of the author is likely to be had,[96] it is the claim made that the author is 'God's and the Lord Jesus Christ's servant' that truly interests him.[97] Again, there is a claim made by the author to speak of God, and it is this claim that is decisive for interpreting the text.

Yet James's aphoristic or proverbial quality presents a problem to saying what this claim might be. Does one undertake an exposition of the text as though each fragment was explicable separately, or does one strive to find the logic relating each one to another? Against Luther's dismissal of James as 'disordered with one thing on top of another',[98] Barth argues that 'there is always a thread picked up'[99] by each new section. This 'thread' is something of a thesis statement for these lectures, wherein Barth differentiates himself from other approaches to James and sets the distinctly moral edge that will characterise his exposition:

> Characteristic of James's personality, as he encounters us in his letter, is the *call to repentance* (*Bußruf*). I do not say what is often heard: active Christianity or practical Christianity. This does not hit upon the object (*Sache*). James is also not interested in action or praxis, not in a secondary matter, but in God. But he speaks of God in the form of the call to repentance and not, or nearly not, in any other way. I say 'call to repentance' in a biblical sense, which does not call upon the impious, not the outsiders, not the ungodly, but rather the pious, the insiders, the Jews, the Jewish-Christians or Christians, in any event those already in fellowship with God to return (*Umkehr*) to God.[100]

Barth will steadily unfold the fragments of James along these lines, showing how the movement of James's thought shows that the moral situation of the Christian is explicable only in light of the doctrine of God, and that the doctrine of God is the basis for moral action.

Barth's approach in these lectures is best thought of as testing and proving this basic theological claim in each section, thereby not accruing new information as the lectures go on but repeatedly re-situating himself in the same basic understanding as James considers fresh

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[94] Barth brings attention to this habit explicitly at the beginning of one lecture, *EkEJ*, p. 246. See also the use of Roman numerals to mark out the distinction in this manuscript for the lectures covering Jms 1:9-11 on pp. 288 and pp. 300. He repeats this device in the next section, Jms 1:12-19a, and then drops it for the reminder of the lectures.
[95] *EkEJ*, p. 166.
[96] *EkEJ*, p. 172.
[97] *EkEJ*, pp. 188-194.
[98] Cited by Barth *EkEJ*, p. 178.
[99] *EkEJ*, p. 246.
[100] *EkEJ*, pp. 184-186.

situations. So, first I will give the general shape of Barth's claims, and then show how these are worked out in some instances of his exegesis.

1.2.2 God and Moral Theology

The intended audience of James's message, though geographically diffuse, is a specific community, not an object of mission, but one that needs reminding of their basic constitution in relation to God. So, '[t]he attitude of the letter writer or speaker to the readers is analytic, not synthetic, pastoral and not missional, establishing anew, not initiating...'[101] Written to an audience that is somehow at risk of error or sin, James's message is a diagnosis and criticism of the basis of these risks. So, in Barth's terms, James is 'whether we like it or not, determinedly a psychologist.'[102] That is, James takes his bearings from an understanding of the moral failings to which the religious, or those who are called by God and at risk of becoming religious, are prey and addresses them on those terms.

This ethically specific, critical stance of James to a group already 'standing with God' is what Barth means by James's 'call to repentance'. It is analytic, not synthetic, because it is critical within the presupposition of the Gospel. It is not new information, but a reminder of what is already known. This is a central ordering claim for Barth: that the threat of judgment expressed by James is itself an expression of good news and as such a reminder of it. The force of the threat of judgment is to lead to a position 'when nearly only the mercy of *God* comes into consideration, then indeed the *Gospel* that waits here...is not completely hidden.'[103] Thus the call to repentance presupposes the waiting Gospel, so that the one is not present without the other: 'When you hear the call to repentance, how is it you cannot hear the Gospel?'

As he does more explicitly in lectures on Zwingli, his primary course of that term,[104] Barth is working towards an articulation of how an uncompromising transcendence in the doctrine of God would not undermine human moral existence.[105] For Barth's understanding of James's moral horizon this is central, because it means that the call to action from James to his readers is not prior to, but within the sphere of God's action. Put differently, the moral

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[101] *EkEJ*, p. 198.
[102] *EkEJ*, p. 212. Not a word often spoken positively by Barth.
[103] *EkEJ*, p. 316.
[104] Barth's teaching load was usually divided between a primary and a secondary course offering, with the primary meeting for either two or four hours a week, and the secondary usually for one. See Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: his life from letters and autobiographical texts* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1976), p. 128; p. 344.
[105] See Webster, *Barth's Earlier Theology*, pp. 17f.

exhortation of James's epistle presupposes that God's action towards creatures is not stultifying to human moral life.

The burden of Barth's exposition of James is therefore to demonstrate how God's action towards creatures enables the moral existence that James inhabits and to which he calls his readers. To illustrate this, Barth shows that James draws on the doctrine of God in two key instances: first, God the *giving* God of wisdom in 1:5 and second, the 'Father of Lights' who gives 'all good gifts and all perfect bounty' in 1:17.

In 1:5, James instructs his readers that if they lack wisdom they should ask for it as God gives 'to all readily and without shaming'. What is the meaning of these two qualifications? They do not simply express God's power and goodness, but designate the way God has chosen to establish creatures in relation to himself. So God's giving 'readily' is God's unforced desire to give to creatures what they lack; it is '*creatio ex nihilo*, absolute freedom of God, but freedom that he uses to give us what is necessary'.[106] Conversely, God's giving without shaming reveals what creatures need, that is, exposes their limits, but in such a way that the creature is not reduced but has their integrity established: 'God gives, he allows, in fact he bids that we, who can forget that we are only human, to be only human, and as such be in the peace of his hands. He does not throw us down, but places us on our feet. He does not slay us, but rather makes us live!'[107] The more formal point, that God's relation to his creation should be construed in non-competitive terms, is not registered for its own sake, but to direct the reader to the moral existence that God's actions make possible. God's character as the 'God who gives'[108] (*Gebergott*) is foremost a call to action, fundamentally a response action in prayer. Those who recognize who God is, and their own lack of wisdom, will not 'sink into wistful tranquillity, nor into pious passivity, he prays. Prayer is also a work. Perhaps the most concentrated. In any event the most necessary.'[109]

This concurrence between the doctrine of God and ethics is well illustrated by Barth's handling of 1:13-17, in particular the confession that God is one 'in whom there is no change (*Veränderung*)'. While the contrast between God and creation is given *via negativa* by starkly laying out creation's flux against God's uncreated constancy, this claim militates

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[106] *EkEJ*, p. 266.
[107] *EkEJ*, p. 266.
[108] *EkEJ*, p. 248.
[109] *EkEJ*, p. 270. This anticipates a theme that will occupy Barth through to his mature theology. See Barth, *The Christian Life,* trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.:William B. Eerdmans, 1981), §76 esp. pp. 85-109, also Eberhard Jüngel, 'Invocation of God as the ethical ground of Christian action. Introductory remarks on the posthumous fragments of Karl Barth's ethics of the doctrine of reconciliation', in *Theological Essays I*, trans. by J. B. Webster (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), pp. 154-172.

against the temptation to divest oneself of ethical responsibility. God's unchanging nature tells us what kind of gifts are given. So, 1:17 is a continuation of God the giver in 1:5, 'while there, where [James] spoke of *prayer*, he portrayed [God] as the *God who gives*, while here, where he deals with the nature of his gift, he depicts his *immutability* (*Unwandelbarkeit*), his unambiguity, his unity in himself, and indeed his *essence* (*Wesen*) as the good and perfect'.[110] The distinction between portraits of God is not the accumulation of information, despite the *via negativa* formulation–'[i]n the background stands revelation, which alone can tell us, who and what God is'[111]–but the insight that responding to ethical failure, such as seeking to relieve one's responsibility by citing God as the tempter, is most effectively done by turning to the appropriate feature of God's character.[112]

Barth is finding the biblical language for a positive account of freedom that stands on different grounds than the Kant-Rousseau autonomy thesis, despite drawing on some neo-Kantian vocabulary to do so.[113] What Barth finds in James's deployment of the doctrine of God in ethics is a way of taking human action seriously in relative, not absolute freedom and spontaneity: 'The originality, the autonomy of human understanding, this is no given, it is relative to the origin of all originality (*Ursprung aller Ursprünge*), and only in it, this enduring, newly consummated relation, is [human understanding] genuine and valuable.'[114] It is important to register that this is the *basis* of ethics, for thinking of human action in meaningful ethical terms, not theological ratification of prior ethical convictions, developed without reference or recourse to the Gospel. What James is after on Barth's account, is not the solution to specific ethical problems (despite the recurrence of specific ethical situations, such as the rich and the poor in the church, 2:2-6) but that his audience would remember that God's freedom and sovereignty means their own freedom and meaningful action.

Despite the at times fragmentary nature of the material, the basic coordinates of Barth's reading of James are discerned easily enough. In what remains of this chapter, I want to consider how Barth's handling of the notorious passage on faith and works (2:14-26), and

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[110] *EkEJ*, pp. 342-344.
[111] *EkEJ*, p. 360.
[112] *EkEJ*, pp. 358-360.
[113] On *Ursprung* as a central concept for Marburg neo-Kantianism and its relative importance to Barth, see Johann Friedrich Lohmann, *Karl Barth und der Neukantianismus* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 280-306. On the Kantian accounts of autonomy, and the 'Kantian paradox' of needing to authorise the laws for oneself by which one must be governed as being the defining problem of post-Kantian German philosophy, see, in a vast field, Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 59-60. Though his criticism of Barth does not always convince, John Macken provides a helpful overview of the issues with reference to the *Church Dogmatics*. See John Macken SJ, *The Autonomy Theme in the* Church Dogmatics*: Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 1-25.
[114] *EkEJ*, p. 262.

particularly his reflections on the relationship between the different voices of the Bible, takes its cues from the nature of moral existence that we have seen thus far.

1.2.3. 'Stracks wider Sanct Paulum'

Barth leaves a single lecture hour, the final one of the term, to the passage on faith and works and the question of conflict with Paul. Though Barth has often used Paul as a foil to illustrate the distinctiveness of James throughout the lectures, the verses on faith and works provide him the opportunity to pose the question outright. Yet Barth does not want to simply try and read Paul against James or search for a harmony between the two. This passage will be best understood, Barth thinks, if the reader lets James be James, instead of engaging in 'Unionspolitik'.[115] But this bit of ground clearing is only preparing for what Barth considers the real challenge of James's teaching on faith and works. It is not against Paul's writings (for example Romans 5 or 8), but nonetheless against Paul's ideas or more precisely, against *Paulinism*.[116] What can Barth mean by this? Barth does not think it is possible to interpret this passage of James without reference to Paul, as simply an independent voice within the Early Church.[117] Rather, both the likely date of the epistle (somewhere in the first century C.E.)[118] and the precise character of his attack on faith without works strongly indicates that Paul's writings were 'in the air' and had established themselves as an influence, with avowed adherents in the church, which had formed a 'Paulist school'.[119] So, Barth reads this section of James as an instance of theological critique, of the kind that James has been engaged in since the beginning of the book.

The primary object of James's critique is a misplaced understanding of the role of πίστις in the Christian life, specifically an un-dynamic account of faith that avoids the morally involving, active existence of Christians.[120] James is *sceptical*, here, not constructive. He is not switching modes to argue for a newly minted union between faith and works but rather once again addressing a moral failing by thinking through the consequences of the doctrine of God.[121] Thus, we have been well prepared by Barth's handling of the ethical import of James for the thrust of this argument. Any notion of faith that does not see its

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[115] *EkEJ*, p. 478.
[116] *EkEJ*, p. 488-492.
[117] *EkEJ*, p. 486.
[118] *EkEJ*, p. 166, see the discussion above on Barth's approach to the dating of James.
[119] *EkEJ*, p. 486-470.
[120] *EkEJ*, p. 472-480.
[121] *EkEJ*, p. 492.

consequences in the life of the creature, that is, in action, cannot be of any genuine value.[122] Again, we see the force of the connection that Barth identifies between God's action towards creatures as a giver, including giving faith, and the corresponding establishment of the creature, furnished now with moral agency. That faith could somehow be severed from this is ruled out of court. However the relationship with Paul himself is construed, '[w]hat James wants to say in his understanding, is simply right.'[123]

This understanding of the relation between Paul and James leads Barth to a discussion of this conflict in relation to the basis of scriptural unity, and how different modes of interpretation imply an errant understanding of that basis. While Barth acknowledges that James's target is a kind of entrenchment of Paul's ideas rather than Paul himself, he still considers James a counter voice to Paul in the New Testament:

> It remains a remarkable fact that the New Testament undoubtedly gives us this drama: *one* Apostle, who quite unmistakably goes about the work of simply *overthrowing*, like Gideon and the Altar of Baal at Ophra, the teaching of *another*, who is of course the biggest of all and in all Christian centuries if not the most understood, nonetheless the most read and the possessor of the most authority.[124]

Barth is putting his understanding of the divine agency behind the text of Scripture to work. It is important to note that Barth is not primarily asking whether or not a doctrinal solution is possible to the conflict between James and Paul, but rather indicating that there is an inappropriate stance in relationship to the biblical text taken by those who seek doctrinal solutions first. The error that comes from trying to harmonize Paul and James, or of privileging one over the other, as Luther did, is in both cases the same: both seek to circumvent the immediate claim of the author is making on his readers. Such a move not only fails by attempting to inoculate one's self from the spiritual challenge of the text, it also does not recognise that the New Testament as a whole reflects the tension that Barth drew attention to in Paul's language in Ephesians:

> Whoever does not note that one can in no way read the New Testament as a whole as a sourcebook for proper dogmatic sentences, while it puts its own distinctive dogmatic sentences to the question...whoever does not notice here, what clearly is to be noticed by the collection of the New Testament canon: that the New Testament as a whole does not deal in –isms, but with an object (*Gegenstand*) that lies beyond all, including all apostolic, -isms, will have great difficulty noticing it at all.[125]

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[122] *EkEJ*, p. 492.
[123] *EkEJ*, p. 518.
[124] *EkEJ*, p. 488.
[125] *EkEJ*, p. 488-490.

When we come to interpret the texts in the New Testament, and this instance of James and Paul is a prime example, we must consider the same theological (and so ethical) horizons to which James has pointed us. Barth's analysis of the conflict between Paul and James turns on each author addressed and established as an individual before God, and this alone can be the content of their message. In part the counter-point within the New Testament is corrective, discouraging the sovereignty of one individual's ideas over another, but more profoundly it is a product of the individual character of the human's relation to God, and the moral terms within which they act.

As a critical move, Barth's reading of this text is bold. How does it not signal the collapse of the New Testament as a whole? In a rather compressed move, Barth invokes the work of the Spirit as the origin of the Bible's unity. The role of the Spirit is fairly underdetermined, and Barth lacks more than a passing reference to the canon as a part of the work of God in the history of the church.[126] There is thus an ambiguity to this move. He is both highly, even provocatively, critical of readings of the Biblical text that have doctrinal unity in view. At the same time, Barth also considers this necessary for the individual claim made by the apostles to be heard. This can helpfully be seen in light of his broader concern in these lectures to show how God's sovereignty grounds the moral action of the creature, as it is not in general terms, but in immediate action. It is unclear, however, if the Spirit is the guarantee of the unity of the New Testament witness, and divine agent behind the individual apostolic communication, why doctrinal readings should be an avoidance of the texts claims. Barth's comments here are more suggestive than elaborated, but the preference of thinking of moral and spiritual existence in terms of encounter, and in some sense inherently conflictual, is evident.

1.3 Conclusion

Towards the end of the letter reporting on his exchange with Hirsch, Barth ruminates on his position in the academy, and wryly suggests that he can look forward to the same 'splendid isolation' among the theologians as he had enjoyed in the state church.[127] Such isolation must have seemed to Barth both a challenge and a mark of his success, as he sought to differentiate his own theological commitments from those regnant in the university, of which he was so critical. To whatever degree Barth may have taken pleasure in his outsider status, he was aware it was not on its own a mark of theological probity, but at best its by-

[126] *EkEJ*, p. 490.
[127] Barth, 26.2.1922, in *B-Th 1921-1930*, p. 50.

product. The isolation of the apostle is a consequence of an affirmation that they have authority to speak of God, but this authority is given in order to communicate. Somewhat removed from the bravado of Barth's preface to *Romans I*, where he claims that his commentary, like the epistle, 'has time to wait',[128] these early university lectures stress that the apostolic message and the audience of faith presuppose one another. It is, therefore, one of the features of the Bible that while it is essential that the apostle is authoritative, it is also the goal of the apostle to bring his audience to the same standpoint that he himself occupied before God.

This parity between the apostle and his audience before God may, however, tends to collapse the difference between the apostolic witness and the receptive faith of the reader. As God is encountered, then, the biblical witness may be left behind, making the Bible a pedagogic text of the type Stanley Fish has called 'self-consuming artifacts'. Such works are designed to effect a change in the reader or hearer that, if successful, exhaust any further use for the text. The text of the bible then would be a 'vehicle for its own abandonment'.[129] When Barth says that the goal of following after Paul is to come to the place where Jesus Christ himself can speak, it does raise the question of what further use Paul can have once such an event occurs. If this is a defect, it is not because Barth wants to the sacralise the text, but because he wants to avoid faith becoming a subjective standard by which all else is measured. The risk of collapsing the difference between the reader and the apostle is that it may be the reader who determines the outcome of the encounter, rather than a sign that she has submitted to the apostle's authority.

In the Ephesians and James lectures, Barth offered two ways to avoid this charge. The first, most prominently employed in the Ephesians lectures, is to stress the eschatological nature of divine presence, such that coming to the place where Christ speaks is neither a human achievement nor a fixed position. Rather, the task of following Paul is passive and expectant of divine action, and as such iterative. On this reading the text is never 'consumed' by the human reader, though it may yet be put aside by the divine speaker. The second strategy that we saw in the lectures on James is to note that while there is a plurality of biblical authors, there is one divine speaker whose word cannot be comprehended by the many together anymore than it could be by one singly. And so the Bible does not contain the raw material for the reproduction of the divine word in some kind of systematic fashion, and

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[128] Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922* Preface, p. 4 ET, p. 2.
[129] See Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1972), pp. 1-77, esp. p. 3.

so cannot render itself redundant. As we noted earlier, this compressed and fairly formal appeal to the Spirit's work seems to discourage an expansive reading of the Bible that strives towards unity, in favour of a more intense focus on the specific witness of individual authors. There is then in both cases significant pressure placed on the individual author and their claim and summons to the reader which is off-set by an appeal to God's sovereignty over the author and reader.

On such grounds stands Oswald Bayer's argument that Barth, who on Bayer's reading labours under a vestigial Kantianism, does not have a theology of Scripture at all. Rather, he seeks to bypass the text in favour of an encounter with the author that is itself made possible by, and passes into, an eschatological encounter with God. The text of the Bible, as a material and linguistic object, has no presence in Barth's thought and does not contribute to his understanding of revelation and its reception. The consequence is that Barth can never get beyond an Enlightenment desire for ahistorical knowledge, at whose root, thinks Bayer, is a theological failure to reckon seriously with the meaning of the incarnation for the character and limits of theological judgment. This a theological failure, but also a moral one, as it is indicative of a desire to avoid the chastening ascetics of faith.[130]

As I will show in chapters 4 and 5, this charge does not meet its target. Further, Bayer's investment in counter-Enlightenment figures like J.G. Hamann incline him to see in Barth's account of divine transcendence an essentially contentless *noumena* that is played off against and de-values phenomena.[131] There is already material in Barth's earlier thought to counter this assessment, and in his mature thought this does not stand up to scrutiny. Nonetheless, we can see where these early lectures open themselves up to Bayer's basic charge. More importantly, Bayer's criticism is helpful because it touches on a point we have seen Barth take great care to emphasise, which is that the theological character of the Bible involves an unavoidable moral demand on the reader. Failure to attend to this moral demand will entail a failure to come to theological understanding. In the end, I will argue that Bayer's criticism of Barth fails, though not because Barth becomes interested in the theological meaning of text *qua* text to any great degree. It will, however, have a good deal to do with the meaning of the incarnation. At this stage, however, we should register that what Bayer desires to secure in focusing on text, Barth will do in claiming relations of authority. First,

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[130] Oswald Bayer, *Autorität und Kritik: zu Hermeneutik und Wissenschaftstheorie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991), pp.13-14.

[131] The fate of post-Kantian theology, including Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, is to always turn history into metaphysics, fatally denying the Word from the Cross as *sub Pontio Pilato*. See Bayer *Autorität* pp. 119-120.

though, it will be helpful to set the basic tension that we have seen in these early lectures within the historical context of Barth's own thought and his own early systematic reflections on the authority of Scripture for Christian theology. At this stage, Barth wants the Bible to be the authoritative witness to revelation, while also wanting to deny that it stands between the believer and God in the event of revelation. This leaves Barth in a precarious position, where he may be accused of the same inability to properly distinguish between faith and its object of which he accused Schleiermacher and his epigones. We saw how, especially in the James lectures, the appeal to the Spirit sought to check this possibility. In the next chapter, we will see how this tension is not just a feature of these lectures, but a broader feature of Barth's thought.

Chapter 2. Barth and the Scripture Principle

In the first chapter, I argued that a basic tension can be discerned in Barth's exegesis of Ephesians and James between God's sovereignty and the communication of revelation to faith. Much of this study is concerned with showing how Barth wrestled with this tension exegetically. In this chapter, however, we will take a different view of the same problem, through the lens of Barth's historical theology from the period. This will be helpful for two reasons. Most baldly, it demonstrates that Barth was not a compartmental thinker, but a synthesising one. While a synoptic portrait of Barth is not in view here, it is nonetheless necessary to see how Barth is working through a number of similar issues in his other thinking as he is exegetically. Secondly, and more directly related to the argument of this thesis, it examines Barth's emerging sense during the early period of his academic career that his instincts about the reading of Scripture and its place in Christian reflection had their natural home in the Reformed theological tradition. Barth comes to articulate his understanding of the Bible and its authority in self-consciously Reformed terms, while also making use of that tradition to distinguish himself from the alternatives offered by Roman Catholic and neo-Protestantism, largely in its Lutheran guise. In this chapter, I will show that Barth is interacting with a line of 19th-century theology that has received fairly little notice in the literature, and how this interaction is important for understanding the tension we find in his exegesis.

I will focus on the claims Barth makes about the Scripture Principle in his lectures on the Reformed Confessions, which were given in the S.S. of 1923.[132] Though these lectures are a work of historical theology, it can also reasonably read as Barth's first foray into dogmatics, as he is prompted by the variety of confessional texts to make some judgments about the systematic ordering of Christian theology. For our purposes, the most important judgment Barth makes here is on the role of the Protestant Scripture Principle for theological thinking. Moreover, the terms that Barth uses remain largely unchanged throughout his writings. It is a recurring claim in the explicit statements Barth made about the place of the Bible in the Christian theology after 1920 to the *Church Dogmatics* that the Scripture Principle is formal, and that it holds priority in demarcating the material content of the Christian confession.[133] There is a tension between the formal and the material, which is most

[132] A number of important themes discussed here are already present in his lectures on Calvin (1922) and Zwingli (1922/1923). See Wood, *Interpretation*, pp. 27-33 and Webster, *Earlier Theology*, pp. 15-40.
[133] See *TrB*, p. 71 ET, p. 43; 'Reformierte Lehre, ihr Wesen und ihre Aufgabe' (1923), in *VA 1922-1925*, pp. 223-224; 'Das Schriftprinzip der reformierten Kirche', in *Op. cit.*, pp. 520-525, pp. 532 n. at; *UCR I*, p. 271 ET, 220, p. 304 ET, p. 249, pp. 366f. ET, p. 302f.; *ChrD*, p. 505, p. 568; *CD* I/2, §19 p. 535.

clear in relation to the order of dogmatic thinking, where the formal Scripture Principle is played off against the material principle of justification by faith. Barth considers the priority of the latter in Lutheran theology to account for a number of the ills he diagnoses in modern Protestantism.[134]

Recent scholarship has rightly drawn attention to the impact of Barth's immersion in the classic texts of the Reformed tradition on his understanding of Scripture.[135] While this is a necessary corrective to those portraits of Barth that suggest his primary interlocutors were critical or dialectical thinkers like Kierkegaard and Franz Overbeck, it can also obscure how Barth not only continued to argue with the modern theological legacy, but often appropriated its terms while putatively retrieving classical Reformed thought. Barth's use of the 'two principles' of Protestantism to order the relationship of Scripture to Christian thought is an instance of this kind. This is not to deny the impact of Calvin, Zwingli, and the Reformed confessional tradition, but it is to be clearer on the contest in which he enlisted them.

What I will argue in this chapter is that in his judgment about the ordering of the 'two principles' of Protestantism, Barth is addressing not just the technical terms of Protestantism as a *wissenschaftlich* discipline, but a long-standing debate on how to properly account for biblical authority without thereby generating morally and spiritually pernicious servitude on the part of the believer. Immanuel Kant had articulated this worry before the turn of the 19th-century. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*[2], he distinguished between the universal and historical tasks of expositing Scripture. The former makes plain that in its historical and metaphysical trappings the Bible teaches a common morality, while the latter investigates the historicity of its authors and its manuscripts. For that 'ecclesiastical' faith that cannot prise these two elements apart, faith gets transferred from the matter itself to those equipped to understand its historical form:

> As regards ecclesiastical faith, there is no avoiding the fact that historical faith ultimately becomes just a faith in scholars and in their insight–a circumstance that does not, indeed, particularly redound to the honour of human nature, but which can be made good through public freedom of thought.[136]

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[134] See especially *TrB*, p. 102, ET, p. 64; *UCR I*, pp. 365-366 ET, p. 302; *ChrDg*, pp. 569-572.
[135] See Wood, *Interpretation,* pp. 24-43, esp. pp 24-26; Webster, *Earlier Theology*, pp. 41-66; Matthias Freudenberger, *Karl Barth und die reformierte Theologie* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchner Verlag, 1997), pp. 238-245.
[136] Immanuel Kant, *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*[2] (1794), trans. George di Giovanni, in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason and Other Writings* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 121-122.

Kant touches here on an anxiety evident in the thought of a number mainstream19th-century Protestant German theologians that preserving the authoritative role of the Bible would result in just such a morally and spiritually pernicious transfer of authority to an elite class of expositor. The normative role for the Bible easily transforms into a normative role for spiritual or moral expertise, and so undermines both the universal power of Christian claims and the universal accessibility of genuine faith. As for most, jettisoning the Bible as authoritative altogether was unpalatable, they sought to 'make good' the problems inherent in the Bible's normative role by rethinking the logic of that normativity.

In the first section, I propose to show how the arrangement of Protestantism's 'two principles' offered the opportunity for some key figures of the Protestant mainstream to handle such anxieties about the normative role of the Bible in Christian thought. This history will be important for understanding Barth's reversal of what he took to be the broadly Lutheran priority of the material principle of justification by faith. While Barth understood himself to be reversing a 19th-century trend towards making faith the object of theological inquiry, which was abetted by the priority of the material principle, he also shares a number of the same anxieties about the Bible's potentially independent spiritual authority. Barth's appropriation of Wilhelm Herrmann's account of faith as a personal relation to God exemplifies this tension. Turning therefore to Herrmann in the second section, I show how Herrmann's account of faith is particularly relevant to his understanding of biblical authority. When turning to Barth's own lectures on the Reformed Confessions in the third section, it is his debt to Herrmann that makes his account of the formal priority of Scripture both so distinctive and problematic.

2.1 The Two Principles of Protestantism: Against a False Obedience

When Barth notes the historically contingent nature of the two principles distinction, he is echoing a judgment made before the 19th-century was over. Albrecht Ritschl's 1875 essay 'On the two Principles of Protestantism'[137] sets out to investigate the legitimacy of the distinction, and its necessity in Protestant thought. He traces roots of such an effort to the turn of the century, as a response to pressures both from rationalists and Roman Catholics to

[137] Albrecht Ritschl, 'Ueber die beiden Principien des Protestantismus' (1875), in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Freiburg i. B.; Leipzig: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1893), pp. 234-247. Though polemical, this essay remains one of the best treatments of a subject that has not received a great deal of attention in modern scholarship. Christine Axt-Piscalar's discussion of the two principles in relation to Isaak Dorner is most sensitive to the theological significance of the topic. See Axt-Piscalar, *Der Grund des Glaubens* (Tübingen: J.C.B Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1990), pp. 7-26.

articulate how Protestantism could be thought of as a coherent set of ideas rather than a relatively *ad hoc* collection of confessional commitments. He judges this effort to be unfruitful. The dominant formulation was to demarcate the formal from the material principle, with the formal being Holy Scripture and the material being justification by faith. Proponents of this formulation presented it as capturing the essence of Protestantism as it was developed in the theology of the magisterial Reformers. Yet, Ritschl argued, such a distinction could not be traced to the magisterial Reformers and further exhibited no consistent formulation until August Twesten in 1825. In sum, the distinction was dubious and inconsistently formulated, and need not exert any sway on Protestant theology.[138]

What Ritschl provides in his brief history is an account of a basic problem of 19th-century Protestant thought: the relationship between the claims of faith and the external, historical forms of Christian religion. The Bible is a point of difficulty because it is not immediately clear on which side of the divide it is to fall, and whether or not its authority derives from its relation to faith or from its historical reliability. For all the thinkers surveyed here, however, it was of primary importance that faith not be made subservient to external forms.[139] The chief interest is how this concern exerted pressure on the normative role of the Bible for these thinkers.

To that end, a brief consideration of two of the major figures that Ritschl discusses in his essay, August Twesten and Friedrich Schleiermacher, along with Ritschl himself, will show that their efforts to articulate the relationship between the reality of faith and the Bible evinces a consistent logic. All three of them more or less explicitly do so in terms of the notion of two principles in Protestantism. Ritschl credits August Twesten with giving the material/formal distinction its (supposedly) definitive form, so we will begin with Twesten's account, given in his 1826 Dogmatics lectures.

What stands out in Twesten is that the material/formal distinction is a provisional one. In fact, the distinction is ultimately perspectival: 'Above all, objective and subjective, material and formal, can be as one; their differences arise only as we understand one and the same

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[138] Ritschl's former student Ferdinand Kattenbusch would echo this judgment in his article on Protestantism for the *Realenzyklopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche*[3] *Bd. 16* (1905) (Leipzig: J.C. Heinrichs, 1896-1913), pp. 146ff. What is instructive is that both Ritschl and Kattenbusch suggest that the search for defining 'principles' is a rationalist hold over, while re-purposing the basic distinction to their own ends.

[139] Cf. Claude Welch's account of the 'turn to subject' in 19th-century theology as part of the struggle to overcome the challenge of historicism. What is crucial is that Bible and church tradition were not dismissed by the mainstream of theologians, but the relationship between them and the self in faith became newly fraught. See Welch, *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, *Vol. 1: 1799-1870* (Eugene, Org.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), pp. 59-64.

[thing] from different sides…'[140] Twesten goes on to ground this unity in the 'gift and work of God's grace in us'.[141] The unity of God's grace in the individual determines how Twesten develops his account of the Bible as the formal principle: 'The return to the original revelation in Scripture is…the formal principle of Protestantism. In its critical use it seeks to distinguish in all that presents itself as Christian truth, that which is human and so under suspicion…from that which lets itself be justified from the Scriptures as the undiluted source of divine revelation.'[142] We can observe two functions of Scripture in this account, a critical and a constitutive. It is notable, then, that when Twesten goes on to discuss biblical authority as a whole, the constitutive role is largely fulfilled by the presence of the Spirit. Twesten sits lightly on the Bible's external features and its intellectual content as the means of its normativity, for the Spirit brings the biblical content from 'mere thought or understanding (*Gedächtniß oder Verstande*)' to 'living in the heart'.[143] The Bible's textual character is not incidental to its constitutive function (it retains historical precedence), but Twesten's stress on the unity of the principles wrought by the Spirit in the individual tends to see the Bible's critical function as separable from its constitutive role. The critical function recedes as the work of the Spirit bringing understanding of the unity of grace in the individual progresses. As a formal principle, then, one aspect of the Bible's function is subordinated by the ongoing work of the Spirit in the individual.

We can understand Twesten's aim in his discussion of the two principles as seeking to avoid giving an account of the Bible's role that gives rise to a spiritually damaging authority, which manifests itself in the Bible assuming a false externality to faith. The goal of the Spirit's work is for a perfect unity between the understanding and faith of the individual with the Bible as the 'source' of revelation. As long as the Bible is taken to be in some sense normative, distinct from the working of the Spirit in faith, it takes up a false externality and dogmatics becomes a 'work of the letter'.[144] What is crucial to see is that the means of avoiding such a work of the letter is to stress the working of the Spirit in the individual to produce the present reality of faith.

This need to specify how the Bible's normative role does not give rise to false authority recurs at several points in Friedrich Schleiermacher's account of the Bible's normative

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[140] August Twesten, *Vorlesungen über die Dogmatik der Evangelisch-Lutherisch Kirche Bd. I* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1826), p. 283.
[141] Twesten, *Vorlesungen*, p. 283.
[142] Twesten, *Vorlesungen*, p. 280.
[143] Twesten, *Vorlesungen*, pp. 296-297.
[144] Twesten, *Vorlesungen*, p. 296.

function. While we cannot offer a full account of Schleiermacher's doctrine of Scripture, we can note that his worry about how certain construals of the Bible's normative role lead to a false obedience.[145] The most well-known consequence of this concern is when, in *The Christian Faith*[2] (1831), Schleiermacher argues that the Bible cannot be the source of faith. Rather, faith must be 'presupposed' if Scripture's 'eminence' (*Ansehen*) is to be understood.[146] His primary argument against faith finding its basis in Scripture is that it entails rationalism: if the eminence of Scripture is not grounded in faith, the only remaining option is 'common reason'. Such a rationalism would make faith superfluous to knowing Christ, but more importantly it would introduce an untoward spiritual hierarchy within the church. The scholarly classes, he supposes, would have access to faith that the rest of the community does not enjoy.[147] In Schleiermacher's view, this would result in the Protestant church reproducing the hierarchy of priest and laity found in Catholicism, leaving the majority of Christians only an 'absolutely obedient faith'. Proper relation to the Bible, to be in 'living orbit' to it, cannot be predicated on the capacity to produce 'evidence' (*Beweis*) of it being God's revelation.

Faith can be the source of the Bible's eminence as opposed to the reverse because Schleiermacher uncouples revelation from Scripture. As recent commentators have noted, this is not to deny the Bible a normative role, but it is to put the priority on the Spirit's activity in the community and the individual.[148] As with Twesten, we can distinguish the Bible's constitutive function from its critical one. Scripture's eminence, and so its constitutive normativity, arises from its proximity to the original apostolic impression of Christ.[149] It is the Spirit who bears the original impression of Christ to the individual in faith and shapes the community of faith. Scripture is expressive of this faith, rather than its source. As the church progresses through history, the Bible functions critically by judging the degree to which church confessions accord with the original impression of Christ, but this is in itself

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[145] For recent treatments of this neglected topic see Dawn DeVries, 'Rethinking the Scripture Principle: Friedrich Schleiermacher and the Role of the Bible in the Church', in *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity*, ed. Wallace M. Alston and Michael Welker (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 294-310 and Paul T. Nimmo, 'Schleiermacher on Scripture and the Work of Jesus Christ', *Modern Theology* 31 no. 1 (January 2015), pp. 60-90. I am particularly indebted to Paul Nimmo's article for bringing aspects of Schleiermacher's account of the constitutive and critical normativity of Scripture to light.

[146] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der christliche Glaube. Zweite Ausgabe. KGA I.13,2 (*Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), p. 316. H.R. Mackintosh errs, it seems to me, in translating *Ansehn* as 'authority', as it obscures Schleiermacher's aim of rethinking what it means for Scripture to be normative in the church. See *The Christian Faith*, trans. H.R. Mackintosh (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), p. 591. Cf. Nimmo 'Schleiermacher on Scripture', p. 66.

[147] Schleiermacher, *christliche Glaube,* pp. 316-317 ET, pp. 591-592.

[148] See on this point DeVries, 'Rethinking', pp. 297-298 and Nimmo, 'Scripture', p. 81.

[149] Schleiermacher, *christliche Glaube*, pp. 321-327, esp. pp. 325-327 ET, pp. 597-600.

a relative function, not an absolute one. In §135, Schleiermacher notes that in the church's 'Ministry of the Word', the Bible's critical function is a feature of the church's ongoing sanctification and so at some stage the critical use of Scripture will pass away and there will be 'immediate certainty of the scriptural nature of both doctrine and morals (*der Glaubenssätze und der Lebensregel*).'[150] This helps us understand the force of his earlier worry about 'obedient faith'. If the Bible somehow comes to be the norm of faith in a manner external to it, then critical and constitutive functions of the Bible merge, and faith can never attain certainty as to the scriptural, that is, original, character of its doctrine and morals. There would always be an aspect of the Bible that is unassimilable by faith.

Schleiermacher gives explicit voice to this concern in his posthumously published lectures on Christian ethics.[151] Schleiermacher contrasts the foundation of ethics in Protestantism with the 'obedience to the church' in Roman Catholicism. Within the Protestant church, on Schleiermacher's account, the 'difference between commanding and obeying is sublated (*aufgehoben*)',[152] because of the 'unique Protestant principle' which is divided into justification by faith not works and 'the equality of all the faithful under Christ and the divine words'.[153] Where the Roman church grounds its ethics in a 'disposition (*Gesinnung*)' of obedience towards the church, for Protestants the church is in no sense a 'commanding power'.[154] What keeps the Bible from becoming a commanding power in the church is recognition of the historical nature of the Christian community, and the corresponding need to adjust the vocabulary of moral claims to different epochs. Confessional documents then serve both to explicate Scripture and, where it fails to speak to our time, to 'compensate'[155] for it. Yet these same confessions can only be binding when 'we

[150] Schleiermacher, *christliche Glaube*, pp. 352-353 ET, pp. 618-619. It is important to note that it is an eschatological horizon to which Schleiermacher points, but also that this eschatology is progressive and in (some) continuity with the church's current existence. As such this unity is not a simply a regulative ideal, but something on which the church can expect progress. For the broader context of this eschatology, see Judith Wolfe, 'Eschatology', in *The Oxford Handbook to Nineteenth-Century Christian Thought*, ed. Joel Rasmussen, Judith Wolfe, and Johannes Zachhuber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), pp. 676-696.
[151] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Die christliche Sitte nach den Grunsätzen der ev. Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt,* neu hrsg. Wolfgang Müller (Waltrop: Spenner 1999. Facsimile ed., Berlin: G. Reimer, 1884), p. 90.
[152] I am following the standard practice for English translations of Hegel for this notoriously difficult word. This need not commit me to holding that Schleiermacher is intentionally drawing on his colleague's terminology, however. As Hegel himself argues, *aufheben* has always possessed an inherent ambiguity in German. Thus, by opting for 'sublation' rather than either 'suspension' or 'annulment' (two other possible English translations that commit the translator to stressing one side or another of *aufheben*) the translator is making the minimum possible editorializing. See G. W. F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), §96 pp. 152-153.
[153] Schleiremacher, *christliche Sitte*, p. 90.
[154] Schleiremacher, *christliche Sitte*, p. 90.
[155] Reading 'ersetzen' for 'ersezen'.

can recognise' their standing in Scripture.[156] Again, we can see the separability of the constitutive and critical functions of the Bible. Like Twesten, for Schleiermacher the two principles of Protestantism are essentially unified and only bifurcate in the process of recognition and analysis: 'Matter and Form evolve for us from one and the same; we analyse the pure Christian life principle as it manifests itself in our Protestant church. In doing so we look to the Confessions and customs, but the seal of all of them is Holy Scripture.'[157]

Ritschl also finds the normative force of Scripture to arise from its historical immediacy via the apostles to Christ.[158] Ritschl's criticisms of the 'two principles' of Protestantism notwithstanding, his own account is best understood as a revision of the logic that we have already seen in Twesten and Schleiermacher. In the first volume of *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1874), he takes up the issue of the material/formal distinction to underline that Scripture should be thought of as the church's book. Thinking of the Bible as a formal principle is problematic, thinks Ritschl, because as formal it would lack a clear connection to tradition. Inasmuch as the Reformers (in this case Luther and Zwingli) did elevate Scripture *against* tradition, they did so for historically contextual, polemical reasons. While such a view of Scripture may continue to be important for theology, it is not for the life of the church as such.[159] Again, we see here that when Scripture is seen as a force over against the church, it is tied most closely with theology as a critical and explicative church practice, but as regards the spiritual life of the church as a whole, Scripture must be seen as tending towards unity with the church's self-understanding. The order of priority is important here. It is not a case of the church's self-understanding merging with Scripture, as Ritschl's emphasis on the community reinforces the sense that the Bible's proper role can only be understood as derivative of the community, rather than vice-versa.

In the conclusion to his essay on the two principles, Ritschl suggests that the formal/material distinction is better served by his own preferred formulation: 'Alongside [the historical uncertainty of the distinction], one might ask oneself whether a formula for the essence of Protestantism can be useful that is not oriented to the concepts of the church and the ideal of the Christian life.'[160] For Ritschl, the practical ends of Christianity require

[156] Schleiermacher, *christliche Sitte*, p. 91.
[157] Schleiermacher, *christliche Sitte*, p. 92.
[158] Albrecht Ritschl, *Die christliche Lehre von Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung* II (Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1874), pp. 13-16.
[159] Ritschl, *Rechtfertigung* I (1870), p. 164.
[160] Ritschl, 'Principien', p. 247.

universal poles, which requires folding the Bible more explicitly into the church than either Schleiermacher or Twesten.

The two principles, as we have surveyed them, identify an attempt to re-negotiate the order of Christian thinking in light of concerns about the way the normative status of the Bible can compromise genuine faith and introduce morally problematic hierarchies within the church. This re-negotiation did not involve the rejection of the Bible as normative *tout court* (at least in those surveyed), but it changed how the Bible was to be understood as authoritative. As I have shown, this authority tends to devolve into the authority of the Spirit (Twesten and Schleiermacher) or the community (Ritschl). This egalitarian turn may have come at the price of naturalising Scripture entirely, and ultimately depriving it of all of its critical force, as Barth's argument would run in his 1917 lecture 'The New World in the Bible'.[161] Yet it is also important to see how Barth does not divest himself fully of these concerns. One way to view Barth's account of apostolic communication in the Ephesians lectures is striving to maintain this same equality between apostle and reader, under the aegis of a new doctrine of revelation. Further, the appeal in the James lectures to Spirit grounding the unity of the biblical writings in a way that precludes systematic comprehension is also a check on spiritual hierarchies emerging from theological expertise. Before exploring Barth's own employment of the 'two principles', Wilhelm Herrmann will provide the key to understanding how Barth received these ideas.

2.2 Wilhelm Herrmann on the Personal Power of God

Along with the moral and spiritual issues outlined above, the other basic issue that drove 19th-century thought about the place of the Bible in Christian theology was the relation between the claims of faith and the historical nature of Christianity.[162] By the end of Ritschl's career, the difficulty of maintaining both the 'absolute' nature of the claims of faith and their historical condition had become acute. Ritschl's construal of Christianity as an ideal concept, by which he sought to conceive of Christianity as the universal, practical religion without denying its historically developed character and distinctness could not survive its own internal tensions. As Johannes Zachhuber has shown, for those following after Ritschl, conceiving of the historical Christian community in ideal terms was the most vulnerable

[161] Barth, 'Die neue Welt in der Bibel', in *VA* 1*914-1921*, pp. 317-343 ET, *The Word of God and Theology*, trans. Amy Marga (London; New York: T&T Clark), pp. 15-30.
[162] See, in a vast field, e.g. Michael Legaspi, *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*. (Oxford: OUP, 2003) and Jörg Lauster, *Prinzip und Methode: Die Transformation des protestantischen Schriftprinzips durch die historische Kritik von Schleiermacher bis zur Gegenwart* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004).

aspect of Ritschl's project, and proved unsustainable within the theologians seeking to carry on Ritschl's project, known as the Ritschlian school.[163]

For Ritschl's student Wilhelm Herrmann, the historical reality of the Christian community could not play the role assigned to it by Ritschl in bridging the gap between the universal claims of faith and historical contingency. Yet Herrmann, in contrast to Ernst Troeltsch, wanted to maintain that Christianity was the 'absolute' religion, universally applicable in its claims.[164] The task was to show how those claims depended not on historical or scientific demonstrability, but on the specific nature of the religious experience as a personal relation to God. With Herrmann in the antechamber to dialectical theology[165], we can see an increasing sense that theology must stand in some way independently of history, even while seeking to maintain the practical force of Christianity for the living Christian community.

These twin concerns have much to do with Herrmann being the most important influence on Barth's early theological development.[166] For the purposes of this study, tracing how Herrmann's account of the unique relationship of authority that can exist between God and humanity will set the stage for Barth's own. First, then, a brief look at Herrmann's account of the role of Scripture in Christian thought. Second, a look at the relationship of obedience in faith to Christ's authority in revelation that Herrmann indicates as the foundation of Scripture's normative character.

Like those figures discussed in the previous section, Herrmann was sensitive to the possibility of the Bible becoming an external law. In an 1882 lecture, *The Meaning of the Doctrine of Inspiration for the Lutheran Church*, he mounts a polemical case against verbal inspiration.[167] Much of what he has to say is familiar from 19th-century criticisms of the

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[163] See Johannes Zachhuber, *Theology as a Science in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford:OUP, 2013), pp. 267ff. The school's two most prominent members were Wilhelm Herrmann and Julius Kaftan, though it comprised a number of theologians who sought to hold together the historical character of the Christian community with the 'absoluteness' of its claims, with a particular focus on moral agency.

[164] For a thorough account of the conflict between Herrmann and Troeltsch, see Brent Sockness, *Against a False Apologetics: Wilhelm Herrmann and Ernst Troeltsch in Conflict* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998). Sockness's account of Herrmann is important for my own. As Sockness shows, Herrmann's criticism of Troeltsch's 'scientific' claims was that it was a category mistake to 'demonstrate' a religious reality. As I read him, Herrmann's argument is not just that there is a distinct category of religious claim, but that the distinct relationship possible with God allows for a relationship of authority and obedience that would be otherwise be morally problematic. See Sockness *op. cit.* pp. 205ff.

[165] Or perhaps better its beginning, see Christoph Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* (Zurich: TVZ, 2005).

[166] See Barth, 'Die dogmatische Prinzipienlehre bei Wilhelm Herrmann', in *VA 1922-1925*, pp. 551-552. For broader overviews of the importance of Herrmann to Barth's development, see, e.g. McCormack *Critically Realist*, pp. 66-68 and Chalamet *Dialectical Theologians*, *passim,* but esp. pp. 23-25.

[167] Wilhelm Herrmann, *Die Bedeutung der Inspirationslehre für die evangelische Kirche. Ein Vörtrag* (Halle: Mar Niemeyer, 1882), pp. 3-31.

doctrine, and he offers a well-trod historical path from Luther's flexible doctrine of Scripture to the unfortunate accretions of verbal inspiration and back again. What is instructive is how Herrmann frames his polemic in terms of the proper relation to divine authority being mediated through revelation. Herrmann begins by crediting Luther's reforming impact to the unique authority of God moving him to do so.[168] He then goes on to trace the doctrine of inspiration (by which he means verbal) as a doomed attempt to secure this authority in Scripture. What inspiration in fact does is set up barriers between God and the individual, ceding authority to lawless interpretation and limiting the redeeming power of revelation.[169] What has to be recognised, argues Herrmann, is that divine revelation is strictly unique and distinct to all other relations. It is, further, God's self-revelation and as such redemptive in purpose. To be under the authority of divine revelation, then, is simply to be a Christian, meaning that the relationship supposed by the doctrine of inspiration between the biblical authors and God cannot be considered restricted, but common:

> [The books of the New Testament] are inspired, because their authors lived in the true knowledge of Jesus Christ. But we should all have this inspiration. For without this knowledge and the enlightenment (*Erleuchtung*) through the Holy Spirit which follows from it, no one is a Christian. Yet what should belong to every Christian work cannot be the basis for the particular merit of Holy Scripture.[170]

Similarly to Ritschl, then, Herrmann stresses the historical originality of the texts, but the emphasis in his presentation is on the commonality of relation between God and the Christian that exists at every point in the church's history. It is this that finally secures the integrity of the Protestant faith, as there must exist a relation to the authority of God apart from any human institution. 'We do not build on an inspired Scripture', concludes Herrmann, but on the Scripture the Christian community has always recognised as the record of 'effective revelation'. In so doing 'we place ourselves under the authority of the revelation of God, and so free ourselves properly from the false authority of the Catholic church.'[171]

Herrmann's equation of inspiration with Roman Catholicism recurs elsewhere in the work, and signals the deep concern he had for distinguishing the proper mode, in his mind, of Christian authority from those he understood to be morally and spiritually destructive. For our purposes, we can extend the hints he gives of this theme in his lecture on inspiration by looking to his *Ethics.*

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[168] Herrmann, *Inspirationslehre*, pp. 5-7.
[169] Herrmann, *Inspirationslehre*, pp. 20-23.
[170] Herrmann, *Inspirationslehre*, p. 30.
[171] Herrmann, *Inspirationslehre*, p. 30.

In his *Ethics*, Herrmann takes up these questions with particular attention to the moral character of Christian faith, and the relationship between genuine Christian belief and the personal presence of Jesus Christ.[172] Herrmann's whole account can be framed as a way of thinking about two different kinds of states in which faith can exist, which are determined by the kind of relation the believer has with faith's object. One sort of faith saves and the other does not. The characteristic of faith that does not save is its dependence on the believer's assent to the content of 'doctrine and reports', and thus it relies on a power that the believer herself can summon up. If faith depends on being convinced of doctrinal and narrative content, then one enters into a relationship with faith's object that is dependent on one's own power in its acquisition, which for Herrmann typifies the Roman Catholic 'struggle' of faith. In contrast, saving faith instead depends on the power of a reality 'that overwhelms us' and thus 'throws us from our erstwhile track'.[173] The rejection of one's own 'power' seems to sit ill with Herrmann's goal of establishing the 'autonomy (*Selbständigkeit*) of religious faith'.[174] The distinction that Herrmann draws, however, between the power one possesses and the one by which one is overwhelmed is one not precisely of internal and external, but between the personal and that which can only be 'assented to'. The personal presence of Christ cannot be summoned by the efforts of the believer to be convinced of the accuracy of a set of doctrines or historical narratives, but depends entirely on God's gracious presence. This way of thinking about God's transforming presence is significant for Barth, and two points are of particular importance for understanding this aspect of Herrmann's thought: God's personal encounter with human beings and God's unique power and personal presence in faith.

To begin, it is important to understand how Herrmann distinguishes 'personal' from other relations. As Herrmann thinks of Christian ethics as the end point of ethics generally, he outlines a movement of moral introspection that goes from asking moral questions, and so coming to recognise the good, to recognising one's own 'divided will' that seeks the good but also fails to acquire it.[175] The condition of the divided will results in the recognition that one cannot personally follow the moral law that dictates the good, and so leaves the morally aware agent in a state of disarray. It is only here that Christian faith makes an entrance: 'Moral thought necessarily brings humanity to the way of religion…In the genuineness of his

[172] Wilhelm Herrmann, *Ethik*[5] (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1913), pp. 1-7. For the significance of this text to Barth, see 'Herrmann', pp. 551-552.
[173] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 114.
[174] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 116.
[175] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 85-87.

willing the human person reaches his God'.[176] Why should moral inquiry terminate in religious faith? One can take Herrmann's claim here as a version of Kant's claim that God is a 'necessary postulate' of practical reason, though with important modifications. For Herrmann, the post-Kantian religious rationalism is the mirror image of pre-critical Orthodoxy: both traffic in a 'system of doctrines or concepts' that are mediated by their intellectual content.[177] Such content, however, cannot bring about freedom from the moral dilemma that faces humanity, as the moral state is not subject to conceptual description, but rather is contained in the more elusive reality of one's 'life' or 'personhood'. Herrmann reasons against Kant that the solution to the 'Kantian paradox' of autonomy cannot be conceptual in nature because the moral dilemma is not conceptual, but personal. It is on these grounds that Herrmann moves from moral introspection to religious belief, because when one inquires into morality, one inquires into the 'ground of one's inner vitality (*Lebendigkeit*)'.[178] The key question then becomes how to understand the personal relationship that allows the individual to overcome its divided will without compromising its autonomy. For Herrmann, this is only possible with God, because only God encounters humanity as a unique power.

The uniqueness of God's power has its correlate in faith. Humanity, on Herrmann's account, depends on God in a personal relationship of faith. To understand how humanity relates to God freely, but dependently, we can initially distinguish between a rational and a religious dependence. To depend on God religiously is to depend on God personally, but God can be identified as the good for which humanity seeks outside of this personal relationship of faith. The dialectical balance of free dependence underlines the importance for Herrmann of the movement of moral introspection: humanity must recognise in God's power the good they seek to follow but cannot achieve. The freely chosen 'goal' and 'duty' of realising moral autonomy is prior to its achievement in religious faith. Yet at the same time, believers are dependent on divine power in their freedom. As we have noted, the relationship of faith cannot be simply rational, or it would not be genuinely moral, and so not genuinely religious. The answer for Herrmann turns on the kind of power that God exercises in relation to humanity. The challenge to autonomy comes from external powers that are essentially competitive with one's own, and yet divine power seems to be the *ne plus ultra* of overmastering power. To get around this, Herrmann distinguishes between what is represented as divine action in the world, which he dismisses as a kind of gross

[176] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 93.
[177] Herrmann, *Ethik,* p. 93.
[178] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 93.

supernaturalism that he calls *Mirakel*, and the actions of God, which he calls *Wunder*. A *Mirakel* betrays its lack of divinity because it interacts with the world just like other powers, except with greater force. The actions of God, however, distinguish themselves as wholly unique from all other powers. God's power shows itself unique in two ways. First, it is unique in the sense that it has no analogue in the creaturely sphere and so can accomplish what is outside the power of humans to accomplish, which is to resolve the inherent tension of human moral life. Second, the exercise of God's power is compatible, not competitive, with human freedom.[179]

The necessarily personal nature of faith and the unique power of God to establish that relationship come together for Herrmann in the person of Jesus. As noted above, Herrmann understands religious faith as the resolution of the moral tension inherent in the human will, and in faith the believer recognises her own incapacity to resolve the tension herself and the power of God as convergent with her own will for the good. In the person of Jesus the morally aware person can recognise the perfect unity of will for the good that eludes them in their divided state. But Herrmann is not simply propounding an exemplarist Christology. Crucial for him is the personal encounter with Jesus, which is the fundamental event of religious faith, without which no resolution can be found for the divided will. How does this personal encounter come about? Herrmann elaborates:

> When we become autonomous in moral thought because we ourselves know what good and evil are, we remain in our religious conviction dependent on those facts that have been for us a declaration of God. When for us their meaning [as declarations] utterly collapses, so is our faith weakened. But the Christian church (*Gemeinde*) claims to experience that, through the power of Jesus, one's faith that is battling for existence is saved. When we ourselves become Christians we also experience that the power of Jesus keeps us from falling into godlessness. But clearly the only way for us to this experience is that we claim in the person of Jesus a reality, whose meaning for us, the disclosure of God's work in us, can never be destroyed. This is only possible, however, when Jesus becomes an undoubtable reality for us in the decisive substance of his personal life…We must above all be able to say, that he is present (*gegenwärtig*) to us in this his own power, as our own experience.[180]

Herrmann presents a movement from moral autonomy to genuine religious faith, the axis of which is the present-ness or contemporaneity of Jesus in the believer's experience. How is Christ present to each believer, in the somewhat mysterious phrase 'as our own experience'? Recognition that Jesus has fulfilled the moral law is part of coming to faith, but this

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[179] C.f. Herrmann's essay devoted to this distinction, 'Der Christ und das Wunder', in *Offenbarung und Wunder* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1908), pp. 28-71. Christof Chalamet argues for the importance of this essay to Barth's development, see *Dialectical Theologians*, pp. 47-48.
[180] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 119.

recognition is only possible when 'the person of Jesus is the revelation of God'.[181] As revelation, Jesus's personal presence is distinct from all causal powers internal to the believer, and so cannot be confused for them or undermined as they are undermined. Yet more striking still is the relation that is the consequence of this recognition. To recognise God's revelation in Jesus Christ is then to be in a relationship of obedience to Jesus, of recognising his authority over one's faith, which is 'the beginning of conversion'.[182]

Why does Herrmann reach for the language of authority and obedience at just this point? Because faith resolves the moral tension in which humanity finds itself, and so this relationship is not only directive of moral action, it enables moral freedom. The struggle prior to knowing Christ personally as God's revelation, arose from the doomed attempt to grasp with one's own power what one could not, since one's efforts to freely follow the moral law inevitably ran aground against one's own divided will, but to submit oneself to another's authority may sacrifice one's autonomy. In Christ, Herrmann sees the solution, by changing one of the key factors: God's power is conceived as qualitatively distinct from any natural power, and so compatible with human freedom. Herrmann summarises:

> We cannot live without the command (*Halt*) of authority, and we do not live truly, when we are not autonomous. Both are united in our faith and so establish a stage of life in which previously irresolvable distress and unappeasable disquiet lie behind us. Jesus Christ, in the power of his personal life that captured us and overcame us, is the authority that makes us free.[183]

In light of this construal of the religious relationship, much of what Herrmann will have to say about the Bible's role in the *Ethics* will be clear, and accord with what we already found in his lecture on inspiration. There is a profound Christocentrism to Herrmann's account of Scripture.[184] From the view of the personal relationship with Jesus, the Christian tradition, inclusive of Bible and church (with the Bible as *primus inter pares*), becomes a witness to the personal power of Christ. The experience of faith is present in each individual Christian, making the function of Church tradition not so much the mediation of the reality of faith as the sphere of witness to the personal reality of faith, wherein each member of the fellowship is engaged in an act of mutual recognition that Christ is present to each.[185] The second point,

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[181] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 124, see also p. 122.
[182] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 125.
[183] Herrmann, *Ethik*, pp. 125-126.
[184] Following Luther. See Werner Elert, *Der Morphologie des Luthertums* (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1931), pp. 166-168 ET, *The Structure of Lutheranism*, trans. Walter A Hansen (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1962), p. 189-191. This will be discussed further in the next section.
[185] Herrmann thinks the Roman church is right about the essential place of the church in Christian faith, but wrong about the church's capacity to be the source of that faith. See Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 116.

then, that is significant for us is that Herrmann accounts for this dialectic by declining to order the relationship between the community's witness and the establishment of a personal relationship with Jesus along causal lines, but instead by drawing attention to the proper order of authority: 'the Holy Scriptures [must] remain servant, and not made into a law…true Christian faith stands in sharp opposition to obedience to such a law, as it is inner contemplation, conviction of the heart and truthfulness.'[186] Once the relationship of Jesus's authority over one's faith is understood, the Christian tradition is transformed into a rich source for receiving the power of Jesus's life.

As a consequence, there is an important if subtle shift from Ritschl's position on the relationship between faith and history. Where Ritschl wanted to allow historical research and doctrinal claims to operate alongside one another, unified by the scientific character of theology, Herrmann's account of witness transforms the meaning of history to faith, without allowing that historical research should subordinate itself to the claims of doctrine. Rather, because they are different sorts of claims, the person of faith may see the value in the work of the historian, while the historian is free to operate as she wills:

> For whomever it is clear that the person of Jesus alone is grasped as an undoubtable reality, since he supplied his imprint through this tradition, then [that person] desires to miss nothing. Every fragment, as it may also be considered by the historical critic, is holy to him, since it can serve the rays of light that came forth from the person of Jesus to make faith visible.[187]

Thus, the historical character of the Christian community is instrumental to the faith that is established in the personal relationship with Jesus. The Bible and church tradition are emphatically not uncoupled from their historical reality, with the important caveat that they are only significant as they serve faith, in the proper relation to Jesus's authority.[188]

Barth would later speak appreciatively about Herrmann's conception of this unique and irreducible nature of the relationship of faith in Christ as Herrmann's *autopistie*.[189] While distancing himself from Herrmann's understanding of religion, and what Barth took to be its implicit détente with Kant, the independence of theology based on the revelation of God in

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[186] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 125.
[187] Herrmann, *Ethik*, p. 125.
[188] Jörg Lauster thinks Herrmann takes a step backwards by placing the weight of the Scripture Principle entirely on the 'unaccountable' subjectivity of personal faith and dismissing the theological value of historical criticism. My argument suggests Lauster is overstating his case somewhat, as Herrmann does not seem to be dismissing historical realities but reordering their place in the movement of Christian obedience. To be sure this is not the same thing as accepting the value of historical research as objectively independent of faith, but to say that this thereby does not value the theological contributions of historical research is to beg the question. See Lauster, *Prinzip*, pp. 223-224.
[189] Barth 'Prinzipienlehre' p.586, see also Kenneth Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), pp. 111-114.

Christ would be central to his own theological project. Herrmann's conception of the Bible as a witness to this revelation while not containing it, too, would be decisive for Barth, though he will emphasise the difference between the witness of Scripture and historical claims more than Herrmann. Barth's challenge, when giving his own account of Scripture and its authority in more systematic terms, is how to avoid the occlusion of God's independent reality by religious experience even as he appropriates Herrmann's basic conception of faith as a relationship of obedience with Christ known in revelation.

2.3 God's Transcendence and the Formal Scripture Principle

The aim of this history just given has been to secure two points. The first is that the relationship between the two principles of Protestantism in a prominent stream of 19th-century theology can be usefully read as guide to the anxiety about the moral and spiritual implications of biblical authority. As a response, the tendency is to shift the Bible to the human side of the relationship between God and creatures. Secondly, Barth's teacher Wilhelm Herrmann, who shares these worries, also formulates an important account of God's authority to the believer that turns on the distinct personal relationship with Christ in faith. When Barth comes to give his own account of the Scripture Principle, given in nascent form in his lectures on the Reformed Confessions, he will adopt the 'two principles' language, while setting himself against the 19th-century ordering of the two principles sketched in the first section of this chapter. Yet, he will carry with him Herrmann's account of the personal relationship of faith that is outlined in section two, which arguably is intended as a solution to the same set of anxieties Barth takes himself to be rejecting. This is in part to argue that the moral integrity of the creature continues to be important to Barth, but it is also to draw attention to the way Barth's account of scriptural authority may pull in two different directions. In this section, a close reading of Barth's lectures on the Scripture Principle in the lectures on the Reformed Confessions will bear this out, and suggest the challenges that will best Barth in his exegesis throughout the early 1920s.

When he came to lecture on the Reformed Confessions he knew that, at best, he could only offer a 'general orientation'[190] to the intentions and concerns of the various figures whose work comprises the founding documents of Reformed theology. To that end, Barth posited a unifying idea that was specific to Reformed thinking. What is distinct about the Reformed, thinks Barth, is their conviction that Christianity was something *'teachable*'

[190] Barth, *TrB* pp. 129-130 ET, pp. 81f.

(*lehrbar*),[191] that is, God's revelation has a 'reflex' in the activity of human life that has its own character and reality, and it is part of theology's task to account for it. For Barth, this concern for the possibility of a human domain is distinctive, not because the Reformed alone see morals as an essential aspect of faith, but because they alone have a doctrine of God that allows for a genuine ethic:

> [We do not learn] God himself, self-evidently not: there all is election, grace, Spirit, faith, God's own work, but that which we can know on the basis of revelation, Christianity, the refraction of the divine light in the prism of human consciousness, which then is not the light, but perhaps can be a witness of the light…A risky enterprise! The variation on this theme could be taken, where pious self-consciousness is extended from cause to object of Christian doctrine. For the classical Reformed this danger did not yet exist. Precisely the consciousness of the unending distance between God and humanity, grace and nature, revelation and reason, precisely the clear distinction between Scripture and the confession of Scripture, between God's word and one's own Christian human word gave them the peace, to take quite seriously the latter within their given limitations and possibilities, to lay great stress on preaching and study, in one word, on teaching.[192]

Recalling Barth's '5th anti-thesis' against Hirsch from chapter one, the basic theological terms may be unchanged, but Barth is striving to bring out their positive implications for human action. What Barth will have to say about Scripture is evidently a consequence of this basic distinction between God and creation, and his placement of Scripture on the divine side of the relation already signals a departure from what we saw in the 19th-century thinkers surveyed. We should also note, however, that Barth is cautious about appropriating the Reformed tradition *tout court*. It is, perhaps surprisingly, the nearness between some of the positions of modern theology and the Reformed that are a cause for caution. Barth suggests that a theologically illicit focus on self-consciousness can also be the result of a strenuous assertion of God's otherness, precisely because in so doing the mechanism of the relation becomes the object of scrutiny, rather than the *relata*. Barth's survey of Reformed confessional statements will therefore be qualified and polemical. The task, as he sees it, is to preserve the basic Reformed insight while at the same time avoiding falling into theological dangers that the shapers of the tradition did not anticipate.

With an eye to distinguishing accurately between divine and human subjects, the first step is properly ordering the relationship between Scripture and confession. On Barth's account, the status of the Reformed confessions can be illustratively contrasted with the Lutherans. The Lutherans, Barth avers, claim for their confessions a conciliar quality and perennial authority.[193] Barth in particular has in mind the description of the Formula of

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[191] *TrB*, p. 130 ET, p. 82.
[192] *TrB*, p. 130 ET, p. 82.
[193] *TrB*, pp. 3-5ff ET, pp. 2-3ff.

Concord as a 'symbol', which is to say an authoritative summary of doctrine, rather than a confession that retains an individual, or local, character. By contrast, the Reformed emphasise the contingent, human character of their confessions, and 'unlike the Lutheran [confessions, which are] a frozen river, on which one can walk….they are rather flowing openly, in which, despite all the fixed elements one carries, one can only swim.'[194] The contrast in Barth's mind signals, on the Reformed part, a proper understanding of the contingency and relativity of all human speech about God. The charge, to be clear, is not that the Lutheran confessions fail to declare the primacy of the Bible as God's Word. Barth's contrast is more subtle. The two different ways of treating their confessions signal a deeper difference in the order of theological thought that is rooted in the doctrine of God. The Reformed, as Barth has it, stress divine transcendence as the starting place for theology, which in turn subordinates all creaturely thought and speech about God to a relative status. The tendency of Lutheran confessions is to see the coming to faith in Jesus Christ as the starting point for theology, and as such have difficulty sufficiently accounting for God's otherness. The elevation of their confessions is an instance of a general propensity to blur the infrangible distinction between God and creatures.[195]

It is here that Barth introduces the 'two principles' language. The distinction between the status of Reformed and Lutheran confessions can be thought of as a difference in the ordering of theological thought, which is determined by the relation between the formal and material principles of Protestantism. Barth holds that what he claims is the Lutheran prioritisation of the material principle of justification by faith tends towards privileging personal faith over scriptural authority. The high status of the Lutheran confessions, thus, comes down to a difference in the original ordering of those principles. Barth suggests that the Reformed are different because Calvin and Zwingli were compelled to extend Luther's basic insight into the entire sphere of human existence. They distinguished themselves from Luther not because they came to an alternative vision of the doctrine of justification, but because they did not stop there:

> [Calvin's] question was, [along with Zwingli]: what ought to happen now? The answer from both, illuminated by Luther's discovery, was: a Revolution must happen…a fundamental, quiet, thoroughgoing revolution, which would be realised when the norm of the church was the Bible, the Bible alone. One understands the fathers of the Reformed church correctly when one

[194] *TrB*, pp. 44-45 ET, p. 27.
[195] Barth makes this criticism most explicitly in a passage highly critical of the Lutheran *genus majestaticum*, *TrB*, pp. 286-287 ET, pp. 182-184. See also *UCR III*, pp. 56-57. It also can probably go without saying that Barth's portrayal of Lutheranism, up to an including his mature works, have come under sharp criticism from Lutheran theologians. See most exhaustively Gerhard Ebeling, 'Barths Ringen mit Luther', in *Luther Schriften* III (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1985), pp. 428-573.

> understands their biblicism in the end as a quite useful, practical, nearly homespun measure: it is really a formal principle that is grasped here.[196]

Barth goes on to specify that justification remains a central doctrine for the Reformed, but does not order their thought in the same way. Rather, they seek to reorder the relationship between the principles:

> They had also placed [the doctrine of justification] in the centre of the proclamation, but one will always find that with Luther it is developed more deeply, more powerfully. Therefore they were freer to let the Bible itself speak, as the form which takes best care of its own content, to provide expression to the whole Bible, to not exhaust God's word in the doctrine of the forgiveness of sins.[197]

Barth actually suggests two advantages of the Reformed priority of the formal over the material here. It both opens up the sphere of Christian action, as the 'useful, practical' measure, and it preserves divine freedom by refusing to determine in advance what the word of God will say. On this latter point, the corresponding critique of Lutheranism is that by narrowing the content of the Bible to justification, it determines the scope and content of the divine word *a priori*.

Simply reversing the order of the principles is not enough, however, to secure a relationship of Scripture to confession that properly reflects the asymmetry between divine and human. As noted above, Barth is sensitive to the dangers of beginning with the claim of divine otherness. Through a bit of intellectual history, Barth suggests that the early Reformed had their own dangers to resist in this regard. Barth begins by registering the influence of Renaissance humanism on both Calvin and Zwingli. Both of them, though Calvin more so in Barth's telling, gravitated towards a picture of divine transcendence that resonated with a 'rigorous, critical classical Platonism with the hard, indispensable lines of its doctrines of distance and relation…'[198] While Barth wants to see such a sharp divide as securing the separation of all theological claims from those of experience, he is aware that this contrastive account of divine/creaturely relations could also be seen as a philosophically axiomatic, rather than a theologically grounded truth. Barth notes that Book One of Calvin's *Institutes* is

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[196] *TrB*, pp. 70-71 ET, p. 43.
[197] *TrB*, p. 71 ET, p. 44.
[198] *TrB*, p. 75 ET, p. 45. Barth contrasts such Platonism with a 'mystical Neo-Platonism', a term of abuse that he will return again in his writings, as one that fails to qualitatively distinguish divine from human. The implication here, which Barth leaves implicit, is that Lutheran theology has failed to sufficiently examine its metaphysical assumptions in this regard. There is evident influence here of Barth's brother, Heinrich Barth, who completed his *Habilitationsschrift* on Plato a few years earlier, and emphasised precisely this account of radical distance between the divine and creation. See Lohmann, *Neukantianismus*, pp. 200f.

on *Dei creatoris* to be followed by *Dei redemptoris*, which could be read as offering a general, natural theology as a 'first step' to revelation.[199]

On his own terms, Barth needs to address how the formal Scripture Principle is differentiated from the possibility suggested by Calvin, which is that knowledge of God could be acquired through the *via negativa* of metaphysics. The problem with the formal priority of Scripture is that it may reflect a speculative position on the relationship between the divine and human, rather than the reality of God who is known only in faith. It is instructive that Barth does not here appeal to the subjective freedom of God in order to negate the possibility of speculative knowledge of God, or show Calvin or Zwingli doing so. Rather, on Barth's reading, while Calvin does entertain such a speculative position, it is as a '*hypothesis*, as pure *possibility*'.[200] Since God is the origin of all things, it is certainly the case that humanity should be able to know everything that is necessary to know about God from creation, as a matter of natural reason. Why does it remain only a possibility? It is not the character of elusive divine subjectivity but creaturely sin that is decisive here. It is because of total depravity that humanity can have no speculative knowledge of God.[201]

By invoking the doctrine of total depravity, Barth secures both the epistemic limitations of humanity and, more importantly, the purpose of Scripture. In the first case, the material nature of the Bible is an affront to philosophical thinking: 'It is obviously quite un-Platonic when Reformed theology put, in place of the regulative *idea,* the regulative *codex* of the Old and New Testaments'.[202] The Bible's material quality as an artefact, as a collection of testimonies, means that it is a contingent reality, and its quasi-axiomatic status is not the result of its necessity as a truth of reason. But this contingency is positively a feature of its purpose within the economy of salvation. It does not speak of the 'general truth of relation between time and eternity, humanity and God', but it is a witness to the very specific revelation of God, 'the old and new covenants of…Jesus Christ'.[203] The place of the Bible within the economy does not only define its content, it also defines how the content is to be received by creatures, which is not contemplatively, but as an obligating reality. Sin means that God's revelation is not of himself as mere reality, as an object of knowledge, but in the

[199] *TrB*, p. 76 ET, pp. 46-47.
[200] *TrB*, p. 76 ET, p. 47.
[201] *TrB*, pp. 76-77 ET, pp. 46-47.
[202] *TrB*, pp. 75 ET, p. 46.
[203] *TrB*, pp. 75-76 ET, p. 46.

very specific relation as redeemer and Lord, 'not of the *relation to infinity* of *human* consciousness, but rather the *becoming finite* of God's thoughts, of Jesus Christ'.[204]

At this point, it is worth asking what the force of Barth's claim for the formal character of the Scripture Principle over against the material principle is supposed to be. It appears that Barth wants to assert the formality of the principle to maintain the freedom of divine transcendence, while simultaneously holding that its formal priority is a feature only derivable from the Bible's purpose within the economy of salvation. Barth may be read here as claiming that the formal character of the Scripture Principle is an *a posteriori* judgment made from within the Christian confession. Its formal priority can then be understood as another way of saying what Calvin and the other reformers meant when they said the Bible was *autopistos*, or self-authenticating, entirely apart from any virtues of the text or its authors. Barth is correspondingly quite critical of those Reformed confessions that list the laudable qualities of Scripture, such as the 'majesty' of its prose, the moral clarity of its authors or the venerable status of its texts.[205] Yet, he must maintain that while Scripture's priority corresponds to divine transcendence and is not subsumed thereby into faith as religious self-consciousness, the content of Scripture is determined by the salvific mission to which faith is the human correlate. To do so, Barth has to put significant stress on the doctrine of election in connection with pneumatology to account for the divine act that is constitutive of Scripture, as is clear in Barth's discussion of canon and inspiration.

The formal character of the Scripture Principle is, argues Barth, a precision of Scripture's *holiness*.[206] The holiness of Scripture lies in its occasion and use by the Holy Spirit in directing the church. In Barth's reading of the Reformed, this falls broadly into two acts, canonisation and inspiration, though these are better understood as modulations within a single work of the Spirit, as it directs the church to obedience to God through Scripture. Canonisation and inspiration have their reflex in the church's reception of the Bible, both as it acknowledges this collection of texts to be the exclusive rule of Christian proclamation and as it exposits Scripture, that is, seeks to hear the words of the Bible as the witness to God's revelation.

An interest in the canon, Barth argues, is particular to the Reformed in contrast to the Lutherans, the latter's focus on the doctrine of justification limiting their interest in holding to the precise limits of Scripture. The Reformed confessions, however, often included a list of

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[204] *TrB*, p. 75 ET, p. 46.
[205] *TrB*, pp. 93-94 ET, pp. 57-58.
[206] *TrB,* p. 89 ET, p. 55.

the books in the canon as part of the confession, even though this list did not differ from longstanding lists. On Barth's account, the aim was clearly not to overturn or separate themselves from church tradition, but to recognise that the biblical canon is not a feature of the Bible's material history. This was done by acknowledging that books were included in the canon by the church according to no other criteria save the Word of God being heard in and through its text.[207] The canon, then does not derive from a 'great and meritorious act of the church'.[208] The church continues to confess the canon as an acknowledgment that it only has the canon as a confession. This aspect of the Spirit's work is the most austerely separate from the historical and material characteristics of the Bible. On Barth's account, the Reformed teaching on canonisation is purely the acknowledgement that in this set of texts and not others, the voice of God is to be heard, and this acknowledgment is not due to the identity of the authors, the historic validity of the texts, or the profundity of their wisdom. No additional reasons can be adduced as to why the canon is as it is except that the work of the Spirit ordered it to be so.

Inspiration is likewise formal, but serves to specify how the Bible may be read as an authoritative witness to divine revelation that is, however, not inherent to the text, but, like canonisation, an acknowledgement of divine work. Barth evidently finds much in the Reformed teaching on inspiration salutary, with an important qualification. Barth was keen to argue that the doctrine of verbal inspiration was a distortion of the magisterial Reformers more flexible and simple accounts of inspiration. Verbal inspiration is thus an unnecessary and ultimately disastrous addition to the philosophically unsophisticated but theologically direct claim that 'God speaks!'.[209] Where later Reformed thought went astray was in displacing the divine authority that resides in the Spirit alone onto the text in its own right. Where Barth earlier found the notion of the *codex* a salutary check on the possibility of taking the Scripture Principle as a philosophical axiom, he here sees the opposite danger, which is the sacralisation of a historical object. As the temporal distance between the authors of the text and its readers is extended, inspiration is a crucial way of securing the ongoing authority of the text over the church. The doctrine of verbal inspiration, however, narrows this authority to the text as an object. The Bible begins to mesmerise as an inspir*ed* text, and so invites investigation into itself, rather than to the actual source of its authority. It is worth

[207] *TrB,* p. 80-81 ET, pp. 49-50.
[208] Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma* I trans. Neil Buchanan (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1997), p. 62. Cf. John Webster, 'The Dogmatic Location of the Canon', in *Word and Church. Essays in Constructive Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001).
[209] *TrB,* pp. 95-96 ET, pp. 59-60.

noting this concern of Barth's, as it is a perennial one in his thought. Whenever creaturely realities are annexed in a particular way to divine service, Barth is less concerned with sorting out the causal mechanisms of such relations, than with the way in which they direct, or misdirect, relations of authority.

With these provisions in place, what can be said about inspiration? Calvin's understanding, on Barth's reading, offers a better way than later developments.[210] For Calvin, inspiration is always in the present perfect, a 'timeless or better yet concurrent (*gleichzeitig*) act of God.'[211] This telescopic view captures at once 'then and now, here and there, biblical *authors* and Bible *readers*, objective and subjective truth'. Inspiration, then, in just the same way that Herrmann described it, contains both the work of the human authors and the readers under the single work of the Spirit. Barth sharpens Herrmann's point, however, by not finding in this work of the Spirit the basis for the unity of the church across history. It was one of the failures of post-Reformation doctrines of inspiration, thinks Barth, that they began to separate the act of the giving of the Scriptures from its subsequent reading and reception. To do so, Barth implies, is not only to risk fixating on the inspired*ness* of the text, but is to make the work of the Spirit into a causal joint between the witness of the past and the faith of the present. It is, says Barth, at the point where the church looks for some kind of causal relationship between the texts of the Bible and their continuing function as witnesses to revelation, that 'the dogma of *inspiration* flows into that of *predestination*…The arcanum testimonium spiritus is [for Calvin] therefore nothing but an outflow of the arcanum decretum Dei, in the face of which it would be foolishness to ask for reasons'.[212]

Barth employs Herrmann's terminology here in distinguishing between the '*Wunder*' of God's act of inspiration and the '*Mirakel*' of inspiredness,[213] to similar ends: God's acts have a distinctive character because of their non-creaturely character that is unmistakable and also lacks any analogues. Again, Barth rejects any kind of intellectual or moral presupposition for receiving revelation, as he makes clear commenting on Calvin: there is 'the "*optima ratio*" but not therefore "*rationes*" (in the plural), the "*veritas*" that allows for no "*verisimilitudines*", "*sensus*" that obviously cannot arise in us without revelation'.[214] Barth

[210] Barth's claim, made here and elsewhere, that Calvin does not have a doctrine of verbal inspiration, has been called into question by scholars. See, e.g. David Gibson, 'The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture', in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids, Mich.; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), pp. 278-280.
[211] *TrB,* p. 99 ET, p. 62.
[212] *TrB,* p. 101 ET, pp. 63-64.
[213] *TrB,* p. 99 ET, p. 62.
[214] *TrB,* p. 100 ET, pp. 62-63.

concludes the section on the Scripture Principle as a whole with a forceful rejection of any 'point of contact' between God and creation: 'We know better than Calvin that there is no "*rationes*" for the divinity of the Scriptures, no God in history and no God in us.'[215]

It is plain that Barth wants to press the parallel between divine transcendence and the formal character of the Scriptural Principle against an understanding of Scripture that is only divided quantitatively from church confession, and as such, faith as the expression of religious self-consciousness. Yet, because he is committed to defining Scripture's role in terms of the economy of salvation, the distinction between Barth and those whom he is criticising seems relatively fine. We might take Werner Elert's discussion of the Scripture Principle in Luther as an example: 'The connection between the authority, sufficiency, and perspicuity (*Durchsichtigkeit*) of Scripture is in Luther inseparable, because he understands them as strictly Christocentric. One can thus say that the doctrine of justification is the key to his 'Scripture Principle'…The true Reformation and Lutheran Scripture Principle was the *Nil nisi Christus praedicandus*'.[216] With the first sentence, it is difficult to see how Barth could disagree, given that Scripture is 'not of the *relation to infinity* of *human* consciousness, but rather the *becoming finite* of God's thoughts, of Jesus Christ'. It must be the further claim that to 'preach Christ' is to preach primarily justification that Barth rejects.

In its place, Barth clearly wants to say that to preach Christ is to preach God , but as yet he seems uncertain how to connect the deep background of God's transcendent freedom with the saving work of Christ. For the Scripture Principle, this is particularly important for understanding Scripture's authority. The authority of Scripture is not the authority of a philosophical axiom, but of the personal lordship of God in Jesus Christ, operating as part of the work of reconciliation. As such, the authority to which obedience is owed in the Bible is established in a personal relation, while the basis of its authority is that of divine election. To put the matter differently, how can Jesus Christ's lordship be exercised in Scripture without either his lordship being simply an expression of a *Deus nudus* (to borrow Luther's term, which Barth will later employ to identify a similar problem),[217] or an accessory of his saving work, and so covertly an expression of practical reason or personal fulfilment?

2.4 Conclusion

[215] *TrB,* pp. 102-103 ET, p. 64
[216] Elert, *Morphologie* p. 167 ET, p. 190.
[217] See Barth, *Ethik II*, p. 82 ET, p. 301.

The first section of this chapter traced the relationship between the so-called formal and material principles of Protestantism in some prominent 19th-century figures. Broadly, the relationship between these two principles was not hard and fast for these thinkers, but their treatment of them does show an uneasiness about Scripture's authority, and particularly the possibility of the Bible's authority becoming the *de facto* authority of an institution or mandarin class. Crucially, the teaching of Scripture needed to correspond to an internal reality lest its authority become a law and undermine the free gift of grace.

In his appropriation of the 'two principles' distinction, Barth commits himself to the terms of the 19th-century anxiety about biblical authority, as much as he seeks to reverse its trend. Just as for the 19th-century theologians we surveyed, Barth needs to claim that the Bible becomes authoritative for faith by the work of the Spirit, lest the Bible wield an authority as a document of historical significance. This is most evident in the way Barth carries on Herrmann's basic position on inspiration. No matter the primacy of the Bible as its medium, the revelatory power of God is not conferred on it. While Barth's claim about the priority of the Scripture Principle is part of a broader rejection of experience and history as sources for knowledge of God, the basic presuppositions about the relationship between revelation and faith, and the need to avoid the Bible becoming a source of false obedience, remain in place.

Equally, however, Barth's appeal to God's sovereign transcendence in relation to faith is not a rearguard action. While I have argued that its formality is problematic here, the appeal to God's election of Scripture means it cannot simply be taken to be open ended. What we have read so far suggests that it is right to think of Barth as reshaping Herrmannian arguments with a dependence on 'the divine Word', but to conclude from this that Barth 'conceived of theology as exegesis and reflection upon a radically open Word of Christ that subverts and transcends all theological systems'is not licit.[218] Non-foundationalist readings of Barth such as Gary Dorrien's are certainly on safe ground in pointing out that Barth did not claim any historical reality or philosophical principle as the secure basis for his theology. Yet the claim of 'radical openness' needs to be qualified because of the exegetical focus, not in spite of it. It is part of the force of Barth's account of the Scripture Principle that God has not chosen to reveal himself in endlessly new ways, but in a definite way, through Christ in Scripture.

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[218] Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology: Theology Without Weapons* (Louisvile, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2000), p.175; p. 195.

This is why the lack of connection between Barth's appeal to God's transcendent sovereignty in election to ground the Scripture Principle and the material content of the Scriptures is problematic. At its most basic level, it suggests a formal understanding of God's transcendence, along with an uncertainty as to how to understand the relationship between God and his acts in history.[219] This gap means that Barth's account of the Scripture Principle has an assertive quality to it, as Barth feels the need to play off its quasi-axiomatic character against its purpose as the authoritative medium of God's self-revelation as saviour and redeemer of humanity, rather than show their continuity. The reading of the lectures on Ephesians and James anticipated how this impacts Barth's reading of Scripture. Though Scripture's claim to authority cannot admit of any human analogue, yet it must nonetheless reflect a place in the divine act. At this point, when Barth is pressed to give some account of what that is, it is either a prelude to an existential encounter, as in Ephesians, or a fairly bald assertion of divine transcendence, as in James. Both of these solutions threaten to undermine the very thing they are to support, which is how God's authority is genuinely communicated by Scripture.

Yet while it is best not to read the authoritative claim of Scripture as anti-systematic, neither does it *wait* for a systematic structure to be in place before it can claim the reader. For all his continuity with some of the 19th-century concerns about scriptural authority devolving into a dangerous biblicism, Barth argued that the self must be exposed in the face of the scriptural claim, not protected. A recent account of modern theology has argued that one of its primary concerns was that faith be seen as one's own, as 'mine'.[220] The energy of Barth's exegetical work lies not so much in his outright rejection of this claim–he is not interested in the negation of the moral subject–but in how that question is allowed to shape theological inquiry. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Barth never departed from his affirmation that the place of Scripture in theological thought had a formal character. This is in part because he always saw as salutary what he has identified in the Reformed tradition's teaching on Scripture, which is that it pre-empts the believer, it does not await her. This makes both the systematic and the exegetical questions urgent ones. The next chapter will return to Barth's exegetical lectures, with the same questions. At the same time as he was negotiating with the Reformed tradition, he was engaged in another, surely more strenuous challenge,

[219] As McCormack notes, there is a 'hint of divine arbitrariness' in Barth's doctrine of predestination during his Göttingen period. See *Critically Realist*, p. 460.
[220] Kevin W. Hector, *The Theological Project of Modernism: Faith and the Conditions of Mineness* (Oxford: OUP, 2015).

namely Paul's theology of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians. The fruit of that wrestling occupies us first in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Resurrection and Salvation History

From the beginning of his time as a university professor, Barth lectured on a fresh New Testament text each semester through the Winter Semester of 1925/26, when he lectured on the Gospel of John as his primary course offering. After that first term in Münster, he began revising and repeating the lectures first drafted in Göttingen. Evenly splitting his time between Pauline and non-Pauline texts, Barth exhibits consistent habits of reading largely backed up by his basic theological convictions. As we saw in the lectures on Ephesians and James, the divine agent behind the biblical texts means both that Barth always seeks a material unity in the text that bears witness to God's act of redemption, and that text's divine occasion gives all exegesis an eschatological horizon that directs towards the idiosyncratic and the specific in the witness of each biblical author.

Chapter 2 addressed how Barth's understanding of Scripture is intimately bound up with some of the dominant concerns of 19th-century German theology: the relation between faith and history, and the need to maintain the autonomous moral integrity of that faith without dissolving it into rationalist morality or individualistic spiritual enthusiasm. While he rejected the correspondence between faith and religious self-consciousness that was widely held to be the most effective response to these conundrums, Barth continued to wrestle with very similar questions. Sharing Herrmann's conviction that revelation is received in faith, Barth sought to avoid the dangers of faith-subjectivism by making the object of faith God in his free, transcendent subjectivity. God's transcendent freedom has a double function for Barth. It both secures God as God and not a projection of human aspirations, and secures the moral integrity of the creature. Yet the relation between God and creatures is shaped by sin of the creature and God's response to it. Thus, God act towards creatures is that of the redeeming revelation of himself, through Jesus Christ in his life, death, and resurrection.

In trying to secure the essentially redemptive purpose of revelation with all its Christological specificity, and yet at the same time hold fast to God's transcendent freedom to be what he will be in his relation to creatures, Barth is hampered by formality in his account of God's transcendence at this stage. In what we have seen so far, Barth struggles to integrate the deep background of God's transcendence with the work of salvation in Jesus Christ, leaving him with more of an assertion of divine freedom in salvation than a theologically coherent account of it. In turn, this means that the claiming of creatures by God, especially as it is done by the authority of Scripture, tends towards an eschatological

encounter that lacks the descriptive tools to adequately account for the obedience of the creature in faith.

Given their widest angle, these tensions advert some issues fundamental to Barth's theology concerning the relationship between God's being and the economy of salvation, which Barth will address at length in the first two volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*. More proximately, because of the spiritual claim the Bible makes on the reader, which is dependent on its relation to divine lordship, these questions are acute for Barth's account of the Bible. To anticipate the developments of this chapter, Barth lays great stress on the authors of biblical texts as the witnesses to divine revelation, and the relationship between receptive faith and the history of Jesus Christ as its objective ground. Though disparate and unique in their own way, it is these two issues that run through the exegetical lectures I will examine in this chapter.

The first and best known of the lectures I will consider are those on 1 Corinthians. Originally given in the summer of 1923, concurrently with his lectures on the Reformed Confessions, Barth would publish them 'slightly revised' the following year under the title *The Resurrection of the Dead*.[221] The text is composed of two parts, the first of which is a fairly free gloss of the contents of chapters 1-14, the second of which is a detailed exegesis of chapter 15, wherein, Barth claims, lies the key to the epistle as a whole. Letters show that Barth had been working through chapter 15 several years earlier, and the unique approach he took to the lectures may in part be due to it being the product both of the pastor's desk and the professor's lectern.[222] Though published during his lifetime, these lectures remain infrequently read, though recent scholarship has argued convincingly for their importance to Barth's thought.[223] For our interests, what Barth presses so firmly in these lectures is the resurrection as the revelatory event in Christ's history. Particularly because Paul references the multitude of eyewitnesses to the risen Christ, Barth must give the relationship between Christ's earthly history and the plurality of witnesses more consideration than he has previously. Of primary interest, however, is how the resurrection determines the nature of the Christian's relationship to God and her own redemption.

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[221] *ADT*, p. V. The brief forward is not reproduced in the English translation. See Karl Barth, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, trans. H.J. Stenning (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1933).
[222] Barth tells Thurneysen of his difficulties with 1 Cor. 15, 'similar to the most difficult chapters of Romans' in 1919. See Barth, 17. February 1919, in *B-Th 1913-1921*, p. 320.
[223] Besides that which is interacted with in more detail below, see Robert Dale Dawson, *The Resurrection in Karl Barth* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 33-64 and Webster, *Earlier Theology*, pp. 67-90.

The next lecture we turn to is Barth's first foray into the Gospels, which are his lectures on the Sermon on the Mount (using the text from Matthew 5-7), given during his last term in Göttingen, the Summer Semester of 1925.[224] Though the material did not seem to grasp him quite the way the Gospel of John would the following semester, his handling of the relationship between the Christ and the Law shows an interest in thinking in terms of a covenantal history that in turn gives him a more nuanced depiction of the relationship between human history and Christ's than we have seen so far.[225] This relationship is of central importance in the lectures on the Gospel of John, part of which we will treat at the end of this chapter. The lectures on John contain some of Barth's most detailed investigation of Jesus Christ as the revealer and the witness to that revelation in this period.

3.1 The Preaching of Christ's Resurrection: *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1924)

I will order my discussion of this material by way of two lines of inquiry. The first will be to see how Barth accounts for the plurality of witnesses to the resurrection and their apparent validation based on temporal and physical proximity to the resurrected Christ. Recalling the eschatological relation that exists between witness and revelation, it is clear why this passage presents some exegetical difficulties. Second, I will consider the relationship between the act of judging the resurrection as true and the reality of the resurrection. This question will lead us to the relationship between Christ's history and the biblical witness that is central for Barth's thought in this period.

3.1.1 The Community of Witnesses

Barth reads the epistle as a whole as Paul's critique of the Corinthians' confusion between divine gifts and their own subjective reality, which is typified by either religious vitality or devotional commitment.[226] In line with Barth's reading of sin generally that we discussed in chapters one and two, this is the result of the Corinthians' subjection to an isolating lordship of the self. The factions that have developed in the congregation evident in 1 Cor. 1:10-17 are a case in point, and Barth makes use of this passage to reiterate the basic disjunction between the personal character of the human witnesses to revelation and their

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[224] As noted in more detail in the introduction, due to the state of the manuscripts, I am unable to consider the lectures on 1 John (W.S. 1923/24) and Colossians (W.S. 1924/25) here. Philippians (S.S. 1924) will be treated at length in its published form in chapter 5.

[225] A letter to Thurneysen during this semester mentions only that his lectures on the Sermon were well-attended. Barth, June 7, 1925, in *B-Th 1921-1930*, pp. 328-329.

[226] *ADT*, pp. 3-4 ET, pp. 16-17

function as a witness: 'The truth and the worth of the witnesses of Christ lies in that which is encountered in them, encountered ἀπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, not what he as man thereby becomes and makes of it…'[227] Barth finds the contrast Paul makes between 'talk' and 'power' in the kingdom of God in 4:20[228] apposite to this issue, and he glosses the difference as that between subjective human reality and God's sovereignty in action: 'The kingdom of God stands in no λόγος (not in the subjective interpretation of humanity), but in δύναμις (my interpretation: the freedom of God to be and remain the Lord)'.[229]

The proper spiritual stance towards such witnesses, then, is to recognise the disjunction between them and the agent directing their testimony. Barth interprets this difference, and Paul's rhetoric in the opening chapters more generally, as a largely critical 'word from the cross' that is set against human religious aspirations.[230] It is given in anticipation of the revelation from resurrection, but is not yet that word. The relationship between witnesses to revelation and those who receive their testimony is also, therefore, cast in the terms of its critical force: 'Step down from the wisdom, the satiety, the abundance, the royal consciousness which you now occupy as Christians' is the Pauline summons.[231] If the rhetoric is in keeping with Paul's own in the opening passages of 1 Corinthians, it is also typical of Barth's own critical rhetoric from this period. As in the lectures on Ephesians particularly, divine sovereignty is the possibility of witness, as only in his sovereign act can God be known, and yet because of the nature of sin this sovereignty is always exercised in opposition to human claims to sovereignty. The consequences for mediation here are consistent with what we have seen in the first two lectures, which is that witnesses only function as they are 'self-consuming'. The witness, says Barth forcefully, may be 'gratefully dismissed, after they have fulfilled their service to God'.[232]

The overall effect is once again to abstract the relation between the one bearing witness and those who receive the testimony into a formal category. Besides the broader theological dangers of such a position identified in chapter one, such an understanding of witness poses a sharp exegetical challenge to Barth when he comes to 1 Cor. 15:3-7. In these verses, Paul seems to appeal to several sets of witnesses to the risen Christ whose legitimacy depends on their historical location. Given Barth's commitments to God's presence in Christ as

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[227] *ADT*, p. 4 ET, p. 18.
[228] 'For the Kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power'.
[229] *ADT*, p. 4 ET, p.18.
[230] *ADT*, pp. 6-7 ET, pp. 21-24.
[231] *ADT*, p. 6 ET, p. 21.
[232] *ADT*, p. 5 ET, p. 19-20.

eschatological, he must account for Paul's apparent claim that Christ's resurrection can be verified by eye-witness reports of a generic variety.

As may be expected, Barth sets himself firmly against readings of this sort. He employs three arguments against such a position. The third reason, and the most decisive, is that Paul aligns the truth of Christ's resurrection with the resurrection of the dead generally. As such, Paul cannot be speaking of a historical truth at all 'for what kind of historical fact is it…whose understanding is bound up expressly with a general truth whose essence is precisely that its truth cannot emerge out of history, or to speak more precisely only on the border of all history, on the border of death?'[233] The eschatological nature of resurrection *a fortiori* precludes its historical character. Barth's first two arguments against the generic eye-witness reading of this passage follow logically from this claim, even if they precede it in his exposition. In the first place, Barth draws attention away from the historical succession of witnesses in favour of Paul's appeal to a tradition of belief, as he 'handed on to you' what he had received (1 Cor. 15:3).[234] In the second place, Barth draws attention to the non-chronological, non-narrative presentation of the events of the passion and the post-resurrection appearances. Such a form is not that of a historical account but of Paul's 'four-fold vantage point'.[235] This argument is nearly identical to Barth's presentation of the shifting tenses in Ephesians 1, wherein God's blessing of humanity in Christ is fundamentally an eschatological reality that must be rendered by Paul in language that defies orderly temporal sequence. The difference here is that Barth applies this same logic to a set of historical figures in relation to an eschatological event, rather than God's own act of revelation, as we saw in the Ephesians lectures. What he seems to be suggesting is that while those to whom the post-resurrection appearances were made may have been historical, their relation to the object of their testimony is not historical and so their relation to one another as a community of witnesses cannot be so either. It is not that Paul's interest lies in the chronological precedence of the first witnesses, but that there exists a common testimony from which he does not deviate. This common testimony does not depend on historical originality *per se*, but on its relation to the eschatological reality of God's revelation of his work in Christ through the resurrection. This in turn determines the character of its testimony, which is not that of empirical report, but of the witness of faith.[236]

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[233] *ADT*, p. 75 ET, pp. 140-141.
[234] *ADT*, p. 74 ET, p. 138.
[235] *ADT*, p. 75 ET, p. 140.
[236] It is for reasons like this that Barth rejects any talk, so important to Schleiermacher's account of the Bible, of Scripture as the 'source' (*Quelle*) of revelation, judging it to be implicitly historicist. See *TrB,* p. 90.

Barth is pressed by these verses to say how the multiplicity of witnesses to which Paul appeals is not claiming the resurrection as a historical fact, and this pushes him towards a rudimentary account of church authority. In line with Barth's general understanding of the Corinthians as a church seeking to establish for themselves a relationship with God, the collective witness of the church is an important ground of appeal for Paul, as Barth elaborates:

> [The Corinthians] must be vexed by this stumbling-block: Christ lives! which in no way can be understood in continuity with any empirical or personal human experiences, or insights of a higher or highest sort, unless they want to bypass the witnesses to Christ, that is, to forsake the fellowship (*Gemeinde*). Rather it is to be understood within the fellowship of Christ (*Gemeinde Christi*) only as witness to the revelation of God, the truly genuine Easter message.[237]

What stands out to Barth most here is that there is a community that precedes and encloses individual faith. This fellowship is itself a community of witness, and so the relation between the individual and the community is not secured by historical continuity or institutional succession, but by the revelation to which they give testimony.[238]

This is only a sketch of a position, and Barth leaves much unsaid. The tensions are evident, as he both needs to account for Paul's appeal to the multiplicity of witnesses without construing the appeal as one of the empirical facts of history. He is wary of institutional language, referring throughout to the 'fellowship' rather than the church, blunting the possibility that a community of witness can be understood through their institutional character or historical continuity. Barth's description of the community shares the vulnerability of his conception of the apostolic witness in Ephesians, as both press the disjunctive relationship between the act of witness and the particular character of the witness to the degree that he is open to the voluntarist charge that their authority is simply willed, rather than legitimate. Yet there is a key difference, which is the public character of the community's witness. The Corinthians' relationship to Paul, on Barth's reading, is contentious because Paul seeks to check their religious heroism. On Barth's conception of apostolic authority, there is a risk of pitting Paul's authority against the Corinthians in a way that leaves little possibility of discriminating between Paul's assertion of witness to Christ and the Corinthian assertion of their own religious experience. It is crucial, therefore, that the

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[237] *ADT*, p. 79 ET, p. 147.

[238] David Ferguson is right to point out the significance of this passage for Barth's development of an account of church authority, but he overstates the case somewhat by speaking of the church's 'apostolic authority'. As we will see, the issue for Barth here is the force of consensus, not of authority. The community of witness thus includes the apostolic witness, but is not a form of it. See David Ferguson, 'Barth's *Resurrection of the Dead*: further reflections', in *SJT* 56.1 (2003), p.67. Stenning consistently translates *Gemeinde* as 'Church', which, while certainly admissable, obscures Barth's emphasis.

force of Paul's own witness does not stand on his charisma as a religious teacher, but on its agreement with the whole community of witness. This is the significance of Paul's appeal to the Scriptures in 1 Cor. 15:3, thinks Barth. It is not Scripture's legislated authority as normative witness, but its consensus on the truth that matters here: 'The truth must prove itself, but in order to open our eyes to this self-proof, the consensus of voices that proclaims this truth is no small thing'.[239] To emphasise the significance of the resurrection as revelation, the unity of the scriptural witnesses lies in their 'standing around one point, this change from death to life…'[240]

The importance of this passage is that we see in it Barth's account of witness developing beyond the scope of the individual encounter with apostolic testimony, even if the relationship between the community of witness and the historical, institutional character of the church is not yet seen. In the rest of the chapter we will see how Barth develops a much clearer account of the church in relation to its own history as an object of God's saving work. The multiplicity of witnesses is only the prelude, however, to the heart of Barth's lectures, which is his exegesis of 1 Cor. 15. The aim here is to see how Barth's position on the resurrection as something that can be thought and the resurrection as reality indicate a shift in his understanding of how revelation is communicated to faith.

3.1.2 Resurrection as Truth and Reality

The response to *Resurrection* as an exegetical commentary has been most taken with Barth's fundamental exegetical claim, which is that the unity of 1 Corinthians lies in chapter 15 and the teaching on the resurrection.[241] Less discussed are the details of his interpretation of chapter 15, especially the torturous treatment of Paul's analogies for the resurrection in 15:35-49d. Recent scholarship has argued that this material plays a more important role in Barth's thought from this period than the attention given it in Barth scholarship would imply.[242] As Barth searches for a way to talk about God's act in history that is not itself amenable to historicism, the resurrection fits as an event in time that nonetheless opens up to a radically disruptive eschatology.[243] Barth's intensive study of 1 Corinthians alongside

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[239] *ADT*, p. 80 ET, p. 148.
[240] *ADT*, p. 80 ET, p. 148.
[241] See, e.g. Anthony C. Thiselton, 'Luther and Barth on 1 Corinthians 15: Six Theses for Theology in Recent Interpretation,' in *The Bible, the Reformation and the Church: Essays in Honour of James Atkinson*, ed. by W.P. Stephens (Sheffield, Eng.: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), pp. 258-289.
[242] See Westerholm, *Ordering,* pp. 91-114, and Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, pp. 42-52.
[243] Dawson is right to stress that the resurrection for Barth was never a purely eschatological event, but always an event in history, though on its 'border'. See Dawson, *The Resurrection*, p. 63.

Romans towards the end of his pastorate further led him to understand the resurrection as the foundational revelatory event: 'if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain' (15:14). In his interpretation of 1 Cor. 15, Barth seeks to show that Christ's resurrection is not only an event of supreme importance, but one that provides the very form of Christian teaching.

Barth's treatment of 15:35-49d is the exegetical basis for this claim. The teaching of the resurrection is more properly called the 'methodology of the apostle's preaching' rather than 'eschatology', thinks Barth, because Paul's thought is not concerned with the resurrection as a future event, but as the reality upon which all of Christian existence depends.[244] It is of decisive importance, then, that the resurrection as an event also has a *ratio*, because only then can one think as a Christian about everything else. This is what Paul attempts to show with the seed analogy of vv. 36-38.[245] While Barth wants to affirm Paul's realism along with biblicist commentators like J.T. Beck and Albert Bengel against an idealist reading of this passage, he rejects an interpretation of the seed analogy that makes the resurrection a kind of higher organic process. Barth argues instead Paul is presenting a form of thinking that can allow one to refer to the resurrection, the reality itself. 'I have chosen the heading 'The Resurrection as Truth', says Barth, but 'I could have just as well chosen 'The Possibility of Thinking the Resurrection'.[246]

To support this reading, Barth divides these verses into two parts, the first of which is concerned with Paul's rejoinder to the objection against the possibility of thinking the resurrection by way of the seed analogy in vv. 35-45. Barth cites Calvin here, claiming this as a 'prelude' to the teaching on the resurrection, wherein the essential point is showing how there can be an identity between two different objects through a 'creative and thus *indemonstrable* (*unanschaulich*) synthesis'.[247] The second, on vv. 46-49, develops the same notion in relation to the resurrection of the dead. This is the 'logical high-water mark' of the whole chapter and where Paul first says explicitly what he means by resurrection, which is that 'it is sown a natural body, raised a spiritual body' (15:44).[248] With this, says Barth, it is clear that when Paul says 'resurrection of the dead', it is 'a paraphrase of the word "God".

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[244] *ADT*, p. 61 ET, p. 115.
[245] 'Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.'
[246] *ADT*, p. 107 ET, p. 193.
[247] *ADT*, p. 110 ET, p. 199. Erik Peterson criticised Barth's use of the term *Unanschaulich* in relation to Christ, as I discuss in chapter 4. There I translate *Anschaulich* as 'manifest', but using 'unmanifest' here would not make sense.
[248] *ADT,* p. 112 ET, p. 202.

What else could the Easter message be but message that God is Lord become quite concrete?'[249]

'Concrete' in this case means determinative of present reality, rather than indicative of a future state. Barth takes pains in these passages to see how Paul's binary language is not coordinated to temporal states but to present, mutually incompatible realities. So, in Barth's reading of 15:44, 'soulish body' and 'spiritual body' correspond not to two creaturely substances, or forms of existence from which and to which one might move, but to the spheres of humanity and God.[250] Thus the relation between the two in the resurrection shows that God, and thought about God, is not restricted to an independent, spiritual sphere while 'we are left to ourselves in our earthly world', but that God is lord of the body and thus 'the question of God is posed acutely and unavoidably'.[251]

It is for this reason that the thought of the resurrection does not look towards a future state that is to be determined by a future judgment, but to a present eschatological judgment. To make the case for a reading of the resurrection within a de-historicised eschatology, Barth argues that that Paul's use of σῶμα should be restricted to human existence and his use of πνεῦμα to the Holy Spirit. The resurrection then becomes not the expectation that present human existence will through death become a different–spiritual–body, but that in the resurrection human sinful existence may be a divinely commanded and directed existence.[252] The relation, then, between present human existence and Christ, is therefore rendered by Paul in temporal terms only to stress that what the Christian does not have 'yet' is that which is only possible from God's side as '*absolute* miracle (*Wunder*)'. Thinking the resurrection, then, means recognising that in it God establishes an identity that would otherwise be impossible to establish: 'You are both [Adam and Christ] or rather, you belong to both'.[253]

The 'possibility of thinking' the resurrection, then, reflects Martin Westerholm's judgment that Barth's 'theology of the resurrection corresponds much more closely to a traditional theology of justification than to a classical understanding of resurrection.'[254] In doing so, argues Westerholm, Barth is indebted to Ritschl's argument that justification should be construed in terms of forms of human judgment. This means that in Barth's description of the resurrection as the apostolic 'methodology', he is constrained to show how it takes the

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[249] *ADT*, p. 112 ET, p. 202.
[250] Barth translates ψυχικόν as *seelischer, die Seele* translating most commonly to 'soul' or more technically 'psyche'.
[251] *ADT*, p. 113 ET, p. 203.
[252] See Westerholm, *Ordering*, pp. 100-101 on this point.
[253] *ADT*, p. 118 ET, p. 212.
[254] Westerholm, *Ordering*, p. 102.

form of a 'synthetic judgment' rather than an event whose ontological weight is sufficient to have historical meaning.[255] This is a perceptive reading of Barth's text and is convincing about how Barth understands the resurrection, at least in part, as a form of thought. Yet it is not sufficiently attentive to the scope of Barth's thinking on the resurrection in these lectures, and so misses something of significance in his exegesis.

To see what this analysis lacks, we can begin with the forms of judgment related to justification. Barth discusses this issue in his 1910 lecture 'Christian Faith and History'. Putatively discussing Luther's account of justification in Romans[256], Barth affirms that because there is a new predicate added to the sinner, it must be thought of as a synthetic judgment. But, Barth continues, 'in God's mouth it is *at once* an analytic judgment. The sinner is justified *now'*.[257] Barth goes on to say that recognising both the analytic and synthetic nature of justification is essential for properly relating belief to the reality of justification in God.[258] The point, held implicitly against Ritschl, is that while the synthetic nature of the judgment is necessary for the doctrine of justification to be a response to the consciousness of guilt, its force depends on its completion in God.

We can see the same logic in Barth's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15. Following the 'Resurrection as Truth' passage, Barth considers the remaining verses of the chapter (vv. 50-58) under the heading 'The Resurrection as Reality'. While Barth is clear that this section does not introduce new content to what has gone previously, it is also more than a peroration. Rather, as much as Paul is here at his most direct and forceful about the power and ultimate significance of the resurrection for human life, it also underlines the gulf between knowing the truth of the resurrection and its reality. Because the '*contemporaneity* (*Gleichzeitigkeit*) *of the living and the dead in the resurrection*'[259] can only be a reality through God, the existence of the believer is defined by the presence of God's gift in hope. Yet this hope is not oriented towards a future continuous with the present, but towards the miracle of Christ's resurrected presence: '…everything depends on this "victory" of God "through our Lord Jesus Christ" being and remaining present in *hope*. There is no fuller joy or mightier presence of God than the *Futurum aeternum*, no genuine having, possessing, or enjoying except in τῷ

[255] Westerholm, *Ordering*, pp. 103-104. Though not in relation to Ritschl's legacy, Asprey will be similarly critical of Barth's theology of the resurrection in the 'Göttingen Dogmatics', which we will address in chapter 4.
[256] The editors suggest the proximate source is Karl Holl, see *VA 1910-1914*, p. 184.
[257] Barth, 'Der Christliche Glaube und die Geschichte', in *VA 1910-1914*, p. 184.
[258] Barth, 'Christliche Glaube', pp. 184-186.
[259] *ADT*, p. 122 ET, p. 217.

δὲ θεῷ χάρις spoken with empty hands…'[260] The gap between the truth and reality of the resurrection fundamentally means Christian existence in the present is one of 'tension'.[261]

Whereas in the 'Christian Faith' lecture Barth suggested a more comfortable relationship between belief in justification and its reality in God (both aspects of justification are forms of *human* judgment, after all), here they are expressly played off against one another. It is possible to recognise the *ratio* of the resurrection, but its reality does not take the form of an act of judgment, but of a history. Barth is best understood as moving towards the vocabulary of salvation history rather than forms of judgment in order to relate faith to God's acts. So, when Barth speaks of God's act in resurrection as being 'creative', as much as this accommodates the vocabulary of synthetic judgment, it also refers to God's act in creation and new creation set in relation to a history. Both are present in Barth's account of the move from the old Adam to the new: 'This is the truth of God that must and will happen to us humans…: the change in predication…which means the conversion (*Umkehr*) from the Adam *created* by God to [the one] created by *God*, the change that is realised nowhere but to and in the concrete, visible, bodily life of the human being.'[262] Thus in Christ's resurrection, salvation history is contracted to a single point. 'We stand' says Barth 'in the unity of salvation history, which is real history…but not the history that plays out in time, but that which is between time and eternity, the history in which creation, the resurrection of Christ and the End…are one day.'[263]

There is a tension between thinking of God's acts as forms of judgment and as a history established in Jesus Christ that determines the believer's history. Increasingly Barth will move towards favouring a richer description of salvation history, which allows for a clearer and more theologically articulate set of tools for relating the believer to God's acts. But first, it is important to note how Barth's uncertainty about relating the form of faith and salvation history limits his exegesis of 1 Corinthians. This is most evident in his handling of Paul's teaching on 'love' in 1 Corinthians 13.

In Rudolf Bultmann's critical yet sympathetic 1926 review of *Resurrection*, he agrees with Barth's overall reading of Paul's intention to make eschatology meaningful for the believer's present reality, but faults Barth for his emphasis on chapter 15. It is not chapter 15, thinks Bultmann, but chapter 13 that is the real centre of gravity for the epistle, if in fact 'the

[260] *ADT*, p. 125 ET, pp. 221-222.
[261] *ADT*, p. 125 ET, p. 223.
[262] *ADT*, p. 116 ET, p. 208.
[263] *ADT*, p. 118 ET, p. 212.

theme of 1 Corinthians is the "last things"–not as an object of speculation but as a reality in the life of Christians'.[264] For Bultmann, if it is to be such a reality, then it must be realised in the temporal life of the believer, and love is the reality that Christ's life makes possible. The theme of 1 Corinthians is just this possibility, claims Bultmann, not 'justification by faith', which means Barth's de-historicised account of the eschatology is correct, but its centrality to the whole is not.[265] In effect, Bultmann implies what Westerholm makes explicit concerning Barth's interpretation of resurrection as justification, and contends against him that Paul's genuine interest lies in redemption. It is an important critique, because it clearly poses the question to Barth of how he accounts for the subjective reality of Christ's resurrected presence within his foreshortened eschatology.

A brief look at Barth's treatment of chapter 13 suggests he is of two minds. His comments on the chapter form part of his survey of chapters 1-14, and so it receives considerably less detailed exegesis than that which he gives for chapter 15. He does, however, recognise that both in its content and its rhetoric it most closely resembles chapter 15 rather than the chapters around it. On the one hand, Barth reads Paul's description of love as highly critical of all religious aspirations, rather than a capstone on them: 'No, what is announced here is much more a *finis theologiae, finis christianismi, finis ecclesiae*'.[266] On the other, Barth argues that Paul does understand humanity as the subject of the predicate love, even as love seems to become 'an independent person and acts for humanity'[267]

Barth is not quite sure what to do with what he takes to be the critical nature of the love passage alongside Paul's clear assumption that love is an act expected of Christians now, in the present reality. As a result, love nearly loses a distinct character–'a word such as seriousness, hope, or expectation could stand here[268]'–even while Barth tries to pin down what Paul means by love being the 'greatest' of the triad. In the end, Barth considers ἀγάπη to be in opposition to the essential isolationist trend of sin, love is 'a utterly voluntary and selfless giving of oneself for another'.[269] This general definition is then specified as a relation possible between humans and between humanity and God only in light of the resurrection. It is the relation that is established when God is lord of his church, and can be served by the individual as part of the church. The slaying and making alive of the resurrection is thus the

[264] Rudolf Bultmann, 'Karl Barth's *The Resurrection of the Dead*', in *Faith and Understanding I*, trans. Louise P. Smith (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 80.
[265] Bultmann, 'Barth's *Resurrection*', p. 94.
[266] *ADT*, p. 45 ET, p. 87.
[267] *ADT*, p. 48 ET, p. 92.
[268] *ADT*, p. 46 ET, p. 89.
[269] *ADT*, p. 46 ET, p. 89.

movement of love, as it requires both the dying of the self and the establishment of this new set of relationships: 'death, in which [the isolated person] as such dies, the total sublation of what he as such experiences and then: his resurrection, now no longer as the isolated, rather as one in service to his lord, or put differently: as one in the whole, which also in him is the one the whole.'[270] Love is thus the 'vital principle' (*Lebenselement*) of the 'fellowship of Christ', a claim which Barth thinks pushes towards a purely objective account of love in Christological terms, as 'the miracle that man does not do, but is from God and done to him'.[271] Yet Barth thinks that such a move should be resisted, and that Paul thinks of love as a human act. 'It is the unprecedented thing about this chapter' says Barth, 'that Paul here really intends to make the human the subject of the predicates'.[272] But Barth somewhat helplessly defers saying what this might mean, beyond positing this subject as an abstract, eschatological one: it must be 'another human being, a new creature, the old is passed, the new is come'.[273] Rather than saying it has no place in the Christian life, Barth is gesturing towards how Christ's resurrection makes possible a new moral existence. Yet for all Barth's desire to show the contemporaneous nature of Christ's presence, he has difficulty saying how Christ's benefits are present as well.

What is striking about this passage is how uncomfortable Barth is with the direction the text is taking him, yet all the while self-consciously resisting his impulse to smooth out its incongruities with his reading of the epistle as a whole. In the end, he can only attribute love to an abstract subject, which plays no role in his concluding account of the reality of resurrection. There, it is only the enduring tension of faith that that can be thought in response to Christ's resurrection. While he may be reasonably accused of collapsing reconciliation into redemption (as eschatology) at this stage[274], it is also evident that the direction of his thought is moving towards a richer account of the objective reality of Christ's history. Barth's difficulty is that the form of apostolic witness and the form of faith are coordinated as a form of judgment, while increasingly he wants to specify the object of faith as a history, to which such judgment is not suited. To do so, Barth will have to see not only how human history relates to Christ eschatologically, but how Christ enters into human history. For early exegetical soundings of this issue, we turn in the next section to Barth's lectures on the Sermon on the Mount.

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[270] *ADT*, p. 46 ET, p. 90.
[271] *ADT*, p. 48 ET, p. 92.
[272] *ADT*, p. 48 ET, p. 92.
[273] *ADT*, p. 48 ET, p. 92, citing 2 Cor. 5:17.
[274] See Westerholm, *Ordering*, p. 105.

3.2 The Creature in Covenantal History: The Sermon on the Mount (Göttingen, 1925)

As Barth had not lectured on any of the Gospels until he lectured on the Sermon on the Mount (based on Matthew's account found in chapters 5-7), his choice of text does not point to an eagerness to deal with the Bible's description of Jesus's history, even as Christology was playing a larger part in his theology. The mode of address that Jesus adopts in this text is more obviously fitting to the account of revelation as *Deus dixit* that he was deploying in his dogmatics lectures, which were by the summer of 1925 on to Christology.[275] Yet the lectures on the Sermon offer some extended wrestling with just how Jesus is both in and outside of history as the one who brings the Kingdom of Heaven, which makes these lectures worth our attention here. I propose to proceed in two stages. First, Barth's understanding of the unified character of this passage as a critical attack on human ethics, made principally in the beatitudes, will be considered. In the second, we will see how this attack prompts an extended discussion of the relationship of Christ's teaching to the Mosaic Law. This, in turn, leads Barth to considering the notion of covenantal history more generally.

Before embarking on exegesis directly, as is his wont in the lectures on epistles, Barth begins by briefly reminding his listeners what it means to read the Bible theologically. The Gospels, and particularly an excised portion of them, generally lack the first-person address that is so important to Barth for orienting the claim of the text on the reader. This may be why Barth felt the need to say at the outset that any individual reading is preceded by the church's reading and its reception of the biblical text as canon. This is not simply a matter of affirming that there is no neutrality in interpretation, it is also a matter of self-knowledge: 'The knowledge of one's existence is the decisive presupposition of a churchly, a theological exegesis.'[276] In the *Resurrection* lectures Barth suggested this way of thinking about the church's relation to Scripture, but it plays a prominent, prolegomenal role here. It has been a theme in this study that for Barth reading the Bible rightly always requires a recognition that neither its content, nor its interpretation, is ultimately constituted by any human agent. It is important to simply note that whereas in earlier lectures, such as those on Ephesians and James, the critical force of the Bible's claim was anchored in God's eschatological relation to the text, here Barth takes into account the reader's own context.

This is especially important as Barth finds in part of the Sermon on the Mount the same wholesale critical attack on human self-constitution that he finds in 1 Corinthians. He arrives

[275] On which see chapter 4.
[276] *BP*, p. 1/2 (Pagination is given as manuscript/archive transcription.).

at this position by asking whether or not the Sermon has a material cohesion, or if it is a redacted collection of statements, not intended to be read as single unit. As in his lectures on James, Barth considers finding a unifying theme necessary for proceeding in his exegesis, even if that does not account for every aspect of the text. To that end, Barth notes that Sermon is of a type with other messianic declarations in Matthew, and that there are resonances between it and the sending out of the twelve in 9:35, as well as the apocalyptic prophecies found in 24-25.[277] This leads some commentators to either read the Sermon with an ecclesial focus or an eschatological one, neither of which properly captures the intent of the Sermon in Barth's view. Barth puts himself in line with a broad tradition going back to Chrysostom of reading the Sermon as primarily ethical in intent, though suggesting that his understanding of what it means for the text to be ethical will differ from the traditional view.[278] Because of its messianic significance, the question turns for Barth of how Matthew conceives of Jesus's fulfilment of his messianic mission. The distinction of the Sermon as ethical rather than ecclesial or eschatological is thus not a sharp one, as the messianic mission always involves all three to some degree. Judging the Sermon as primarily ethical, then, is a judgment about the order of the messianic mission, which on Barth's reading of the place of the Sermon in Matthew is 'in the first place' an 'attack on human life, on ethical praxis'. One cannot 'open wide enough' or 'think universally enough' to comprehend the scope with which the Sermon gives the 'problem of ethics'.[279] The language of attack signals Barth's departure from what he takes to be the traditional understanding of the Sermon as ethical teaching, in the sense that it presents a guide to Christian living that covertly leaves a general understanding of ethics untroubled. The initial task of reading an 'ethical' passage of the Bible, suggests Barth, requires a recognition that it begins by reconstituting its subject. The source of this attack in the Sermon is found in the Beatitudes.

3.2.1 The Beatitudes and Ethical Existence

Barth's discussion of the Beatitudes (5:3-10) took up the bulk of his lecture hours. After surveying a set of formal issues and interpretive conundrums associated with the list,[280] he identifies two elements of significance in the passage: first, the announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven, and second, the corresponding new ethos in which the ethical subject is

[277] *BP*, pp. 3-3b/7-10.
[278] *BP*, p. 3b/10.
[279] *BP*, p. 3b/10.
[280] *BP*, pp. 7-8/22-27.

placed by the announcement. Formally, Barth notes that each 'blessed' group is called so because they await some good corresponding to the condition of their blessedness. The question then becomes what this good is, which goes under various guises in each of the blessings. Barth judges that it is the 'Kingdom of Heaven' (ἡ βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν) that is the 'circumscribing reality' that unites the 'future goods' together. As ever, Barth is sensitive to the way biblical authors use tense to, as he sees it, denote the complex eschatological relations that come to bear on human life when God announces himself in Jesus Christ. Thus, the expectation of the goods in vv. 4-9 is bracketed by the present tense possession of the Kingdom by the 'poor in spirit' and the 'persecuted for righteousness' sake', to whom the Kingdom 'belongs' (ἐστιν).[281] In terms familiar from the *Resurrection* lectures, the Kingdom's presence, while inclusive of future and as yet unrealised goods, denotes the paradoxically present eschatological determination of the new ethical situation in which the 'blessed' are to be found. Two questions follow from this: how is it that the Kingdom 'belongs' to the figures of 5:3 and 5:10, and how are the 'blessed' to be. Put differently, how is the good of the Kingdom present and what are the ethics of this Kingdom?

In the first case, Barth notes that 'blessedness' is the condition of belonging to the Kingdom, and by giving an anatomy of the 'blessed', Barth develops an account of what it means for the Kingdom to be present while maintaining its eschatological determination. He notes that 'blessing' is in general used as a declaration by Christ in the Synoptics. By way of a brief survey of Christ's other declarations of blessing, Barth wants to deflate the blessings in the Beatitudes as occupying in their own right a unique, exemplary category. 'Blessing', he argues, is 'roughly between congratulations and a simple greeting.'[282] In general terms it describes a kind of readiness for moral action and is given 'in respect to the preparedness and capacity for right understanding and decision'.[283] But this readiness is not indicative of a condition inherent in those blessed, but is announced to those blessed that unbeknownst to themselves occupy a salutary proximity to divine activity. The announcement of blessing declares that those who are blessed are 'pulled in' to the 'correlative relation between the human state (*Zuständlichkeit*) and divine promise'.[284] Most simply, to be blessed is to be in a certain relation to God that allows for action in response to that relation.

[281] *BP*, pp. 7-7a22-23.
[282] *BP*, p. 9b/34.
[283] *BP*, p. 9b/35.
[284] *BP*, p. 9b/35

Yet the nature of this correlative relation is not to be deduced from the state of those blessed. The announcement of blessedness itself is one that undermines the presumed link between the phenomena of human life and its relation to the good: 'between that which those declared blessed are or do and that which is indicated on the grounds [of the blessedness] promised, [there is the] opposition between present and future, a distance never to be overcome.'[285] This critical eschatology is familiar enough, but Barth is also quick to point out the limits of reading this material as simply a declaration of paradox.[286] Barth recognises that simply equating 'blessedness' with an inversion of the ordinary perception of ethical reality is not sufficient to achieve a new ethical reality, but simply a 'whitewashing affectation'.[287] The task is to move beyond bare paradox to articulate the ground of blessedness, which lies in the paradox of the eschatological kingdom that 'belongs' to the poor in spirit and the persecuted. It is in that relation that the blessed are what they are and in that relation that there is content to the paradox.

To move 'blessing' from a general category to its specific content in the Beatitudes, Barth considers the 'poor in spirit' as the master category for the Beatitudes, due to the 'poor' possessing the Kingdom. The 'poor' can be considered objectively as a broad biblical category for all those who recognise their own spiritual indigence and thus exist only in dependence on God:

> Jesus extols as blessed the discriminated against, the outcast, those whom, outside of God, possess no hope…The mishandled, lost, those whose righteousness is only reliant on God, are those by the μακάριοι have the news of deliverance announced, the always persecuted people of God, the 7,000 in the desert who would not bend the knee before Baal, the true Israel, the true, quite misjudged by the ungodly and pious alike, church ἐν πνεύματι outlasting all external πτωχεία.[288]

As suggested by the expansive terms Barth gives it, the 'poor' are equivalent to the elect, understood in terms of a concrete covenantal history. Yet this term admits not only a 'situation'– an objective reality that describes the 'poor' in which they are found in God's work of salvation–but also an active relation. Under the specification of the 'meek' (Mth. 5:5), to be 'poor' is understood as a designation of a '*habitus*, *constitution* (*Verfassung*) and *posture* (*Haltung*)'.[289] This 'posture' exhibits the relationship between the 'poor' and passivity to divine action. There is a recognition of the need for divine action and the

[285] *BP*, p. 9/30
[286] *BP*, p. 9/31
[287] *BP*, p. 9/31
[288] *BP*, pp. 10b/38-39
[289] *BP*, p. 11b/45.

passivity of its reception, which is a movement of thought made possible by the announcement that the goods of God are 'realised in the promise' of God's coming kingdom: 'One must say precisely here: first now, declared blessed by Jesus Christ, on the basis of the conjunction between πτωχεια and βασιλειά that came about in the promise spoken by Christ, they become what they are, they can understand themselves as the righteous, though they can only boast of their righteousness in *hope* as it has not yet appeared'.[290]

The relationship between the announcement of the Kingdom of Heaven and the double movement of judgment and hope is consistent with what we observed in the *Resurrection* lectures. In a similar way, this seems to come at the cost of limiting the ethical scope of the biblical material. The ethics of the Kingdom are a 'posture' of expectation of divine presence and action, rather than a set of determinate human actions. In this more explicitly ethical material, this can be seen as a version of the well-trod critique of Protestantism as ethically malign due to the exclusive reliance on grace in all things. It is possible that this critical use of grace to reject all human pretensions to self-justification makes the attack on ethics too strongly, leaving nothing further to say about the obligations that might exist for Christians as a consequence of God's peremptory and wholly gratuitous work of salvation in Christ. Yet, Barth is struck by not just the critical force of the messianic announcement, but also of the way the blessed are so by their proximity to Christ. This relational element gets elaborated in the context of the relationship between Christ's messianic announcement of the Kingdom and the Mosaic Law, to which we now turn.

3.2.2 Law and Promise

In Matthew 5:17, Christ seeks to forestall his hearers falsely concluding that because of his comprehensive attack on ethics by way of the Beatitudes, he has come to 'abolish the Law or the Prophets'. Barth takes Christ's contrary claim that he has not come to abolish the Law but to fulfil it, along with his reaffirmation of the Law's status that will 'not pass away until heaven and earth pass away' in v. 18, as the *locus classicus* on the relationship between Gospel and Law. It is here that Barth will address the need to fill out the content of the paradox of 'blessing' by way of the objective acts of God in Christ. First, however, Barth's reading of this passage is careful not to lose its moorings in the precise nature of the problem that Christ is addressing: how does the messianic announcement relate to the dispensation of

[290] *BP*, p. 10b/42.

the Mosaic Law? Accordingly, his reading begins with an analysis of Christ's 'fulfilment' of the Law and then moves to ask what this means for the Law's enduring authority.

In the first case, Barth takes the meaning of Christ's fulfilment of the Law's status as revelation. Central to Barth's reading of this passage is the technical nature of linking 'Law' and 'Prophets' together to embrace the entirety of the accepted Hebrew canon. What this does for Barth is move the question away from the narrow one of whether or not disciples of Christ are bound by the strictures of the Mosaic Law, to whether or not the messianic appearance means that the Law, which had been understood as divine revelation, is now only of 'antiquarian' interest.[291] Barth's concern here is less about an overt Marcionism as it is an attitude that historicises the relationship between the testaments, and so implicitly the incarnation and revelation. The dilemma is: either the Law was divine revelation, in which case how could it admit of improvement, or it was not, in which case Jesus cannot claim any connection to the God of Israel. Barth understands Jesus's response to be grabbing the horns of the dilemma by denying that his relationship to the Law is properly sequential, but affirming rather that it is closer to that of form and content. This line of reasoning supplies the tools for Barth's account of Christ's fulfilment of the Law: as revelation, the Law is not set next to the New Testament, but rather the New Testament is 'in' the Old. Christ's fulfilment of the Law, then, is the realisation and affirmation of the Old Testament. Barth reasons that this is the necessary consequence of the unity of divine action in revelation. Christ was really promised to the Old Testament prophets as they 'awaited [Christ]…in the Holy Spirit, and he was announced in the same Holy Spirit'. With Christ as the unifying factor for Old and New Testament prophecy, Prophets and Apostles–Scripture in its entirety–stands under a single category of witness, not two:

> The Apostles' cannot supersede the Prophets, nor is it essential that they stand as a second category, standing as the witness to the transpired realisation (*Verwirklichung*) next to those, the witness to the promise. Rather insofar as the realisation is in relation to the promise and is only what it is in this relation, are they [the Apostles] themselves Prophets, as in reverse the witnesses to the promise, in so far as it was not empty, but directed and related to the realisation, are themselves Apostles.[292]

As we will see, Barth deploysa similar logic in his lectures on John to relate the promise of Abraham and the vision of John. For now, due to the facticity of Jesus's own history, the 'promise-realisation' binary both reflects the order of the Testaments, and, due to Jesus's history being directed towards an eschatological end, shows how both the testaments properly

[291] *BP*, p. 23b/100.
[292] *BP*, p. 24/102.

sit under the expectation of Christ's *parousia*. This construction indicates two important things for understanding Barth at this stage. One, it shows the fruit of a genuinely futurist eschatology. Two, it allows him to think about the unity of Scripture specifically in relation to Christ and Christ's ministry. Barth's categories of eschatological relation can now be anchored in Christ's own history, rather than more simply to election. While 'promise' and 'fulfilment' cannot be simply reduced to historical sequence, they can now be provisionally reflected by those sequences.

In Barth's reading of 5:17-18, he anticipates what he would later argue in the *Church Dogmatics*, which is that the Old Testament takes on a collective witness to Christ.[293] Yet, in the context of this passage, we may yet wonder if Barth has avoided its salient problem, which is the relationship between the moral obligations laid down by the Law and the fulfilment of the Law claimed by Jesus Christ. It is notable that Barth drops the phrase 'Law and Prophets' in the discussion of witness in favour of only 'Prophets'. By reading the whole of the Hebrew Bible as prophetic, Barth may deny the very claims made by the Law that make its relationship to the messianic fulfilment problematic. In other words, does Barth's eschatology lead him to undermine the content of the Mosaic Law even as he strives to maintain its equality with the New Testament as divine revelation?

Barth's exegesis of 5:18 points to an awareness of this problem, though his response is to continue mining the 'promise-fulfilment' terminology. As we saw in his reading of 5:17, 'promise' and 'realisation' were not fixed to the Old and New Testament modes of witness, but rather both directed towards the eschatological reality of Christ. In 5:18, exhibiting his futurist eschatology, Barth notes that the end of the world is also the 'completion of the messianic realisation of the promise and the command'. Thus, the fulfilment of 5:17 remains a future, eschatologically determined reality that is only given definite content by Christ's messianic announcement. At the end of the world 'there will be no more Law, but also no Gospel, one might say'.[294] By this it is clear that both Law and Gospel are within the same eschatological horizon, meaning that presence of Gospel does not signal a definitive movement away from Law. Barth is worried here about a 'historicising' of the Old Testament, which, by treating Christ's incarnation as creating a historical division, rather than revealing the content of an eschatological reality, would deny any further claim to the Law.[295]

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[293] *CD* IV/3.1, §69 pp. 53-66.
[294] *BP*, p. 24b/104.
[295] *BP*, p. 25/109. Barth can be understood here as anticipating the concern Oliver O'Donovan raises, drawing on Hannah Arendt, about the implicit historicism of marking all time after the incarnation as *anno domini*. What results is an infinite past and an infinite future that are continuous with the present, and so effectively

What remains is an existence that is specific to creatures prior to Christ's *parousia*, which Barth describes as bounded by the two testaments of Scripture:

> But in pictorial language the text says undoubtedly that when Christ speaks of Law and its persisting significance as correlate to Gospel, it is dealing with the written word, and indeed the entire written word of the Old Testament. Not merely with its spirit, not merely with its content. The witness to revelation as earthly, a concretely circumscribed factor that shall not pass away, so long as the earth itself does not pass away. It shall be given this side of the eschatological border a book with words, whose words are all true, of which one cannot pick and choose as one pleases, but all are fully promise and all are fully necessary commands. Not fully fulfilled–on that they await as words, the fulfilment is Christ–but fully promise and command, and the fulfilment of this promise stands over against the command and never elsewhere.[296]

The importance of the textual character of Scripture pointed to here echoes what Barth had to say about the importance of the 'regulative codex' in the Confessions lectures.[297] However in those earlier lectures, Barth's emphasis is far more on the critical significance of the physical nature of the Bible to keep the Scripture Principle becoming a principle of an ersatz metaphysical realism. Here, Barth draws the connection much more positively with the Bible's capacity to mediate revelation as part of human history. Yet, while the testamental division seems to reflect Christ's incarnation, Barth shifts almost imperceptibly from equating the Law with the Old Testament to the moral authority of the Bible in general. The statutory character of the Mosaic Law is appropriated for its formal significance as written, while the meaning of the Old Testament as a whole prophetically anticipates Christ's incarnation, and by extension, eschatological appearance.

In the context of the critical attack on ethics, this might not be altogether problematic. It may be that, as the Bible remains anticipatory of future redemption, as a whole it partakes in the spiritual and moral claim that God makes on humanity, first revealed in the Mosaic Law, but continued in Christ. In this sense, Barth can be understood as trying to draw the formal character of the Bible much closer to its material purpose as the authoritative norm of God's claim on human life. If this is the case, however, by extending the formal character of Old Testament as written to the entire Bible, Barth gives the impression that its primary function continues to be serving as a 'space' wherein human and divine encounter might occur, much as the apostolic preaching did in the Ephesians lectures. This impression may be due to a lack of clarity on Barth's part about what kind of change is brought about by the incarnation. In the portion on the Beatitudes, he primarily stresses the universal attack on ethics, yet he

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secularised. See O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order* (Leicester, Eng./Grand Rapids, Mich.: Inter-Varsity/William B. Eerdmans, 1986), pp. 66-67.

[296] *BP*, pp. 24b/105-106 The 'pictorial language' to which Barth is referring is the reference to the κεραία, or 'jot and tittle' as the Authorised Version has it.

[297] *TrB*, pp. 75 ET, p. 46.

qualifies this as not pure paradox but containing definite content. The content is Christ as an eschatological subject, yet as this is true for both testaments, how or if this is conveyed by the text of Scripture in a new way, Barth leaves unclear. The notion of the 'blessed' being in proximity to divine action is in part simply a reflection of the narrative setting of the Gospel text which he is expositing, but it also suggests the possibility of the role Christ's 'definite' presence could play in articulating divine action. In this vein, Barth gestures towards the prescriptions that follow in the Sermon denoting a shift from formal prescriptions of action (such as 'do not commit adultery') to having knowledge of the meaning of those actions (so, the meaning of lust is adultery).[298] At this point, however, these ideas are more signalled than developed. In the following semester, however, after moving from Göttingen to Münster to take position of Professor of Dogmatics and New Testament Exegesis, Barth would take the opportunity to explore just these issues at length in his lectures on the Gospel of John, which is the focus of the remainder of the chapter.[299]

3.3. The Witness in Christ's History: The Gospel of John (1:1-39)

Barth described his experience of studying the Gospel of John in preparation for his lectures to his brother Heinrich in almost ecstatic terms: 'What a remarkable book. The whole room sometimes spins around me…I have not ceased to be amazed.'[300] Barth's own transport did not result in an aerial view of the text, however, but rather in some of the most detailed exegetical passages to be found in any of the lectures from this period. Thurneysen relayed a friend's report that Barth had taken three quarters of a month to get through verse 12 of the prologue 'philologically explained!'[301] Certainly at this point in his teaching career Barth exhibits more confidence in his handling of the text, and a greater willingness to venture judgments on specific exegetical matters than perhaps he had previously. But it is also clear that in John's Gospel as a whole, and especially in the prologue, Barth found a spacious exploration of that which had increasingly occupied his own dogmatic and exegetical concerns: the relationship between Christ's incarnation, revelation, and faith.[302] Barth's treatment of the prologue divides easily into two sections. In the first, Barth seeks to justify

[298] *BP*, pp. 29-30b/125-130.
[299] *JE*, 'Vorwort', p. 7.
[300] As quoted by Walter Fürst, *JE*, p. VIII.
[301] Thurneysen, 25.11.1925, in *B-Th 1921-1930*, p. 387.
[302] Barth also provides an introduction to his lectures, wherein he discusses the relationship between the apostolic witness and revelation. I pass over it in silence here, not because it does not make worthwhile reading, but because Barth addresses the same issues in more detail in their exegetical context in the material I will cover below. See *JE*, pp. 1-11.

his reading of the prologue as having a double focus on Christ and his witnesses. In the second, he develops this claim specifically in relation to John the Baptist. The figure of the Baptist is decisive not only for furnishing the exegetical basis for Barth's overall reading of John, but also for how Barth understands the relationship of the scriptural witness to Christ's incarnate mission.

3.3.1 The Logos and the Witness

Barth gave approximately a third of his teaching time to the prologue, which given the significance of the first few verses of John for the history of Christianity is no surprise.[303] Yet where most commentators have focused directly on the Trinitarian and Christological issues, Barth fixes his attention on the implications for the doctrine of revelation suggested by the juxtaposition of the *Logos,* who was *with* God and *was* God (1:1), and John the Baptist, *sent* from God (1:6-8;15). Noting that some consider the presence of the Baptist an interpolation in the prologue, Barth rejects this reading, arguing instead his, now familiar, claim that the nature and possibility of the response to revelation is a necessary ingredient in talk of revelation itself. John's Gospel, thinks Barth, is particularly self-aware about its own position as a witness to revelation, and the spiritual and moral domain that this entails. The placement of John the Baptist in the prologue is definitive evidence of this:

> But [these verses] nonetheless stand there, and, in the end, there can be no question that they give the Johannine prologue exactly the concrete face with which one must engage…[The author] definitely did not want the prologue to be released without these verses or known without reading them. Rather he desired…to make clear the *practical acumen* (*praktische Akumen*) of his introductory statement clear. However one thinks of the practical outlook and also of the literary relationship of these verses to their context, however one positions oneself in regards to the textual and historical questions brought up by these verses, it is certain that…it is precisely the problem of the relationship between revelation and the witness to revelation that the author wanted to bring to light with these verses (and so perhaps not only with these verses), thereby to bring the reader to an awareness of his situation as a reader of the Gospel, and in this situation put him in the proper place.[304]

Whereas in past lectures Barth drew attention to the problematic notion of speaking about God in order to frame his exposition, in this text he finds a self-consciousness about the problem. To show how this is so, Barth argues, first, that the structure of the prologue sets up two points of reference–revelation and witness–and, second, that the nature of the 'situation' of the Gospel reader is determined by *both* of them.

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[303] The first lecture took place on the 2nd of November 1925, and the course ran through the 26th of February 1926, with a roughly month long holiday break from mid-December to mid-January. Barth lectured on John 1:1-18 from 3/11/1925 to 11/12/1925.

[304] *JE*, pp. 14-15.

How does the prologue presume and order the relationship of revealer to witness? Barth's claim that the reader is given a 'concrete face' with which to engage is not to be overlooked. The implication is that, even in the rarefied air of the opening verses, there is no forgetting that this is the communiqué from a human witness in a creaturely medium. To secure this point, however, Barth must contend with the sense that the prologue's direction is one of *descent*, and that from the *Logos* to the Baptist there is a lurching shift not just of focus but of domain: the first view of the *Logos* is external to revelation of Jesus Christ, and then in subsequent steps enters into its revelatory activity. Thus, Barth's first task is to clarify the relationship of the *Logos* to the prologue as a whole.

Rather than a downward move from the heights of vv. 1-2 to the particular historical situation of the Baptist's testimony, Barth portrays the prologue as a gyre. This is because on Barth's reading the prologue wants to resist focus on the *Logos* as such, but the *Logos* material is necessary to determine the origin of revelation found in Jesus Christ. As such, there is descent on the part of the *Logos* to the historical situation of Jesus Christ, but crucially tracing such a movement is only possible through encounter with the person of Jesus–the true centre of gravity of the prologue–through his witnesses.

The first important judgment that Barth makes, therefore, is that the *Logos* indicates a divine identity and purpose,[305] but 'obviously only plays the role of a *placeholder*, only the preliminary indication of a place, where afterward something quite different or another quite different will come to stand.'[306] Though painstaking to do so, it is important to see how Barth grounds this claim exegetically. His argument turns on the ambiguous referent of the pronominal clause οὗτος ἦν in 1:2.[307] Most commentators, Barth notes, treat 1:2 as a simple recapitulation of the massive doctrinal claims being made in 1:1, with οὗτος ἦν referring back to ὁ λογος, but he finds this explanation is unsatisfactory. By his lights, 1:2 is only an incomplete recapitulation of 1:1, leaving out the final clause καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος ('and the Word was God'). Following Theodor Zahn, Barth reads the final clause of 1:1 to be itself an explication of the claims made about the *Logos* in 1a and 1b, meaning that if 1:2 is supposed to be a recapitulation of 1:1 it is incomplete. However, what if, asks Barth, οὗτος ἦν refers *forward*, not backward, to something to be specified in the later verses of the prologue? Barth draws attention to the other instance of the οὗτος ἦν construction in the prologue, found in the first recorded words of the Baptist in 1:15. In that case, though the name has still not yet

[305] *JE*, p. 30.
[306] *JE*, p. 27.
[307] *JE*, pp. 33-35.

been given, it 'undoubtably refers to *Jesus*'.[308] Therefore, Barth concludes, 1:2 and 1:15 parallel each other, both referring forward to the person of Jesus Christ, who becomes the subject of all of the predicates of the *Logos* in 1:1-18: 'for the author *Jesus* is the Logos, *Jesus* the life, *Jesus* is the light shining in the darkness'.[309]

The Trinitarian interpretation of 1:1 adopted by Nicaea is correct, thinks Barth, but this point is essentially to secure the identity of the person of Jesus.[310] It is not only the identity of the person of Jesus as divine in the abstract, but the identification of the person of the *Logos* with the person of Jesus. Without the distinction of persons among the Godhead, then the nature of the incarnation, and Jesus's revelatory role, remains ambiguous.[311] We should be careful here to see that Barth is not quite rooting Christ's missions in his procession. The relations between the persons are important for showing how the divine nature of Jesus has a specific identity, but the nature of this identity, furnished by filiation from the Father, is not explored here. As such, the *Logos*, while not simply a cipher, is not the object towards which John would direct his readers; it is around Jesus that the revelatory event revolves.[312] Barth summarises the movement of the prologue thusly: 'Going *backwards* then generates the meaning: *this one, Jesus*, as the Logos, that was θεός, partaker in the divine essence, this one was in the beginning, because as such he legitimately belongs to God. And going *forwards*: the Logos was θεὸς, partaker in the divine essence, then *this one*, *Jesus*, was the one who was in the beginning, because he legitimately belonged to God.'[313]

The above passage sets the agenda for Barth's reading of the Gospel and reflects the agenda of his theology of revelation in this period generally.[314] Besides giving a decisively Christological shape to revelation, however, it indicates how the exegetical course must run. Barth is less concerned with the self-subverting nature of the language with which the apostle speaks of God, as in the Ephesians lectures, but in the way the scriptural witness pulls

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[308] *JE*, p. 34.
[309] *JE*, p. 34. As Barth notes, this is not a common interpretation, and of all the commentators on John that Barth read, he claims Schlatter alone suggests something similar. In linguistic terms, the possibility of οὗτος ἦν referring forward instead of backward is rarely mentioned by commentators. However, one recent commentary does argue that based on the male gender, οὗτος ἦν refers backwards to the *Logos* and forward to the man Jesus. See Francis J. Moloney, S.D.B., *The Gospel of John* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998), p. 35.
[310] *JE*, pp. 25-26;35.
[311] *JE*, p. 35.
[312] This is not to say that Barth finds the Trinitarian background unimportant, by any stretch. John Webster is right to point out that Barth finds in the prologue 'the free majesty in which the Logos utterly surpasses created reality.' (p. 79) However, Webster's presentation should be qualified, as it may give the impression that Barth is preoccupied with this issue, whereas in fact it serves only as the backdrop–even if an essential one–to the Jesus Christ as revealer in relationship to his witnesses. See Webster, 'Witness to the Word: Karl Barth's Lectures on the Gospel of John', in *The Domain of the Word* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), pp. 79-84.
[313] *JE*, p. 35.
[314] On which see chapter 4.

towards the person of Jesus Christ. In turn, by having its origin and end outside of creation, this identity has a critical function, and subverts the tendency of human thought and language to turn all things to its own end. The exegetical task is now attending to the identity of Jesus Christ and allowing it, or more precisely, him, to direct all things in relation to himself.

For this reason, Barth's reference to the Evangelists 'practical acumen' should be read in a new light. It may be read as Barth's perennial insistence that there are no neutral readers of Scripture, but whereas previously he had made that point by elaborating the claim of God on human life, in this case it more specifically means the reader is drawn into the history of Jesus Christ.

We can see this when Barth turns to the 'situation' of the reader. Much of what Barth has to say about the situation of humanity is that it is understood in fundamentally the same spiritual-moral terms that we have seen him employ consistently throughout this study. In 1:4-5, the Evangelist's claim that the work of the *Logos* is in conflict with the sin of the cosmos is made 'analytically' in Barth's eyes.[315] The metaphysical issues of time and eternity, finitude and infinitude, are not overlooked but are the proscenium to the moral conflict between the 'light' of God and the 'darkness' of humanity. Barth prefers more bellicose language to the neutral language of perception: 'The world, history, stands against the light as something entirely hostile.'[316] Humanity is thus confronted by the light of revelation 'in its own *existence*'.[317] There is thus no neutral ground available as the 'darkness' is comprehensive, and its scope extends to include both the Evangelist and the reader in the indictment of humanity: '[It is] a battle manoeuvre, in which the Evangelist is involved, in which he also….wants to involve the reader, or rather: he wants to instruct [the reader] that he is already involved in this battle manoeuvre.'[318]

As the object of the mission of the *Logos* is clearly salvific, the identification of the *Logos* with the person of Jesus Christ pulls the attention to the concrete events of Jesus's life and ministry. Similarly, the prologue seeks to place the readers of the Gospel *in medias res* to the same event. The Evangelist employs several overlapping techniques to this end. One is to note the universal object of Jesus's mission, which is sinful humanity. But this categorical claim about the state of humanity is coupled with bringing the significance of historically specific events to bear on the temporally distant reader. As suggestive as 1:4-5 are of a

[315] *JE*, p. 54.
[316] *JE*, p. 57
[317] *JE*, p. 56.
[318] *JE*, p. 57

primordial cosmic conflict, Barth wants to draw attention to the Evangelist's fluid use of tenses to bring immediacy to events that the prologue describes. Here, in 1: 4-5, Barth notes the shift from the aorist ἦν (which, Barth claims, is not without 'meaning for the present')[319] to the present tense φαίνει. He mentions several other instances in the Gospel where 'one expects the past tense [and] the reader is involuntarily confronted with the reported past, at once hauling him from the audience as a participant on the stage.'[320]

This description of the Evangelist's use of tenses is reminiscent of Barth's discussion of Paul's fluid tenses in Ephesians. It is also worth noting here that such a strategy of making present the reality of God bears a marked similarity to assessments of Barth's own exegetical practice, and particularly the *Romans* commentary, which in both editions is notable for its mode of exegesis by way of contemporary paraphrase. In both cases, an important distinction should be made. What Barth appreciates in the tense shifts in Ephesians chapter 1 is the way they undermine any sense that the reality towards which Paul is gesturing can be grasped within the confines of human language. Though Paul may be read as occupying the right standpoint in relation to God, his language remains intentionally self-subverting. Here, Barth identifies the fluidity of tense more directly as an attempt to bring the reader into the orbit of the specific history of Jesus Christ.

Yet neither is it an exercise in imaginative historical displacement for the purposes of developing sympathy or empathy as part of the aim of historical research.[321] This strategy is most associated with Dilthey. Following H. G. Gadamer's description of the process of empathy in Husserl (which Gadamer extends to Dilthey), Barth's understanding of the John prologue is the opposite of the empathetic technique. As Gadamer describes it, 'The other person is first apprehended as an object of perception which then, through empathy, becomes a "Thou." In Husserl the concept of empathy…is still oriented to the interiority of self-consciousness…' It is clear in the prologue that the rhetorical strategy of the Evangelist, which leads to the reader finding herself, as it were, implicated and involved in the events of Jesus's life and ministry, are simply reflective of the objective reality that those events are taken to entail. By the terms of revelation that Barth finds in John, there is no relation to God in revelation except through the act of the person of Jesus Christ. As we will explore further

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[319] *JE*, p. 54.
[320] *JE p. 54.*
[321] See H.G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*[2], trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Sheed & Ward, 1975), p. 250, cf. pp. 213; 232-233. Richard Burnett has drawn attention to Dilthey's 'sympathetic' strategy as a contrast to Barth's hermeneutics in the *Römerbrief* period. See Burnett, *Theological Exegesis*, pp. 185-191.

in the next section, because of his divine identity, it is Christ's 'I' that allows humanity to become a 'Thou'.

If Barth's description of the 'practical acumen' of the Evangelist stopped here, for all its focus on the distinct identity of Jesus Christ in history, it might still suggest that the goal is still an eschatological encounter that threatens to discard the rule of Scripture once the 'practical acumen' has been successful and one can truly see oneself implicated in the reality of Christ's life as from 'above'. So, it is notable that the feature that impresses Barth the most with the Evangelist's rhetorical strategy and 'practical acumen' is John the Baptist's 'interruptions' of the prologue. It would be difficult to overestimate the importance that Barth attaches to the Baptist in understanding the purpose of John as a whole and the nature of the witness to revelation. A more thorough look at the Baptist's role in the Gospel is the focus of the next section.

3.3.2 John the Baptist and Salvation History

Just as the introduction of Jesus Christ shows how revelation comes to humanity, so the introduction of the Baptist shows how revelation has its witness. The Evangelist introduces John the Baptist in order to bring the 'problem' of revelation and its witness to the reader.[322] The dualism and cosmic scope of 1:4-5 results in the 'disturbance' experienced by the reader when they come upon 1: 6.[323] The change is both literarily abrupt and materially so:

> The moment of surprise in v. 6 lies in that we are at once on the inside of the history of vv. 4-5, which we, so to speak, viewed from the outside, and therefore moved in a fitting way directly to a particular point in the history–and yet not, as would be expected from the sharp contrast of v. 5, directly to the epiphany of the Logos, but rather to a point in history that following v. 5 must surely lie in the sphere of the σκοτία.[324]

Because of the way Barth develops his exposition of the prologue, it is easy to forget that Jesus Christ has not yet appeared by name at this point in the text. So, as much as Barth wants to maintain Jesus Christ as the centre of the passage, it is nonetheless important that the figure of John the Baptist precedes Jesus. Not only reflective of their historical ordering, it also neatly captures Barth's understanding of the role of the scriptural witness. Barth begins by noting two elements in the Gospel's account of the Baptist that serve the Evangelist's

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[322] Barth found the figure of John the Baptist, particularly as depicted by Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece, important for thinking about the relationship between Scripture and revelation well before these lectures. Most prominently in 'Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas' from 1920 makes prominent use of the figure of the Baptist, see 'Biblische Fragen, Einsichten, und Ausblicke', in *VA 1914-1921*, pp. 662-701 ET, in *The Word of God*, pp. 71-100.
[323] *JE*, p. 59.
[324] *JE*, pp. 59-60.

'practical acumen'. One is his historical specificity and the other is his inclusion in the moral crisis of humanity. First, the historical place of the Baptist.

On a basic level, the shift in the prologue from *Logos* to Baptist signals that revelation takes place in history, in the historical reality shared by the Baptist and the reader. Formally, 1:6 has the same function as the Baptist does in the narrative: to precede and announce Jesus Christ, preparing the reader for the decisive identification of the *Logos* with a human person, the 'anti-climax' of the prologue.[325] With the entrance of the Baptist, the Gospel provides a reference point on the horizontal plane of human existence, a 'concrete face'.[326]

This is not, however, historicism by the back door. The intention is not to find a historically verifiable figure to anchor the witness to Christ in secular history. Barth quickly puts that kind of historical specificity of the Baptist under some strain. Citing Franz Overbeck, Barth draws attention to the alleged ambiguity presented between John the Baptist and the putative author of the Gospel. By never naming himself, Barth argues, the Evangelist seeks to draw out the continuity between the Baptist and himself, encouraging the reader to recognise that both are in the same 'economy of revelation'[327] This suggestive equivocation extends to the calling of the first disciples (1:35-37), wherein the second unnamed disciple of the Baptist can be inferred to be 'John', the traditional author of the Gospel, and the one who subsequently carries on the Baptist's mission.[328] The fluidity of reference indicates that when Barth speaks of the Baptist serving a 'point in history', Barth also wants to refigure what that means for the reader. Barth will do so by introducing the most important feature of the Baptist's role in the Gospel, which is the way he unifies the offices of prophet and apostle.

Returning to a theme he had worked on exegetically the previous semester in his lectures on the Sermon on the Mount, Barth's investigation here is exegetically careful, and more illuminating of his own interests. He returns to the significance of the pronominal phrase οὗτος ἦν that was so important in identifying Jesus as the centre of gravity for the prologue. Barth again stresses the parallel between 1: 2 & 1:15, arguing that just as the Evangelist identifies the *Logos* with Jesus, so does the Baptist. The Synoptics 'certainly tell us of his witness as forerunner, as prophet, but not of his knowledge (*Erkenntnis*) and of his confession (*Bekenntnis*) of this οὗτος ἦν'.[329] Unique to John is the Baptist's fulfilment of both aspects of scriptural witness, of 'prophet *and* apostle, witness of promise *and*

[325] *JE*, p. 40.
[326] *JE*, p. 14.
[327] *JE*, p. 16.
[328] *JE*, pp. 17; 178-179.
[329] *JE*, p. 137.

fulfilment'.[330] The contrast between the Synoptics and John should not be put down simply to the presence of different streams of tradition, thinks Barth, as it may be that the Evangelist was basing his account of the Baptist on the Synoptics. Rather, we should see here again the confluence between the Evangelist's understanding of his own witness and the Baptist's:

> [The Baptist] does not only foretell Christ, but he knows and confesses him. He stands with one of his powerful feet (Grünewald!) resolute on the floor of the New Testament. We will not investigate here how the church knew the Synoptics and John as canonical, clearly seeing these two pictures of the Baptist together, without blurring their idiosyncrasies…The sideways glance at the Synoptics picture was only done in order to remind us that through the Johannine picture a problem is actually posed.[331]

As a pair, the offices of prophet and apostle serve at least two functions for Barth. They give a covenantal determination to the Baptist's witness and introduce in these lectures the two points between which human knowledge of revelation moves: promise and fulfilment.

At first blush, however, it seems that by framing the Baptist's role in the Gospel as a the prototype of biblical witness, encompassing both the Old and New Testament forms, Barth risks turning him into a symbol and evacuating him of the historical reality that serves to anchor the John prologue, and by extension the Gospel as a whole, in the plane of common human existence.[332] Indeed, as Barth continually draws attention to the Evangelist's intent to put the problem of revelation into relief for the reader, we might find that Barth subordinates the Gospel history to the drama of the individual confrontation with divine revelation. Barth wants to resist a 'general' account of revelation, and rather finds in John 'concretely the question' of how 'we behave' in response to 'hearing the witness to revelation',[333] but as an effort to make the problem concrete for the reader–the pronoun usage is important–it also threatens to lose its grip on the particularity of the Baptist. Yet if we follow Barth's description of the Baptist's role as both prophet and apostle, and particularly his movement from 'promise' to 'fulfilment', we can see that part of Barth's purpose in making the Baptist the historical anchor for the reader is to revise expectations of what counts as a 'particular historical point' in relationship to revelation. It is not so much the historical details of the Baptist (contemporary accounts, archaeological data, and so on), but the Baptist's role as witness that allows him to be the 'concrete face' the Gospel supposes him to be. This is

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[330] *JE*, p. 136.
[331] *JE*, pp. 137-138.
[332] As some commentators have noted, this might be particularly problematic for Barth's 'doctrine of Israel' and the way in which he conceives of the Hebrew Bible as offering a unique witness. The question is to what extent any Christological account of revelation can accommodate a 'unique' witness for the Hebrew Bible, and to what extent that is a desideratum for Christian theology. For some criticisms of Barth along these lines, see Klaus Wengst, 'Der Zeichenbegriff in Barths Kommentar zum Johannesevangelium', *ZDT* 2000/1, pp. 40f.
[333] *JE,* p. 21.

crucial for understanding the Evangelist's 'practical' approach. Barth's reading of the Baptist's first announcement of Jesus and the oblique baptism story offer some initial clues as to how this is so.

Barth's treatment of the Baptist in relation to the incarnation reproduces the account of promise and fulfilment he gave in broad strokes in the Sermon on the Mount lectures, but with greater subtly. Here, as in the earlier lectures, Barth is seeking a way of talking about historical relationships that do not become confined to their historicity. To do so, Barth narrows his focus from the broader categories of Law and Gospel, which muddled his analysis somewhat, to the Baptist's own transition from testifying to the coming Messiah to bearing witness to the incarnate Christ. While Barth portrays this transition as one from prophet to apostle, this distinction is neither strictly sequential, nor simply equivocal to 'promise' and 'fulfilment'. We can see this by looking to the Christological specificity given by Barth to 'promise'. When commenting on the relationship between Jesus and Abraham in 8:56-58, Barth argues that the joy that Abraham had was a joy in the promise, which bridged the temporal gap between himself and the incarnate Christ: '[Abraham] received joyously the *promise* of my day, *and* likewise he *experienced* [Christ] joyously, he was [Christ's] *contemporary* (*Zeitgenosse*).'[334] Barth takes the claim that Abraham 'was to see' and 'saw' as quite a straightforwardly, drawing on the tradition of exegesis that holds theophanies in the Old Testament to be of the pre-incarnate Christ. But, employing the more technical Reformed scholastic terminology, Barth wants to say that what Abraham saw was not the 'λόγος ἄσαρκος' but the *'incarnate* word, even as it was in his future, the λόγος *incarnandus*, as it was later put'.[335]

It is clear from his discussion of Abraham's joy at seeing the *logos incarnandus* that it is not mundane proximity to the person of Jesus (either spatially or temporally) that is

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[334] *JE*, p. 396.

[335] *JE*, p. 396. For details on the distinction between the *logos asarkos, incarnandus* and *incarnatus* in Reformed dogmatics, see Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics. Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*, ed. by Ernst Bizer, trans. by G.T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1950), pp. 416-419. One's position on the status of the *logos asarkos* in Barth's thought, particularly as it relates to election and the doctrine of the Trinity, has been a *causus belli* in Barth studies in recent years. We might simply say here that in this passage, as throughout the John lectures, Barth understands the Evangelist to speak of God's revelation, he is always speaking of the operation of the *logos* in relationship to the incarnation. This is as much to do with the structural features of revelation as it is to do with the retrospective and responsive posture that the Evangelist takes towards that revelation. Because revelation came through Jesus Christ, that must be the centre of an response to it. Yet Barth nowhere in these lectures suggests the *logos asarkos* is an empty or erroneous concept, but simply that God's revelation in history is the *logos incarnandus* or *incarnatus*. The literature on the subject is too vast to be detailed here, but for two sides of the debate see, e.g. Bruce McCormack, 'Grace and Being. The role of God's gracious election in Karl Barth's theological ontology.', in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth,* ed. John Webster (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), pp. 92-110 and Paul Molnar, *Faith, Freedom and the Spirit: The Economic Trinity in Barth, Torrance and Contemporary Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2015).

decisive for bearing witness to revelation, but that the incarnation should, or does, happen. Further, in the discussion of Abraham's joy, he draws a parallel between the Baptist and Abraham to suggest that both of them stand in the same position in expectation of the 'day' of fulfilment, which is drawn in expansive terms to include the whole scope of salvation history. In 8:56, when Jesus says that Abraham would 'see my day' (τὴν ἡμέραν τὴν ἐμήν), Barth holds that this does not refer to the day of Christ's 'historical appearance' but (Barth is paraphrasing Jesus here) 'the day of my exaltation, my glorification, my going to the Father'. Barth then suggests, via a litany of citations from elsewhere in the Gospel, that Moses (5:46), Isaiah (12:41), and the Baptist (1:6) all looked to the same fulfilment of the promise.[336] On this account, the dynamic of promise and fulfilment does not capture the change from prophet to apostle *per se*, but both are directed towards an eschatological future.

We may then yet find the line between prophet and apostle blurred to the extent that the historical presence of Jesus Christ, and so historical relation to him, has lost much of its force, and a flattening of historical narrative has taken place to the point where the incarnation threatens to become a principle that floats above historical events. However, to see the *logos incarnandus* is not the same thing as to see Jesus Christ. While 'promise' ultimately refers to redemption, Barth still wants to hold to the incarnation being an event in history, to which the apostles had physical and temporal proximity. It is the burden of Barth's exegesis of the second half of John chapter 1 to say what difference this makes while not countenancing a baldly historicist reading of the relationship.

The decisive shift for Barth is when the Baptist speaks of Christ as sacrifice. Barth treats the interrogation of the Baptist by the Pharisees beginning in 1:19 through to 1:34 as a single passage, wherein the distinction between the Baptist as a prophetic witness and an apostolic witness is made clearest. What captures this shift most decisively is the Baptist's manner of directing attention to Jesus. Two passages might help illustrate this, the first commenting on 1: 29 ('Here is the Lamb of God…') and the second on 1:30-31 ('this is he of whom I said…'). Commenting on 1: 29, Barth gives the scope of the Baptist's testimony and how it defines apostolic knowledge:

> Redemption (*Erlösung*), ζωή, life through righteousness, righteousness through judgement, judgment through substitutionary sacrifice, substitutionary sacrifice through God's own act: this is the connection. There can be no question that the first word, which the Baptist has to speak about Jesus, at once is also the last thing said, which even can be said about him, that the Christmas message here directly presents the Passion message. I must again reference Grünewald and say: It is this one, the knowing (*wissende*) Baptist, who speaks here, the Baptist,

[336] *JE*, pp. 396-397.

> who *also* knows, as the first one to know, what the Apostles know. Once again: from here, and perhaps only from here, can one understand the force of that οὐκ εἰμί.[337]

What the Baptist knows, then, in the shift from prophetic to apostolic witness, is this particular person as the subject of God's saving mission. The incarnation as the possibility of revelation is not oriented towards historical encounter as such, but towards the work of sacrifice and redemption that God will perform as Christ incarnate. This shift is not only in content, but in the movement that the Baptist takes as a witness. In this historical encounter, the Baptist's apostolic knowledge is shown by his ostensive definition'[338] of Christ through proclamation, and crucially through the corresponding negative movement by the Baptist towards himself in relation to Jesus. Note that proclamation of the atoning ministry of Jesus–presuming, but not exhausting, the identification of the *Logos* with Jesus–is what gives proper force to the denials by the Baptist of messianic status. The movement of the apostolic witness is self-denying–'I am not the one'–in correspondence to Christ's fulfilment of his ministry.

But Barth offers more detail than this, which we can get see by turning to Barth's comment on 1:30-31, wherein the relationship between water- and Spirit-baptism are laid out. Barth spoke of the Baptist's claim to anonymity in the face of the Pharisee's questions, but when it comes to relating the Baptist's water-baptism and the Spirit-baptism of Christ, Barth sees this anonymity as 'sublated'.[339] By this, Barth means that the anonymity is not rejected on the Baptist's part, but takes a definite shape in relation to Jesus's ministry:

> The terms of the relationship [between the Baptist and Jesus] are not reversible: I do not know him–but because he *is there*…therefore I have my mission, therefore have I come with my water-baptism. I am dependent on him, not the reverse. *My* baptism is the complement to *his* baptism. For this reason, I do not stand in the air, but on firm ground, because he, who comes after me, holds me with *his* deeds. For this reason, the *vox clamantis in deserto* has sound and voice–not by its own will (on its own it is, so to speak, silent), but from its object, which commands it to cry out. And it is there. Even more so [the voice in the desert] must and will also be there, but still anonymously there.[340]

The assumption of a particular human history by the *Logos*, the one that leads towards the cross, confers identity on its witness. Anonymity is sublated because this identity is only

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[337] *JE*, p. 169.
[338] That is, defining by pointing. I am borrowing the term from Ludwig Wittgenstein. See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.M. Anscombe (Chichester, Eng., and Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), §30.
[339] *JE*, p. 170.
[340] *JE*, pp. 170-171.

received in relation, not as a matter of secure possession.[341] It is therefore essential to Barth's argument that the asymmetry between the Baptist and Jesus is described here from the Baptist's perspective since its claims are descriptive of the Baptist's own movement in response to Christ's presence. Though their relation is the consequence of the objective material distinction between the Baptist and Jesus with respect to their persons and offices, it is part of the Baptist's witness that he positions himself in this way in response to Jesus's appearance in the flesh. It is in this way that the negative movement on the Baptist's part is not total self-abnegation, but a relative one. It is a particular relation that does not eclipse the role of the witness, but rather the witness's movement is given its direction in relation to the Christological one:

> We have heard with the ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο how revelation, to which the testimony applies, is possible and real, how by the givenness of the *object*, the witness's testimonial receives its ratio, in what way it, to which the testimony applies, even comes to the witnesses (and the witness to him!), so that this can be a true and genuine witness. The Word became *flesh*. *Therefore* are there words about the Word.[342]

We are now in a better position to see how Barth reads the Evangelist's purpose: the Baptist's specificity lies not in the reconstruction of the historical figure but in the way Christ's own particularity confers identity on those whom it summons into relation. The problematic of this section has been how Barth understands the 'practical acumen' of the Evangelist in bringing the problem of revelation to bear on the reader. By placing the Baptist so prominently and startlingly in the prologue, Barth suggested that the Evangelist was making use of the Baptist as an anchor in history for the reader. Yet, on several levels Barth upends the notion of how the Baptist fulfils his role as a witness in an historically specific sense, at least in terms of his chronological situation being of primary importance.

Rather, the Baptist as witness moves in tandem with Christ's specific history and in this way gains particularity. In this context, Barth offers something close to a technical definition of 'witness' that harks back in significant ways to his discussion of Paul's apostleship in Ephesians and 1 Corinthians, as one who must as far as possible get out of the way in order to allow Christ to speak:

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[341] Wolf Krötke speaks finely of the biblical writers, in the act of witness, 'self-transcending' their own relativity and, 'to follow them in this movement, is called scriptural interpretation'. The only qualification I would make to this account is that the witness's self becomes clearer, rather than in anyway left behind in relation to Christ. See Krötke, 'Die Christologie Karl Barths', p. 5.

[342] *JE*, p. 127. Here I have translated *Zeugnis*, that is, the material of witness, as 'testimony', and *Zeuge*, the person or individual who gives the testimony, as witness, in order to clarify Barth's meaning, though he clearly is exploiting the German terms to underline the unity of the witness and their testimony.

> To witness is truly and in the best sense to *talk around* the the matter (*Sache*), a precise and complete *paraphrase*, an allusion, acknowledgement, repition, through which the matter always remains the matter and can speak for itself, not in some way sucked inside human speech, shouted down and violated by it. Only where both are together: the utmost care to speak in the greatest proximity to the object, and the utmost care to give the object distance, so that it can speak for itself, only there is μαρτυρία.[343]

This can no longer read as threatening to dissolve the witness into an eschatological moment, however. Because their particular identity is conferred in relation to Christ's history, the movement of the witness in relation to Christ's revelation retains its own definite history. This in turn is the basis for securing the inviolability of the witness and its role in the life of faith. Yet, given the sheer force of Christ's incarnate presence, it may be unclear why the witness must accompany Christ at all. Barth seizes on the claim made in 1:7–'so that all come to belief through [the Baptist]'–as crucial:

> Through a human mediator of the divine mediator, through this human witness, now qualified as medium, δι'ἀνθρώπου ἀπεσταλμένοθ παρὰ θεοῦ–not to revelation, as it needs no witnesses to occur, but to *faith* in it…We cannot, in that we come to faith, go around or leap over the witnesses, the prophets, the apostles. The figure of John does not stand in vain and not of his own will at the beginning of *all* Gospels.[344]

Rather than a simply disjunctive relationship between Christ's revelation and the witness of Scripture, there may be a positive ordering of the two. Moreover, the fulfilment of the witness's office is no longer simply making room for the eschatological moment, but being in proximal withdrawal that reflects Christ's own movement towards death and resurrection.

3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has had the most developmental structure. As the material addressed in chapters 3 and 4 can be read as two parts of a whole, covering the centre of my argument. I will state my overall conclusions drawn from this material at the end of chapter 4, but it will be helpful to briefly say where chapter 3 fits into the overall line of thought. In simplest terms, chapter 3 shows a shift in Barth's exegesis from a focus on the correspondence between the form of faith and the form of witness, to the relation between the witness and Christ's incarnate history, as the basis for the communication of revelation. Early signs of this shift could be seen in the 1 Corinthians lectures, where Barth wrestled with an understanding of resurrection as a form of thought and as the revelation of salvation history *in nuce*. The significance of salvation history was further seen in the lectures on the Sermon

[343] *JE*, p. 64.
[344] *JE*, p. 64

on the Mount, where the critical attack on ethics, as Barth sees Christ's sermon, cannot simply stand on its own, but must be fixed within the broader movement the history of salvation. This history, understood in covenantal terms, must then be related in some way to the movement of human history. In the John lectures, we see how Barth develops this relation in terms of Christ's incarnation. At this point, the role of the witness directs towards Christ's history rather than the aporetic shape of its own communication, allowing Barth to show with a good deal more clarity how the witness is paradoxically opposed to revelation, but given a positive role in it.[345]

Generally, what emerges is a clear sense that Barth considers a descriptive and ramified Christology necessary to maintaining the proper focus in theology. This sense goes hand in hand with the economy of salvation understood as the economy of revelation, in which God's claim on creatures involves them in his revelatory work. Exegetically, this reaches a high point in the John lectures, where Barth spoke of the Evangelist's 'practical acumen' in bringing the reader into the events of the text. This 'practical acumen', on Barth's reading, turns assumptions about historical relations on their head. While the reader may suppose that a figure such as John the Baptist provides continuity with their own history, and so allows them to see Christ's life as on a plane with their own, the reality turns out to be that the Baptist, and they, only receive their identity in relation to Christ. In this regard, Barth's most suggestive claim is that, for all the centrality of Christ's incarnate history for one's own faith, it is not so in direct relation but mediated through witnesses. This brings up a point of contention for Barth's theology of this period, which is the revelatory status of Christ's earthly ministry. If faith is coordinated to witness, what is to secure Barth's account of Scripture from remaining locked in an echo chamber of belief? More basically, does Christ's own history change anything beyond securing the moral histories of others? At this point, we only have a partial portrait of these issues. It is this that will occupy us in the next chapter, by way of further material from the John lectures, along with some of Barth's dogmatic writings from this period.

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[345] I am anticipated in this view of the John lectures by, at least, George Plasger and Christopher Asprey. Plasger is correct to see the John lectures as a stage on the 'way' to the account of Scripture found in the *CD*, even if he overstates the significance of the church in exegesis for Barth. See Plasger, 'Wort vom Wort: Systematisch-theologische Überlegungen zur Bedeutung des Verhältnisses von Dogmatik und Schriftauslegung anhand Karl Barths Erklärung des Johannes-Evangeliums.', *Zeitschrift für dialektische Theologie* 16:43 (2000), esp. pp. 52-58. Asprey finds a similar positivity in the relationship between Christ and the witness, though as I have argued here, Barth has been moving towards this position since at least 1923. See Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, pp. 122-135.

Chapter 4. Christology and Christ in History

There is widespread agreement among historians of theology that a defining feature of Barth's legacy is the forceful declamation of the idea of God as 'wholly other'. There is much less agreement over what the consequences were for his theology. Against some accounts of Barth's development, I have consistently drawn attention to Barth's claim that the firm delineation between God and creation serves to provide the basis for a moral theology as much as a resistance to idolatry. In broad strokes, then, Barth's reaction to liberalism did not result in the rejection of the liberal concern for the ethical community, but an inversion of the Ritschlian legacy. Rather than Christology (and God's relation to humanity in general) being realised in the ethical community or ethical life, Barth sought precisely the opposite: the ethical community as a possibility created by Christological, and more broadly, Trinitarian realities. Divine transcendence is the starting point for all talk of God and was ramified in Barth's doctrine of revelation, which was his key tool in effecting the inversion of the Ritschlian pairing of ethical community and Christology. In revelation, God is not made available as an object of human knowledge but remains a divine subject and so is irreducible to any creaturely form of knowing. Much of the protean energy of Barth's theology after his reaction to liberalism, particularly after the publication of the first Romans commentary, comes from working out the shape and order of a theology that seeks to hold the insistence of a thoroughgoing divine transcendence with an equally sure insistence that it is precisely this transcendence that allows the human sphere its own proper dignity.

As we saw in chapter 2, Barth put the Scripture Principle back in line with the doctrine of revelation, much as it had been for the Reformers, as part of securing the divide between revelation and religious self-consciousness. Yet this did not solve many of the problems that beset the Scripture Principle in Schleiermacher and those following him. For those, the Scripture Principle sat uneasily between Christology and ecclesiology, tending to lose its place as an independent norm and authority over the church as it became more and more the church's book. The problem was an inability to articulate how it held any kind of normative force for the church when it was the expression of the church's faith. But by placing the Scripture Principle back under the doctrine of revelation, Barth did not so much solve this problem as make it more acute. Scripture's role within the doctrine of revelation secured its normative authority, but Barth's resistance to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, on the grounds that it compromised God's subjectivity in revelation, leaves the relationship between the Bible and the church uncertain. Barth was caught on the one side between an apparently

simplistic biblicism and a spiritually and morally inert subjectivism on the other. Erik Peterson, Barth's sometime colleague and a cordial critic of his theology, summed up the problem in a letter to Harnack: 'I too consider the Barthian return to a scriptural basis to be impossible. It must logically lead back to a doctrine of strict verbal inspiration. But without any dogmatic authority there can be no church and, what is worse, no church activity.'[346]

This chapter responds to Peterson's criticisms of Barth directly in the context of further exploring Barth's Christology from this period and his exegetical attention to Christ's earthly ministry in the lectures on the Gospel of John. In chapter 3, we saw that Barth put increasing stress on Christ's history as the objective ground of the redeemed subject. Here, we explore the Christology behind this move, both in its dogmatic form and in Barth's exegesis of John. Our procedure will be as follows: in the first part, we will look at Barth's Christology in the Göttingen Dogmatics. The purpose here is to see how in its dogmatic form Barth's Christology places the incarnate Christ at the centre of God's revelation. Barth sometimes operates in his exegesis as though his audience was as steeped in dogmatic questions as he was, and this brief *excursus* will offer some conceptual tools for understanding Barth's work on John. Turning back to those lectures, we will focus on two passages, the Nicodemus pericope from John 3 and the 'Bread of Heaven' discourse from John 6.

In both of these passages, we will see how Christ's history not only determines the identity and movement of the witness, as we saw in chapter 3, but of the believer directly. Yet this relationship is characterised by Christ's reserve in revelation during his earthly ministry, leaving the actual force of his incarnate history uncertain. It is precisely here where Erik Peterson finds Barth wanting. However, instead of focusing on Peterson's published criticisms of Barth, it will be helpful to look at some key sections of Peterson's own commentary on John. There he offers a reading of John that, at times explicitly, is set against Barth's own. In a survey of corresponding passages and themes in Peterson's lectures, a very different reading of the material emerges, one heavily invested in the ecclesial meaning of Christ's 'manifest' presence. This in turn will offer an opportunity to revisit Peterson's claim that there exists in Barth a fatal gap between Christ's revelation and the life of the church, a gap that proves disastrous for both Barth's Christology and his ethics. This criticism suggests that the indicative role given to the witnesses of revelation leaves an absence of human knowledge that forces faith to manufacture a kind of divine presence, leaving Barth no less vulnerable to the charges of subjectivism than his liberal forbearers.

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[346] Erik Peterson, *Theological Tractates*, trans. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2011), p. 16.

4.1 Christology in the Göttingen Dogmatics

I argued in chapter 2 that Barth's lectures on the Reformed Confessions can reasonably be read as his first foray in systematic theology, though largely beholden to the demands of historical theology. It is notable, therefore, that there he began with Scripture and the sharp distinction between it and church confessions, while in his first dogmatics lectures, he begins with God as the revealer. It was a weakness of his presentation in the Confessions lectures that divine transcendence retained a formal character, reproduced in the Scripture Principle, which lacked inner connection to the material content of God's acts in salvation. In this chapter, we will see that Barth takes a different tack by placing the revealing God at the beginning of the cycle, and so underscoring the absolute prevenience of the act of revelation.

4.1.1. Incarnation and Revelation

Barth develops his account of revelation in terms of *Deus dixit*, God's speech. On Barth's logic, it is only possible to speak of God because God speaks of himself: God is the subject of revelation, not the object, and this is the sole basis of any human speech about God.[347] The prolegomena explores the ramifications of the basic claim that God is first and foremost subject of his revelation. Barth's preference for thinking of revelation in terms of *Deus dixit* gathers God's revelatory activity under the umbrella term Word of God. The Word of God is a flexible, multivalent concept for Barth that serves to both characterise the modes of God's revelation, but also specifies revelation as an address, an intentional activity on God's part that presumes and demands a human response: 'We are not directed to God *in himself*, but to God who *communicates* himself. The correctness of the prophetic or apostolic thoughts and claims *about* God do not make the text Holy Scripture, but rather the encounter of *I and Thou*, of person to person, which these thoughts and claims declare.'[348] As Barth is quick to say, the personalist terms of *Deus dixit* should not be taken to suggest that there is not a 'disclosure' in revelation, that there is not a making known, but rather that this making known is to be understood only in terms of God's active address. It is thus not the disclosure of a given object but the active disclosing of God by God.[349] Again, Barth wants to ensure that the reception of God's revelation only occurs in the moral and spiritual situation

[347] *UCR I*, pp. 67-68 ET, 57-58.
[348] *UCR I*, p. 69 ET, p. 58.
[349] *UCR I*, pp. 69-70 ET, p. 58-59.

demanded by the mission of revelation. The address, as the active disclosing of God's self, means that the reflexive movement of humanity must be morally involved in its response.

From what we have already seen of Barth's handling of the exegetical task, this is familiar territory. Barth elaborates God's revelation in terms of divine speech, Scripture and preaching, but the basic terms, particularly as found in the Reformed confessions lectures, are present here.[350] For our purposes, it is the far more sophisticated Christology brought to bear on this basic revelational schema that is of interest. Christology does not exhaust the doctrine of revelation, but it is its possibility. The doctrine of the Trinity is the 'actual centre of the doctrine of revelation'[351] because in revelation God reveals himself, not as an abstract divinity or partial picture, but as self-revelation.[352] However, while the Trinity is the subject and content of revelation, the incarnation is what makes revelation possible.[353] To establish this point, Barth considers again the necessity that God always remain transcendent Lord in revelation: 'We must always grasp revelation as *God's* revelation, he remains always God even in revelation, not quantitatively…but qualitatively completely different from us, not spatially, but in spatial terms a totally different place than us!'[354] Barth is as wary here as he was in the Reformed Confessions lectures that simple transcendence can be as much a product of human conceptuality as immanence, so he stresses that 'God is not hidden because of the relativity of all human knowledge, but because he is a *living* God…the un-sublateable subject, [who reveals himself] from *himself*, not from *us*.'[355]

Though we have seen revelation to be governed by the dynamics of the address and response before, the personal nature of the address is given much more prominence here. All the while, Barth continues to want to construe revelation in terms that allow for a human response as well as being protective of divine freedom. It is the twin demands of these personalist terms that suggest the incarnation as the possibility of revelation. By becoming incarnate, God makes himself a subject that can be an object, he can enter into the subject/object communication of human creatures, and so remain 'hidden' in his subjectivity, even as he reveals himself by making himself available as an object in the incarnate person of Christ.[356]

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[350] See *UCR I*, §1-3.
[351] *UCR I*, p. 161 ET, p. 131.
[352] *UCR I*, pp. 105ff ET, pp. 95ff.
[353] *UCR I*, p. 163f ET, p. 134f.
[354] *UCR I*, p. 164 ET, p. 134.
[355] *UCR I*, p. 165 ET, p. 135.
[356] *UCR I*, p. 167 ET, p. 137.

The necessity of the incarnation for revelation does not result in a supralapsarian Christology, wherein the qualitative divide between divine and human would always have required the incarnation in order to establish the kind of personal fellowship Barth here describes. He denies as much a few pages later: 'Humanity, as he was made by God, the paradisal human, required no revelation, no incarnation of God…God was no problem for humanity, when humanity was no problem for itself.'[357] This represents a further move to draw the work of revelation closer to the reconciling mission of Christ, away from the possibility of 'realist metaphysics' entertained by Calvin and other Reformers. McCormack's claim that the incarnation solves the problem of 'God in history', should be treated with caution in part because there is no problem of God in history except under the terms of salvation history.[358] Rather, Asprey is certainly right that the question is the reverse: 'how is it possible to speak about the encounter with God in revelation without making God's presence historically "available"?'[359] Revelation always has a soteriological purpose, and the problem of making God 'available' is a problem inherent to the sinful reflex of human relations.

The argument up to this point has been that this problem has been pressed on Barth with particular force by his exegetical labours, and by the consistent claim of Scripture to speak authoritatively of God. The basis of this claim is found in God's sovereign election of Scripture as authoritative, but this foundation seems to possess an only tenuous connection to the history of God's acts. The danger, then, is that instead of exercising a genuine, if derivative, authority, Scripture vanishes into an eschatological moment. This danger is exacerbated by construing the communication between Scripture and its readers through the correspondence between the reader's movement of faith and the witnesses' manner of proclamation. Chapter 3 traced a steady move away from this picture towards one in which the witness communicates by directing towards Christ's own history as salvation history. In turn, this clarifies how the divine lordship that occasions Scripture and confers authority to it is integrated into salvation history, which the Göttingen Christology makes plain.

Yet placing the weight of the doctrine of revelation on Christology may threaten to subordinate Christ's own history to the needs of revelation. This would in turn, ironically, undermine the capacity of Christ's history to anchor the doctrine of revelation in the first

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[357] *UCR I*, pp. 190-191 ET, p. 155.
[358] McCormack, *Critically Realistic* pp. 358-359, see also pp. 327-328 in a similar vein on the an-/enhypostatic Christology as the replacement for the time/eternity dialectic.
[359] Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, p. 168.

place. Already in our discussion of the 1 Corinthians lectures we saw that Barth seemed to place more weight on the resurrection than it could bear to anchor the believer's life objectively in Christ's history. Asprey suggests that these problems remain in the Göttingen Dogmatics, written a year later. The resurrection as the work of God's free subjectivity is a miracle that can only be 'referred' to, and so, argues Asprey, may lose 'any historical resonance'.[360] Yet, in the prolegomena, Barth is primarily concerned with the formal character of revelation. Before addressing the substance of these criticisms by way of further material from Barth's lectures on John, we should turn to Barth's Christology proper in the second part of the Göttingen Dogmatics where he considers at greater length how the incarnate Christ is communicative.

4.1.2 Divine and Human nature in the Hypostatic Union

Because of the structure that Barth gave the prolegomena, which covers the key doctrinal loci in light of their relationship to the doctrine of revelation, Barth notes that this is his second run at Christology in this cycle of lectures. The previous material, however should be presumed, and the latter material should not be a 'disturbance' of what has come before.[361] This suggests that the needs of the doctrine of revelation will still be in Barth's mind as he develops his Christology proper. This suspicion is reinforced by the way Barth gives his account of the hypostatic union in view of his critical attitude towards Lutheran Christology.

With an eye for the doctrine of revelation, the burden of the prolegomenal Christology was securing the doctrinal basis for the paradox of revelation in concealment. This was done in order to underline that even in the intimacy of the incarnate union there was no direct access to God. The emphasis must be entirely on the divine subject that assumes human nature without internal change, leading Barth to appropriate the classical formulation in which Christ's human nature is *anhypostatic* until assumed by the person of the Logos.[362] In turn, for Barth this implies the 'Calvinistic *extra*', which is to say that Christ's humanity subsists in Christ's divinity in a wholly irreversible manner; his divinity is fully present in the incarnation but not exhausted by it.[363] To secure these matters is especially important because it is in the great promise of Christology that the danger lies. As the site of God's most

[360] Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, p. 168, also pp. 188-193.
[361] *UCR III*, p. 26.
[362] *UCR I*, pp. 192-194 ET, pp. 156-158.
[363] *UCR I*, pp. 194-196 ET, pp. 158-160.

intimate relation to humanity, theology is most likely to overstep its bounds and attempt to reverse what is an irreversible equation.

In his survey of classical Reformed and Lutheran Christologies, Barth argues that affirming Chalcedon is not sufficient protection against such dangers. Barth finds the different routes chosen by Lutheran and Reformed Christologies instructive in this regard. For all the suspicion of scholasticism and the supposedly speculative nature of substance metaphysics, Luther always gave '*space*'[364] to the definition of Chalcedon, taking seriously the presuppositional importance of securing the identity of Christ in order to understand his work. Yet the broad agreement on Chalcedon among the magisterial Reformers did not mean their respective Christologies agreed. It is the precisely the difference in how the logic of Chalcedon functions that distinguishes the Reformed from the Lutheran paths.

The differences between Reformed and Lutheran on this issue can be given in brief compass. On Barth's telling, Reformed Christology prioritised the divine subject in the incarnation, and so understood the union of two natures as something that takes place within the person of Christ. By contrast, the Lutheran prioritised the union of two natures, in which the person of Christ is a reality determined by this union. In a more technical idiom, for the Reformed, the union between God and humanity in Christ's person is 'unio *immediata*', but the union between divine and human nature is 'unio *mediata*'.[365] For the Lutherans, however, the union of natures is a communicative reality, where there is the communication of 'the properties (*Eigenschaften*) of each nature to the so-called concretum…' which means that 'God and humanity as such' are unified, not only 'the God-man.'[366]

What turns on this distinction for Barth is how God in Christ is understood to be present to humanity, which has important implications for the nature of faith:

> [Lutheran Christology] seeks the immediate experience of the divine triumph over the division between God and man, of course experienced in faith, but immediately experienced. It is of course also aware that it must reckon with the divine triumph, but this recedes somewhat into the background in relation to the concern for unmediated having and possessing…Of course it is meant that the person of the God-man is visible in the humanity, in which the hypostatic union is likewise the principle of the whole process. Of course the permanent integrity of both natures is preserved, as in the Eucharist in the doctrine of consubstantiation the bread is at once the bread and body of Christ. But the emphasis does not lie in the preservation, but on the possibility to now have and experience divinity in humanity as such, so that one can say: the man is God! and: God is man! God's son is Mary's son! Mary's son is God's son![367]

[364] *UCR III*, p. 30
[365] *UCR III*, p. 39, Barth is citing Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p. 431
[366] *UCR III*, p. 40
[367] *UCR III*, pp. 41-42

An adherence to the basic terms of Chalcedon is undermined by the focus of Lutheran Christology on the relation of natures. Barth almost suggests that the difference is simply of emphasis, but he goes on to make clear that it is the reversibility of the relation that is in fact the problem. Once the incarnation makes the union between the natures immediate, thinks Barth, then the asymmetry of divine-human relations is set to one side. Downstream is Hegel's apotheosis of history and the elevation of experience by *Sturm und Drang* Romanticism.[368]

The decisive point of difference between Reformed and Lutheran Christologies, then, is that 'divine *spontaneity*' is the cardinal feature for the Reformed and the aperture through which the doctrine must be viewed.[369] Putting the union of natures into the 'background' and mediating that union by the person of Christ are paired moves for Barth. Both involve the necessary denial that human nature could in any way bypass God's subjectivity to access God directly, which makes Christ's humanity a concealment of his divinity, not a manifestation of it. Yet, for all that the subjectivity of God is preserved by the Reformed doctrine of the *unio personalis* that mediates the natures in Christ's person, Barth wonders if he may yet be allowing for metaphysical speculation by speaking of 'natures' at all:

> Is it: God–man, and not much more: God–sinner? Did not Luther get it right, when for this reason he spoke so harshly of the two natures? Answer: Of course, the decisive opposition is: God–sinner, *Deus–homo peccator*. But since the peccator is *homo*, the opposition between God–man is not to be disassociated from him, and this is the the presupposition [of God-sinner]. Only when there is a triumph over the opposition of God–man, is there a triumph over the other: 'God–sinner'. Only when the person of Christ is really triumphant over everything, can he be this one, can he do this work, which will be spoken of in the second part of Christology [on the atonement].[370]

Christ's person is not to be had simply by the description of his work as reconciler, not primarily here because of the *extra Calvinisticum*, but because what Christ assumes in the incarnation has a nature that is not determined by its fallenness, even as that nature is not knowable outside of the drama of salvation. This alone suggests that the incarnation is understood as a soteriological possibility as much as a revelational one. Christ's history is human without thereby becoming a type of a generic relationship between God and creatures. It is 'precisely not, as one has said a thousand times, the prototype for religious relationships'.[371] It also suggests Barth is more sensitive to the elision between sinfulness and

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[368] *UCR III*, pp. 56-57.
[369] *UCR III*, p. 68.
[370] *UCR III*, p. 34.
[371] *UCR III*, p. 70.

creatureliness than he seemed to be in the Ephesians lectures, giving him greater freedom to speak of human history in positive terms.

Nonetheless, because the humanity of Christ remains in the 'background', and because it conceals revelation, it is not clear that Christ's incarnate life is more than a passage between the two events necessary to make it revelatory. These are exegetical problems as much as they are dogmatic ones, and Barth must confront what it means not only for the Bible to speak of Jesus Christ, but to report Jesus's life, and words, in the text of Scripture. With this in mind, we return to his lectures on John's Gospel.

4.2 Nicodemus and the Crisis of Belief

It is a fact of Barth's lecture choices that narratives are not a prominent feature of his exegesis in this period. He is far more comfortable with rhetorical modes suited to proclamation and exhortation rather than the description of events. Further, as he insists, all of Scripture, including narrative, is conditioned by its status as witness.[372] However, when Barth comes to read the Gospel of John, his theological presuppositions put him under some strain. Particularly as he has set strict limits on Christ's humanity as making visible his divinity, the narratives of Christ's history must be read with an eye to subverting their apparently direct character. This does not appear to be a strength of Barth's exegesis, or the Christology that increasingly stands behind it, and forms the basis of the line of criticism mounted against Barth by his contemporary Peterson. But, before addressing those criticisms directly, it will be important to see how Barth handles such passages himself.

We can begin with Barth's fairly extended discussion of the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus at night, found in John 3:1-21.[373] Barth's insists in his discussion of John the Baptist that, while the witness is inherently self-effacing, faith correlates to the witness's testimony, not to revelation.[374] The question for the Nicodemus pericope is how an encounter with the incarnate Christ stands in regard to this requirement.

Barth reads this passage as an instance of the drama of unbelief that is carried out whenever humanity is encountered by God in revelation. So, Nicodemus's nocturnal visit is best thought of as an instance of the Johannine dichotomy of darkness and light: sinful

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[372] In the Sermon on the Mount lectures he makes a similar point, somewhat obliquely: 'The *Lord* of Matthew speaks, but the Lord of *Matthew*' *BP*, pp. 1b/2-3.

[373] Barth reads the structure of this passage somewhat differently than is common. He considers v. 16 the completion of a thought that runs from v. 10, as opposed to v.16 being a break in speaker, from Jesus to the Evangelist. He treats all of 3:1-21 as the 'Nicodemus pericope'. *JE,* p. 209.

[374] Barth cites Frédéric Godet: 'L'idée du témoignage…est corrélative et inséparable de celle de la foi.' See Godet, *Commentaire sur l'Évangile de Saint Jean* II (Paris:Neuchâtel, 1885), p. 49, cf. *JE*, p. 65.

humanity and revelation.[375] Barth finds it helpful here to contrast Nicodemus with the Baptist. The Baptist is described in terms of the office of prophet and apostle, while Nicodemus represents the condition of humanity in general in its presumption that the capacity to either believe or disbelieve in revelation is within its grasp. Nicodemus's incredulity at Jesus's claim that entering the Kingdom of God requires birth by the Spirit (3:5-9) is a case in point:

> How can this happen? Yes, indeed how? Who is here, who would not have to also join in the questioning? Only the act of belief could put the that! in the place of how? It is the general situation of humanity in opposition to revelation, so long as he stands on this side of the krisis…It is clear in the spectator question, in the question of the teacher of Israel that by-passes decision, the leap which above all humanity will not venture.[376]

We are on familiar territory here, as Barth repeats the claim that the 'spectator question' (*Zuschauerfrage*) is emblematic of a sinful strategy of avoidance employed by humanity (and especially, Barth implies, theologians) when confronted by the judgment and obligation of God's Word. With his reference to 'krisis' and the 'leap', we may further think we are in the starker rhetorical character associated with *Romans II*. We are in fact much more in the regions of *The Resurrection of the Dead*, as Barth does not stop with the crisis of belief, but further asks how this crisis indicates the prior possibility of belief already established in God.

Barth recognises that one needs to account not just for Nicodemus's presumption that he can remain a 'spectator' to the question of God, but also that he does in fact come to search out Jesus in the first place: 'What is valid? That he has come to *Jesus* or that he came to Jesus at *night*?'[377] The problem is that Nicodemus could be understood as representing a capacity on the human side to, even its sin, approach God on its own terms. Nicodemus may be, Barth suggests, the original Herrmannian, who through moral crisis comes to the question of God, and though genuinely confronted by Christ's power as one not his own, subtly conceals his own self-consciousness as the actual starting point of his theology. The task then, is to show not only that Nicodemus stands under the crisis, but that the crisis itself is dependent on God's prior act of salvation in Christ. In turn, unbelief is not the anti-thesis of belief, but its parasite:

> The consequence of the sending of the Son of God portrayed in vv. 14-16 is entirely undialectical, quite undoubtedly directed at the *salvation* of the world. It is the announcement of life and nothing else. Equally undialectical is its corollary: the existence of the believer as such: v. 18a: οὐ χρίνεται. [The believer] will not be condemned, any more than the Son of God

[375] *JE*, p. 212 Barth holds that the nighttime setting should be seen in line with the darkness motif that runs throughout the Gospel.
[376] *JE,* p. 215.
[377] *JE,* p. 222.

> is sent to judge. This does not only mean the decision on him has already been made that he believes and has eternal life. Rather: it is as such the *possibility* of a decision, entirely disconnected from the domain of a *double* possibility. The yes of belief does not stand next to, but absolutely *above* the no. Yes and no stand opposite each other like possibility and impossibility, or like what God *wills* in his act of love for the κόσμος, and that which he even with this act *rejects* that not willed by him.[378]

This is a fine example of what Ingolf Dalferth has called Barth's 'eschatological realism'.[379] Rooted in divine election, the believer, as well as Christ as the object of belief, logically precede unbelief and the judgment against it. Put differently, Nicodemus could not come to Jesus in his unbelief had belief not already been objectively possible in Christ. What appears to Nicodemus to be a self-directed moral and spiritual quest is in fact responsive and dependent on God's prior decision to create the possibility of fellowship with him.

Yet, even more pointedly than the relationship between Christ's resurrection and the believer found in the *Resurrection* lectures, the connection between the 'believer', who is undialectically willed by God (like the sending of the Son), and Nicodemus seems tenuous. G. C. Berkouwer argues that even in Barth's mature theology he posited a 'triumph of grace' that so stressed the force of divine election it drained all drama from the biblical narrative, as well as the life of faith.[380] All the more so here as the 'believer' is already given objectively in Christ, is there any remaining sense that Nicodemus's belief or unbelief bears any weight in his relation to Christ, or that Jesus's obtuse response is more than a deferral made necessary by the gap between birth and resurrection? Might it all be a *Schattenspiel*, and the shadow's source is in the end revealed to be something quite different than it appeared to be?[381]

As an exegetical problem, this turns on two issues. First, what sort of thing is Jesus's speech to Nicodemus, if not revelation? Second, can something be said to have happened to Nicodemus in his encounter with Jesus? Is it possible to trace any development that might have occurred as a result of this meeting? Barth's answer to these questions is instructive, because he takes the opportunity to draw the connection between prophecy, revelation, and belief, almost in one breath:

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[378] *JE,* pp. 222-223.

[379] Dalferth claims that Barth 'defends [this position] by expounding it rather than justifying it.' We should add that he defends his largely by expounding Scripture, which is his justification for it. See Ingolf U. Dalferth, 'Karl Barth's Eschatological Realism', in *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, ed. S. W. Sykes (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), pp. 14-45.

[380] G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth,* trans. Harry R. Boer (London: Paternoster Press, 1956). It is instructive that Barth's response to Berkouwer in CD IV/3.1 §69 takes the form of an extended exposition of *Jesus's* life, in the subsection 'Jesus Victor'. See esp. pp. 173-180.

[381] Barth uses this language in a sermon on Mark 10:35-45, see *Predigten 1917*, pp. 65ff. As we will see in John, so there the critical force of the divine decision is the basis for genuine moral and spiritual existence.

> [Jesus] can only announce to him-and that is what Nicodemus encountered-what it will mean when he entrusts himself to him. V. 21,[382] where again there appears the believer in the sense of vv. 15-16, can only be rightly understood as the highest paradox: for the works of the believers are also, following v. 19, πονηρά [darkness]. But so that he, thereby released from the decision of his belief, *actualises* the truth that is also against himself, the truth that judges himself, thereby will his works–he, who is born of the flesh, is indeed born of the Spirit–be manifestly done as in God. He is the *peccator iustus*. And that means having eternal life.[383]

Barth makes several points here that need elaboration. First, Jesus's ministry prior to his passion and resurrection is prophetic in the more traditional sense, meaning that his words here are to be understood as any other part of the scriptural witness, as awaiting the work of the Spirit to make them God's Word. However, Barth also makes this point to stress the banal fact that Jesus has not died and been resurrected yet, and so these words can only function as anticipatory.

Barth argues first that when Jesus speaks of 'entrusting' himself, he is referencing John 2:24.[384] This is demonstrated, thinks Barth, by Jesus limiting his revelation: 'Jesus as revealer in the *withholding*, in the reserve, with a question on the lips'.[385] His 'actual revelation' is the culmination of his atoning ministry, through crucifixion, death, resurrection, and glorification. The parallel Jesus draws between himself and the serpent Moses raised up in the wilderness in 1:14 makes this clear for Barth. Jesus's encounter with humanity is in his being ὑψωθείς, 'lifted up', which is the definitive moment of revelation, in Barth's reading, the whole passion narrative *in nuce*, culminating in his exaltation: 'The hour of death that Jesus approaches, is the hour of his glorification…This glorification is however…his actual revelation.'[386] Therefore, Barth does not read this 'reserve' as only a function of Christ's humanity understood as the structural limitation to revelation, which migh be expected from the dogmatic Christology, but of the sequence of Christ's history.

To clarify this point, Barth picks up on Jesus' pneumatological language in 3:6-8 to draw a comparison with the upper room pericope from 14:15-31. It is the sending of the Spirit, he argues, which is the culminating event of revelation because only then can the believer 'ask the Father in [Jesus's] name.'[387] Revelation thus comprehends the whole relation established in reconciliation, as a genuinely Trinitarian event. This is all to say that as

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[382] 'But he who does what is true comes to the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought in God.'
[383] *JE,* p. 224.
[384] 'but Jesus did not trust himself to them, because he knew all men and needed no one to bear witness of man; for he himself knew what was in man.' (2:24-25).
[385] *JE,* p. 211.
[386] *JE,* p. 218.
[387] *JE,* p. 219, citing John 16: 16-27.

Barth develops it here, the limitation of Christ's humanity on revelation is as much a feature of respecting the actual sequence of the passion narrative as it is bound up with the concerns of Reformed Christology. To equate Jesus's self-attestation prior to his death with revelation would both undermine the reality of Jesus's human history, and separate revelation from its soteriological end.

What then of Nicodemus, and the prophetic encounter? Barth seems to shift so quickly from Nicodemus to the believer 'born of the Spirit', who is *peccator iustus*, that the timelines to get muddled. It is not obvious how Nicodemus's state of eschatological expectation shows any salient difference with that of the believer after Pentecost. It seems that these differences are intentionally blurred due to the relationship between prophecy and revelation that we explored in the sections on John the Baptist in chapter 3. Christ is the revelation of God, but as this revelation is given in Jesus's death and glorification, the announcement looks forward to Christ's resurrection, even as the resurrection looks backward towards Jesus's ministry and passion. In part, this is just to repeat that for Barth there is no prising apart of revelation and witness. But it is also to say that Barth always understands the history of Jesus to be on a trajectory towards glorification, even as its origin is in the divine will. Crucially, this trajectory passes through death, and it is this human aspect of Christ's life that thus establishes the trajectory for those who come to belief in him. The worry was raised earlier that the believer 'as such' threatened the particularity of Nicodemus. Barth suggests that the same logic he employed to account for the Baptist's relationship to Christ applies here, up to a point. There, Barth suggested that particularity is gained in relation to Christ's history precisely because only in relation to that history is the fulfilment of the office of witness possible. Similarly, freed from the burden of self-establishment, Nicodemus may now '*actualise*' the reality declared in election through in his existence. Yet the parallels are not exact. Barth universalises the Baptist's movement with regard to his office as witness, but for Nicodemus it is the moral and spiritual movement of humanity that is at issue. So, the confrontation with Jesus demands a more clearly moral judgment against oneself, a movement that accords with God's judgement made known in Christ. It is this belief that breaks through the '*circulus vitiosus* of vv. 6-12, in which Nicodemus moves'.[388]

The notion that Jesus's history, both in its physical sequence and its deep background in God's divine will, is real history, to which all other histories are related, is one of the central theological tenets of Barth's mature theology.[389] For our purposes, what we need to see is

[388] *JE,* p. 219.
[389] See most strikingly *CD* II/2, §33, but also *CD* IV/3, §69 pp. 135-165.

how this establishes a pattern exegetically that in turn grounds the moral force of the scriptural text. The Nicodemus pericope portrays Jesus as a prophet, but it is not clear that that this is materially connected to his incarnate ministry. For that, we turn to Barth's reading of John 6, and the 'bread from heaven' discourse.

4.3 Bread from Heaven

The dominant exegetical question of this chapter has been Barth's handling of the Gospel narrative in light of the challenges posed to it by his Christological framework. The broader theological issue is how Christ's history can be understood to reshape the history of others. In the Nicodemus pericope, Barth handles the limitations of Jesus's humanity on revelation by claiming that his speech is prophetic, rather than revelatory. We also saw how this turn to prophecy was as much a feature of preserving the actual sequence of Christ's human life as it was part of Barth's Reformed Christological structure. Nonetheless, the prophetic mode of Jesus in the Nicodemus pericope leaves the significance of Jesus's human presence to his ministry unclear.

In expounding the 'bread from heaven' discourse of John 6:22-71, Barth addresses just this question. He declines to consider at any length the eucharistic import of this passage, which has so dominated its interpretation in Protestant circles since the Reformation.[390] Rather, Barth finds the drama of this chapter in the disjunction that Jesus exposes between the general perception of what his visible ministry entails with its reality. Jesus's giving of bread to the crowd and the resulting offence he causes to their desire to possess him as source of material provision is what holds the disparate scenes of this chapter together.[391] Thus, the feeding of the five thousand in 6:1-15 sets the stage for Jesus challenging the crowds' motives for seeking him. What they desire from him is material relief, a desire which is based on a misreading of the Exodus narrative. It is not only that Jesus denies the crowds' reading of the Exodus narrative as one fundamentally concerned with material liberation and provision, that causes consternation, however, it is his own claim to be the bread of heaven that must be consumed. This is the χληός λόγος, the 'hard word', that both the crowds and the disciples find difficult to accept.

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[390] Being even handed, Barth thinks that Luther is right about it being a reference to the eucharist, but that Zwingli is right to distinguish what Jesus says here from the words of institution in the Synoptics (τοῦτό ἐστιν), and ultimately thinks with Calvin that this is an *umschreibung* of the sacrament and not the institution of the Lord's Supper. See *JE,* pp. 313-316.

[391] *JE,* p. 310.

Barth finds the two different offended groups instructive for understanding the relationship between Christ's ministry and belief. In the offence taken by the crowds, Barth argues, we see something less profound, more bald than in that of the disciples'. The crowds' offence lies in their presumption that if Christ is of God he will offer material abundance and political power. In Christ's claim that he himself is the 'bread from heaven', they correctly recognise an attack on their presuppositions and beliefs. It draws Barth's attention because both the crowd and the disciples are fundamentally disturbed by the same thing, though divided by their understanding of who Christ is, or claims to be.

Barth notes the commonality between the reaction of the people and the disciples to Jesus's claim to be the bread from heaven:

> The question accosts the people as it does the disciples: the people, as [Jesus] through them has become visible help, the disciples in the person of the helper himself. If the people are angry at Jesus because that help does not simply continue…the terror of the disciples moves on a higher level (though it is at its base the same defiance), from which they must also understand that the sign given to them, the person of the helper himself, is only a sign, stands in the shadow of death, must hereafter be seen [across] a cleft full of darkness and must be found again, in order to really be the food of eternal life.[392]

The function of Christ's own witness is thus to anticipate his death, resurrection, and glorification, though with a particular emphasis on suffering and death. For both the people and the disciples, Christ's announcement of himself indicates a break in their horizon, and most profoundly a challenge to their presumed teleology. The crowds and the disciples have both inferred the meaning of Christ's ministry from his flesh, which is his *visible* ministry.

The role of the crowds in Barth's exegesis of the Gospels is telling for how he thinks of Jesus's earthly ministry. In his lectures on the Sermon on the Mount, he refers to them as a kind of 'chorus in a Greek tragedy' who act as an 'enlarged and simplified projection of the drama of fear and joy, belief and unbelief, obedience and denial in relation to Christ.'[393] The 'mountain' on which the Sermon is to have taken place does not therefore signal a withdrawal into the esoteric, for the crowds are 'astonished' at the teaching.[394] In the same fashion, in the John lectures the crowds are the background to Jesus and his disciples. As Barth reads the Sermon on the Mount as primarily a critical attack on ethics, the crowds indicate that it is not an attack on a specialised religious ethics, but on human ethics. In this passage of John, it is the recognition by the crowds that Jesus's announcement of his own

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[392] *JE,* p. 311.
[393] *BP*, p. 5b/16.
[394] *BP*, p. 5a/15.2.

death that shows its genuine visibility, as well as its universal scope. Put differently, because Christ is visible in his humanity, his earthly ministry is not circumscribed by the duality of revelation and faith, but is in a mundane sense factual, even as it always demands faith, and only in faith can it be responded to fruitfully.

Barth plays out the difference between the crowds and the disciples then not as simply between ignorance and understanding. The error in both cases is to infer from this visibility that Christ's ministry is in continuity with their own history. The distinction between the crowds and the disciples in not in the recognition that Christ is denying such a continuity, but that the disciples recognise that the eating and drinking of Christ's flesh entails for them a new history and obligation. Barth specifies this in the discussion of the 'hard word':

> This is the 'hard speech' from v. 60. Why hard? Because it is implicitly, though for the disciples only too explicably, about the giving of his flesh and blood, that is, speech about the death of his human life. Because it is implicitly a *prophecy of suffering*...This position takes hold [of the disciples], having already understood the sign given to them of [Christ's] appearance on the lake more as mysterious menace rather than as promise, as it is clear to them that the true food and drink, which was the point of [Jesus's] speech to the people, consists in the giving of his flesh, in the shedding of his blood, that is, in his death. That is the figure in which he elicited their fear.[395]

The disciples react with fear because the demands of belief in Christ are laid bare. To believe in Christ is to recognise in his death the judgment against one's self. The 'promise' which is interpreted as a 'menace' is the exaltation of Jesus and the sending of the Spirit, and its menace lies in the cross:

> Jesus holds the offence of the coming cross against the prospect of his exaltation in v. 62. The way of the Son of Man is the way back to where he came from, the way from the Father to the Father. It is insistently asked: are you still offended, when you know me truly, when you believe in me (v. 64)? Belief indeed means knowing truly in this sense…The *Spirit* makes alive, the Spirit who only on the basis of my death (*Hingang*) can give you the belief in me as the departing one…If [Christ] does not go the way, before which you are horrified, by which you are offended, then he will not be the ζωοποιῶν ('one who gives life').[396]

Barth is again somewhat loose with the timelines. He seems to conflate the position of the disciples with the church after the sending of the Spirit–'It is clear that before the happy completion of the journey in v. 21 the crisis is unavoidable in the inner circle, also among his own, also in the church.'[397] But rather than read this as a conflation of pre- and post-Pentecost epochs, we can see here the way in which Christ's own history is the point of reference for belief not only in its content, but in its movement through the cross to

[395] *JE,* p. 308.
[396] *JE,* p. 309. The citation is from 6:63.
[397] *JE,* p. 309.

resurrection and exultation. Belief in Christ as the giver of life always involves the offence of the cross and thus the recognition of its judgment against sin and thus one's self. This is the 'work' of belief, as Barth argues following 6:29: 'work in God's service, in obedience to him, that will be done, done by humans…'[398]

The monergism of grace is protected on Trinitarian grounds, which Barth specifies in the terms we have already come across in the Göttingen Dogmatics prolegomena. Christologically, the obedience of faith is possible for humanity because the incarnate union between God and humanity allows divine subjectivity to become objective: 'One believes, in that one believes Christ, at once *in* Christ, *through* Christ. He is the object and subject of belief.'[399] Christ's objectivity is a consequence of his incarnation, but we should not be confused by the language of subject and object that Jesus's humanity is necessary simply for the possibility of an encounter with 'the other'.[400] This is nonetheless an important prerequisite for the more expansive purpose of showing that the divine mission of salvation takes up a particular human history, which has a particular telos and confers that same telos on others: 'there is no way to this fellowship except Christ in *that* form [of flesh and blood], Christ the crucified and as such the exalted.' [401] In pneumatological terms, then, belief is not an acquired bit of knowledge, but a reality given by the Spirit. It is important that in both of these sections, Barth notes the significance of the Spirit for belief as a consequence of Christ's 'glorification'.

The question then becomes if the Spirit is the actual focus of the divine act of revelation, and so if the Spirit covers up a lack of the real presence of Christ in history. In the context of Barth's dogmatic Christology, we raised the question as to whether or not his Reformed Christological commitments might have exegetically deleterious consequences, particularly when navigating the Gospel narratives. This in turn suggested a deeper theological problem, which is that Christ's history, bounded by the miracle of the Virgin Birth and the Resurrection, may be determined entirely by the doctrine of revelation, and so lack any substance in its own right outside the event of belief. In Christopher Asprey's sophisticated analysis of this material from the Göttingen Dogmatics, he argues that because of the way Barth conceives of the resurrection-ascension motif as primarily an absence,

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[398] *JE,* p. 319.
[399] *JE,* p. 326.
[400] McCormack rightly points out that 'Barth was not grounding theology in an I-Thou philosophy' though we must say in the same breath that moral fellowship understood in terms of address and response between two subjects runs right through his theology in this period. See McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, pp. 362.
[401] *JE,* p. 326-327.

Christ's history 'seems to disappear' into the ever-fresh moment of revelation brought by the Spirit.[402] In its own way this line of criticism echoes that of one of Barth's contemporaries, Erik Peterson. While Peterson's essay 'What is Theology?' mounted an attack on the dialectical theology movement in general, it was Barth who later responded, and Peterson's writings make clear that Barth was his primary target.[403] For our purposes Peterson's criticism of Barth is helpful because it centres on his capacity to give theological grounding to the obedience of faith in the context of biblical authority. Outside of his published writings, Peterson argued this point against Barth in the context of his own exegetical lectures on John's Gospel, given just shortly after Barth delivered his own. This affords the opportunity to evaluate his criticisms of Barth, as it were, in action.

4.4 Erik Peterson and the 'Manifest' Christ

Eduard Thurneysen once commented to Barth that '[Erik] Peterson is certainly one of the theologians that can write, but…whilst he has himself not become totally Catholic, he still speaks somewhat from the outside in'.[404] Indeed, this sense that Peterson was an outsider to both the theological establishment and the 'dialectical theology' movement of Barth, Bultmann, and Friedrich Gogarten, even before he did finally become a Roman Catholic, is what makes him such an interesting, and neglected, figure of the period. Here, we will largely restrict ourselves to his criticisms of Barth made in the context of his own lectures on John. He delivered his lectures on John at the University of Bonn, in the Summer Semester of 1927, a year and half after Barth delivered his own lectures in Münster. Peterson, like Barth, only managed to cover roughly a third of the Gospel, terminating the lectures at chapter 7.[405] While Peterson was not familiar with Barth's lectures, he makes explicit that his understanding of the presence of Christ is diametrically opposed to the 'aporia' that he saw

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[402] Asprey, *Eschatological Presence*, pp. 188-193, esp. p. 191. Asprey correctly sees that Barth affirms the resurrection as an event in time, as part of a real human history, but he sees this undermined by Barth's understanding of the ascension and the sending of the Spirit in terms of the doctrine of revelation. On Asprey's account, this results in a weak Royal Office.

[403] Erik Peterson, 'What is Theology?' in *Theological Tractates* trans. Michael J. Hollerich (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 1-14. The inherent contradictions Peterson saw in the theology of his day, with special reference to Barth, are detailed in his correspondence with Adolf von Harnack, see *op. cit.* pp. 15-29. For a sympathetic account of Peterson's criticisms of modern Protestant German theology, see Reinhard Hütter, *Suffering Divine Things,* trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp. 5-15. For a comprehensive overview of Peterson's life and work, see Barbara Nichtweiß, *Erik Peterson. Neue Sicht auf Leben und Werk* (Freiburg: Herder, 1992), for his relationship to Barth see esp. pp. 505-566.

[404] Thurneysen, 21.7.1925, in *B-Th 1921-1930*, p. 358.

[405] For context and manuscript information, see Nichtweiß's introduction to Peterson's John commentary, in Erik Peterson, *Johannesevangelium und Kanonstudien* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2003), pp. xvii-xxviii.

between the church and Christ, which for him formed the heart of Barth's dialectic.[406] He does so by way of his own reading of John's 'manifest' (*Anschaulich*) Christ in history. We will then briefly look at Barth's published response to Peterson, before drawing some conclusions about Barth's exegesis in light of Peterson's alternative.

4.4.1. The Ascended Christ and the Body of the Church

The difference in emphasis between Barth and Peterson is apparent from the beginning in their account of the prologue. Where Barth is struck by the juxtaposition of the *Logos* and the Baptist, Peterson is most interested in the Trinitarian 'standpoint' of the prologue. He argues that the marginalisation or outright rejection of John in post-Enlightenment European religion is due to the incompatibility of the prologue's standpoint with any human one: 'The standpoint taken by John is so high that it is difficult for us to raise ourselves, then and only in spirit and in imitation.'[407] The pre-existence of the *Logos* rooted in the Trinitarian life is the heart of this standpoint, and it is the diminution of Trinitarian theology that has led to a modalist reading of the prologue:

> Actually, not between God and humanity, but between God and Logos stands a real relation. This is a truth that has increasingly gone missing with the fading of trinitarian doctrine. Effected through the loss of trinitarian dogma, the relationship between God and humanity has become as intimate as that which previously existed between God and Logos…Jesus himself is in his pre-existence not an attribute of God, but he is rather (as Logos) a person distinguished from God the Father.[408]

For Peterson, as for Barth, this Trinitarian backdrop furnishes the divine identity of Jesus Christ. Yet, where Barth's reading of the prologue left him with minimal investment in the content of the relation between the pre-incarnate *Logos* and the Father; for Peterson it is this relationship that furnishes not only the content but the structure of revelation. As Peterson has it, it is this relation that signals the lack of an analogy between the relationship God will establish with humanity and the one that already exists in the Godhead.[409] As such, where Barth will lay stress on the divine transcendence of Christ in his revelation to prevent the

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[406] Peterson, 'What is Theology?', p. 6.
[407] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 58.
[408] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 61. There is a marginal note in the manuscript here saying 'K. Barth, doctrine of the Trinity'. The editor speculates it may have been added when Peterson repeated the lectures in 1929, after Barth's *Christliche Dogmatik* had already been published, though it is entirely possible that Barth and Peterson could have discussed Barth's plans for the doctrine of the Trinity in the *UCR* while they were colleagues in Göttingen. Either way, it is an enigmatic reference, as it is unclear whether or not Peterson finds in Barth an example of this error in Trinitarian theology or not. See *op. cit*., p. 61 n. 5.
[409] I have benefited immensely on this point from György Geréby's very learned article on the political implications of this conviction. See Geréby, 'Political Theology versus Theological Politics: Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt', *New German Critique* 105 (2008), pp. 7-33.

incarnation from becoming a Feurbachian projection, Peterson shows little of the same anxiety. If the proper Trinitarian dogma is in place, Christ's bodily presence will not be so leveraged for sinful self-establishment because it does not contain or reveal any fulcrum for entering the divine life. Because the Trinitarian life of God is *sui generis*, in one sense, Peterson thinks that the worry about religious subjectivism is ruled out of court.

All this means that Peterson will construe the exegetical task in different terms than Barth, just as he does the meaning of Christ's earthly ministry for revelation. It also means that he will come at the question of Christ's ongoing presence in history from a different angle than Barth does. Both of them are keen to say how Christ's presence is eschatological, and not immanent to history, without sacrificing the ongoing reality of his lordship over history. For Barth, however, this means shoring up theological defences against making Christ's presence a concrete possession of the church; for Peterson, it is saying precisely how Christ's presence remains concrete. Peterson's discussion of the Eucharist provides a helpful entrée into his reading of the 'manifest' presence of Christ and his critique of Barth.

4.4.2. The Eschatological Existence of the Church

Without delving into Peterson's understanding of 'aeons' and relationship between Greek, Jewish, and Johannine conceptions of time, we should note at the outset that Peterson considers the cross to be primarily public and visible in its meaning, because it represents a decisive ending and beginning within human history. The cross is the singular moment, and this singularity is in contrast to the perpetual possibility of messianic arrival that, by Peterson's lights, is the defining feature of messianic Judaism.[410] The incarnation, passion and resurrection of Christ is a visible, concrete reality for Peterson, and it is what allows the church, specifically its sacraments, to be a visible, concrete, eschatological reality. The Eucharist is Christ's presence to the church, and it is the continuity between Christ's body and the Eucharist that prevents the sacraments from becoming an act of human *poesis*:

> Not that we have to become–whether through the medium of historical research or through our life's existentiality–contemporaneous with [Christ], much more is he contemporaneous with us, as the incarnate one contemporaneous in his flesh and blood, which he directs us to eat and

[410] It should be stressed that, whatever one's judgment of Peterson's supersessionism, he is absolutely not trafficking in the 'de-Judaising' of Christianity that would become central to the work of *Die Deutschen Christen*. See his affirmation that John 4:22 ('Salvation comes from the Jews') is not a 'later gloss', (p. 184), and also his lecture/commentary on Romans 9-11 'The Church from Jews and Gentiles' (1933). See Peterson, *Tractates*, pp. 40-67, also Nichtweiß, *Peterson*, pp. 545-549, with particular reference to the importance of the 'Jews and Gentiles' lecture to Barth. On the 'de-Judaising efforts of some German theologians, see Susannah Heschel, *The Aryan Jesus* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), esp. p. 106 on Walter Grundmann's 1938 article denying the originality of John 4:22.

> drink in the Lord's Supper. There is no greater nearness to Christ than the sacramental. No prayerful fantasy, no historically faithful picture, no pious experience, no mental and personal *communio* can bring us as near as the *communio* of the Lord's Supper. In the Eucharist the incarnate one is among us, as among us as he was with the Twelve. Woe, when it is gainsaid that Christ is truly, that is, in flesh and blood, encountered in the Lord's Supper! It is unavoidable that in a symbolical conception of the Lord's Supper the entire appearance of Christ must become a symbol, that the true humanity of Jesus outside of his sacramental presence will be disclaimed.[411]

Unlike for Barth, claiming the concrete, clear presence of God does not signal idolatry for Peterson but is the check against it. If in the life of the church the presence of Christ is not as it was 'with the Twelve', then that presence becomes a matter of human achievement, of manufacture. Correspondingly, any qualification of the presence of Christ in the Eucharist is part and parcel with an ambivalence about the reality of the incarnation. It is the *concreteness* of Christ, his incarnate presence, that reveals the new aeon and shows it to be a counter-reality to the old. This manifest (*anschaulich*)[412] concreteness and eschatological reality are thus not mutually exclusive, but in the visibility of the cross essentially united. So, the church is no less an eschatological reality for all its manifestness than was the incarnate Christ. To drive a wedge, therefore, between the visibility and the eschatological existence of the church must, *perforce,* be applied to Christology. It is this argument that Peterson brings directly against Barth. While commenting on Jn. 3:14-15 (Moses raising up the serpent in the wilderness), Peterson makes an *excursus* on the 'Manifest Christology', where he addresses Barth's dialectical account of divine revelation directly:

> The "Son of Man" is a person endowed with a real human body, that can be seen as genuinely as the uplifted serpent in the desert can be. The concept of the un-manifest (*Unanschaulichen*) that entered into theology through Karl Barth is nowhere better refuted in its theological meaninglessness than through John 3:14. The Mandaeean saviour and the Son of Man in Daniel are as a matter of fact in the end un-manifest figures, since they represent only as symbols something spiritual. The Evangelist's Son of Man is indeed not a symbol for something spiritual; he is rather a real, bodily figure and for this reason also "manifest", as all bodily reality is manifest. The concept of the 'un-manifest', which Barth has proclaimed and which so many have repeated, since nominalism appears to them to be the only possibility for Protestant theology, demands, when the consequences are thought through, also necessarily a gnostic-docetic Christology. When Christ only apparently has a body, then he is naturally also

[411] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 246.

[412] *Anschaulich* presents some difficulties to English translation. Its root, *schauen*, both in its verbal and substantive forms means simply to look at, or to exhibit something. Yet to translate *Anschaulich* as 'visible' suggests simply physical perceptibility is the issue, which a) is better captured by *sichtbar*, which is not Peterson's word, and b) misses the conceptual understanding that *Anschaulich* suggests. Peterson's use of it as a contrast with Barth's use of *Unanschaulich* is also less than clear. Peterson seeks to reject Barth's use of *Unanschaulich* by citing John 3:14, but Barth seems to take the term from Romans 1:20. There, Barth translates ἀόρατος as *Unanschaulich* (departing from Luther's *unsichtbar*), and couches the issue in the conceptual otherness of God, rather than his spiritual invisibility. Peterson probably means the contrast with Barth to suggest the visible manifestation of God in Christ to be both. See Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, pp. 22-23 ET, p. 45.

> an un-manifest reality. But this docetic Christ is not the Son of Man who encounters us in the gospel.[413]

To be clear, Peterson is not accusing Barth of having a 'gnostic-docetic Christology' explicitly, but can be judged as having such by virtue of his account of the economy of grace in which the church lives. This lays great stress on the Christological implications of revelation. The accusation against Barth is that the way he describes God's act of revelation cannot satisfy the demands of a Chalcedonian Christology, and so he must in the end admit a docetic Christology or dispense with the notion of God's *Unanschaulichkeit* in revelation. Peterson will go on to draw out the implications of his Christology for revelation and Scripture in terms of his own understanding of 'witness'.

4.4.3 *Questio Iuris*

As he frames the argument in terms of the Christological consequences of how revelation is conceived, Peterson's account of 'witness' in John is developed in correspondence to Christ's 'manifest' presence in its relation to the Trinitarian background that governs his reading of the whole Gospel. Peterson draws on the juridical etymology of 'witness' to specify the kind of relation Christ has made possible for humanity. To witness is to make a declaration in court. It is most properly then a moral act, rather than a verification of facts, a response to '*questio iuris*' rather than '*questio facti*'. More specifically, however, it is to align oneself with the right of *another's* claims, not one's own.[414] To be a witness is therefore to enter into a public relation, which is the key distinction for Peterson between intellectual assent and bearing 'witness'. In the Nicodemus pericope, when Jesus distinguishes between his own witness to what he has seen and the witness to himself, which he does not give (3:11), Peterson notes: 'The problem is taken out of the sphere of intellectual knowledge and reframed as the problem of bearing witness'.[415] This is not an absence of knowledge but is most properly characterised as a certain kind of relation, as according to Jewish legal theory one had to see that of which one claims to be a witness, rather than what one knows on the basis of conjecture or hearsay.[416] Peterson takes this requirement for a concrete relation to be the basis for moving witness out of the private, merely intellectual sphere. He expands on this point in commenting on the Baptist's testimony about Jesus in

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[413] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, pp. 147-148.
[414] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 206.
[415] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 142.
[416] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 142.

3:22-36, specifically in response to the Baptist's claim that the one who accepts the testimony 'seals' God's truth. This kind of action places us in a public relation:

> Our relation to God is no private relation–clearly because God is no private person. In 'witness' (μαρτυρία) God stands opposite us as a person of public law. For us there is only the one thing: whether or not we take his witness, or if we want to take him as a liar. There is no third option. Since Kierkegaard, the concept of the decision for relation to God has been stressed. But the concept of the decision is far too private and romantic. It is the latest romantic adventure when one dares to commit oneself to the paradox–in Kierkegaard's sense. The Gospel of John speaks a quite different language than Kierkegaard. It does not deal in paradox, but in a witness's testimony. And further it does not deal in a wager or a decision, but in the quite matter-of-fact question of belief. Do we want to believe God's witness or not? We believe it by accepting it. If we lay it aside, we make God a liar.[417]

Peterson's critique here is of the way dialectical accounts of revelation may conceal a fetish for internal experience, even if that experience is self-negating. The antidote, thinks Peterson, is a properly public account of divine revelation, secured on Trinitarian grounds. Such an account moves past the agonism of decision precisely because it does not posit a structural relationship between the act of revelation and its response. The act of revelation is the mutual witness of the Father and Son, made known in Jesus Christ. But this relation, as we saw in the prologue, has no analogue and is therefore supposedly not at risk of being a religious projection.

Commenting on John 5:31,[418] Peterson argues that Christ's denial of his own capacity to bear witness to himself points in the direction of the divine status of his mission, which is the import of the ensuing verses.[419] The legal legitimacy of Jesus's claims about his own equality with God, and thus his rights in relation to divine law (the precipitating event of this discourse being the healing at the pool on the Sabbath, 5:1-17), are dependent on the witness of another who bears the necessary concrete relation to Jesus's divine status, that is, the Father.

Coming to the right understanding of this account of witness, claims Peterson, has direct implications for the Scripture Principle. As it is, it is not immediately clear how best to understand the form of the Father's witness. Jn. 5:37-38[420] seems to offer three elements of the Father's witness, voice (φωνή), form (εἶδος), and word (λόγος). Peterson notes that Cyril of Alexandria finds in this verse grounds for a Scripture principle, by taking the scriptural

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[417] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 175.
[418] 'If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not true'.
[419] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, pp. 206-207. Peterson argues against a subordinationist and/or Arian reading of this passage.
[420] 'And the Father who has sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent.'

words of the Father to be the location of the Father's witness to the Son,[421] a position that Peterson thinks fails to account for the unity of the verses. Rather, the three elements are united Christologically: 'With this [Christological] interpretation God's witness naturally does not reside in the words of Scripture, but in the voice, form and word of Christ, which are not really Christ's, but God's.'[422] The reciprocity between Christ and God is that of the Son and the Father, is for Peterson the heart of John's Gospel, [423] yet the implication of this for Christ's witness does not so much turn on a further Trinitarian movement–the Spirit is absent here–but on the qualitatively distinct form of Christ's witness from all other witnesses due its unique relation to the life of the Trinity.

Peterson draws out the meaning of Christ's unique witness in an excursus on 'The Christian Scripture Principle' that functions as an extended gloss of 5:39-40.[424] Here, he claims, there is a contrast between the necessity of believing in Christ as opposed to the Baptist and the Scriptures: 'But it is not necessary for our salvation to believe all these witnesses. We can also believe the testimony of Jesus's work…We are not blessed, when we believe the testimony of John [the Baptist] or the Scriptures, but rather when we go through these witnesses to the belief that Christ has given.'[425] What we saw earlier of Peterson's theology of sacramental presence shows the force of this distinction: the material uniqueness of the incarnation enables Peterson to place a wedge between revelation and testimony that for Barth is not possible, even though Barth too would affirm that Christ, not the scriptural witnesses, is the object of belief.

4.5 Conclusion

Erik Peterson, ill-served as he is here as a mere foil to Barth, suggests a genuine alternative to Barth's reading of John, and some of Barth's basic theological presuppositions. In conclusion, I want to draw out more clearly what these are, and then show how they illuminate the trajectory this study has been tracing. In the most basic terms, the divide between Barth and Peterson on John is how they understand the nature of revelation to

[421] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 209.
[422] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 210.
[423] See the above cited passage, Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 61.
[424] 'You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have eternal life.'
[425] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, p. 211.

determine the content of what is revealed.[426] This is most clearly seen in their respective treatments of the prologue.

In Peterson's account, the Trinitarian relations that are revealed are prior to, and in an important sense unaffected by, the soteriological mission in which they are revealed. Put differently, the relation that God establishes through revelation is secondary to the internal relations of God, which is the content of revelation. This, in turn, is the foundation for Peterson's understanding of witness as fundamentally declarative act.[427] This declarative notion of witness underwrites Peterson's own claim to possess a plain sense reading of Scripture. In the context of the 'bread from heaven' discourse of John 6, he draws attention to his own 'realism' when reading the Bible in critical contrast to Barth's dialectical reading.[428] It is important to see how Peterson's self-described realism is downstream from his understanding of the relationship between revelation and its content. For Peterson, true obedience means recognising the simple directness of Christ's words as a necessary consequence of Christ bearing this divine identity. To subvert the simplicity of the former is to preclude the capacity to affirm the latter.

Barth's reading of the prologue, by contrast, finds that revelation and its content are one in Jesus Christ. What is revealed is God's self, but because it is revealed in Christ the decision of God for humanity comes to the fore. In Barth's exegesis of John, it is the electing God that is revealed: 'This fatherly will for salvation from death is ὁμοίως (likewise) (v. 19) the will of the Son, who as the incarnate one addresses humanity, confronts them, is the revealer striding to them.'[429] As such, what Peterson sees as dialectical avoidance of the plain sense of the text is for Barth is simply the necessary implication of how God has revealed God's self.

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[426] Which is to say I do not think that the difference comes down primarily to their differing Christologies, as McCormack claims. He argues that Peterson's *anschaulich* Christology is (perhaps) simply a deduction of the *unio naturarum*, presuming, as it apparently does, the interpenetration of Christ's divine and human nature. While Barth, in contrast, maintains the Reformed *unio personalis* that resists any unmediated relation between the natures, and so correspondingly retains Christ's lordship independent from his incarnate presence. Though their Christologies are not separated from their differing understandings of revelation, it is not the heart of the issue. See McCormack, *Critically Realistic*, pp. 367-371, echoed by Amy Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Catholicism in Göttingen and Münster* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), pp. 84-90.

[427] See on this point Erik Peterson, *Eis Theos. Epigraphische, formgeschichtliche und religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1926), pp. 141-145, esp. p. 145 on the 'religious-legal' character of inscripturated acclamation, also pp. 150-152.

[428] Peterson, *Johannesevangelium*, pp. 250ff.

[429] *JE,* p. 278, in reference to Jn. 5:19 and following.

Rather than judge between Barth and Peterson, which would require not only a much more expansive reading of Peterson, but of also of Barth[430], I want to show how Barth's response to Peterson turns on was identified in chapter 2 as 'Herrmanniann' themes that have been re-figured in light of his understanding of how Christ reveals God's self.

Barth's public response to Peterson's 'What is Theology?' entitled 'Church and Theology' (1925),[431] was written before Barth began his John lectures, though it also turns on a bit of Johannine exegesis. Barth's basic charge to Peterson is that Peterson fails to reckon with the humanity of the church, which in turn results both a collapse between the church and Christ's ascended being, but also a contracted account of the ethical possibilities of belief. In connection to Thurneysen's essay on the prologue to John Gospel (which, like Barth's later lectures stress the *in medias res* nature of humanity's encounter with God in Christ in the prologue[432]), Barth argues that the church, like humanity, is caught in the 'σκοτία, the darkness, that has not grasped the light'. Insofar as the church remains human, it remains caught in the same darkness as the rest of humanity 'without ceasing to be in themselves sinners'[433] or removed from history, they nonetheless have a new *telos*, on the 'hidden and yet not hidden way through the times'.[434] This might be taken as a reaffirmation that time and history are simply equivocal with sinful existence. But Barth offers a more complex view than perhaps he did in the Ephesians lectures. Temporal existence is not only bound up with sin, but it is also the arena of human freedom.

Therefore, when Peterson calls for a concrete authority that presupposes a concrete obedience, Barth argues that doing so without reckoning with the temporal extension of the church to which revelation comes means that the freedom of obedience cannot be realised. For theology to have an object, then revelation must become '*contemporary*', not by human effort but by taking on the appropriate form, a 'theologia ἔκτυπος' in the world, as opposed to a 'theologia ἀρκέτυπος' that is timelessly possessed by God. Rather than a primarily critical relation, however, the difference also preserves the possibility of human action, as the 'immediacy of the eternally omnipresent Word and Spirit of God, in which [the church's] *freedom* is grounded, the freedom of faith bound to God alone'.[435]

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[430] Including of course Barth's reformulation of the doctrine of election in *CD* II/2 §33.
[431] Delivered first in October of that year, about a month before beginning his lectures on John. See Barth, 'Kirche und Theologie', in *VA 1922-1925*, pp. 646-647.
[432] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 659, see also Eduard Thurneysen, 'Der Prolog zum Johannes-Evangelium', in *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3/1 (1925), pp. 12-37, esp. pp. 27-29.
[433] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 659.
[434] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 660.
[435] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 654.

Peterson's inability to see how this could be the case, argues Barth, is thus a failure of pneumatology. By Barth's lights it is the Spirit that is crucial for any account of the church's own speech of God if that speech is not become a position of human assertion over against God:

> The transfer of power to the church is fulfilled through the gift of the Holy *Spirit* at Pentecost, through which the word of the old Prophets and the new Apostles become effective testimony of Christ to the peoples and the generations. This *Spirit* that, through the Logos-revelation in spoken and written words of testimony went out into all the world, is as such the principle of all realisation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) and revelation, the faultless and unchanging Lord and Judge over everything that the church 'speaks'.[436]

On the one hand, Barth thinks a proper pneumatology is essential for describing the church's work without moving outside the sphere of God's grace. Barth is rejecting what he takes as Peterson's account of the consequence of the ascension, wherein Christ imparts his authority to the church directly. The Spirit both 'grounds' and 'limits' the authority of the church to speak of God, limiting in the sense of defining what counts as such speech. But on the other, pneumatology is the way of accounting for the church's continuing historical existence in relation to the eschatological event of Christ's work, as the 'Spirit of the Son, that is, the one become flesh, but also the divine *words* become speech and writing, in so far as the Spirit, who speaks to the hearts of the believers, is the same Spirit of the Prophets and Apostles.'[437]

This compact retrieval of the doctrine of inspiration is necessary for Barth in order to argue that Scripture, rather than sacrament, is the proper domain of the Spirit's authority because it shows how revelation is both responsive to the reality of human sin and preserving of human freedom. Thus, the substitution (or replacement) of the Scripture Principle with the sacraments alluded to above indicates a one-sided understanding of revelation. Peterson's move from Christ's presence in the church to dogma that, on Barth's account, bypasses the Bible and exegesis, is in effect the bypassing of the Spirit's work in history.[438] This is to, in effect, miss what revelation is for, which is to bring about and be responded to in human faith. What the Spirit gives 'is understood as an act of *faith*, as a confession of *faith*…It is an act and confession of *humans*, of *sinners*, but even so an act of *faith*, a confession of *faith*.'[439] Thus in the Spirit the church is always indicative of God's acts, if never reproductive of them. Still, as the church's witness is grounded in its faith and its consequent movement against its own sin, it properly moves through the same *via crucis* as Christ did.

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[436] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 664.
[437] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 664.
[438] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 663.
[439] Barth, 'Kirche', p. 666.

The work of the last two chapters has been to show how in his exegesis, Barth has come to see the history of Christ as the communicative reality that is faith's object. What is suggested in Barth's response to Peterson is the way that this allows for relations of authority that reflect the concern for the moral and spiritual integrity of faith that reflects the inheritance from Herrmann. For example, Barth's worry about the way Peterson's sacramental ecclesiology side-steps the demands of exegesis is as much about the freedom of the obedience of faith as it is about the check on sinful aspirations to control the divine presence. In the conclusion to chapter 2, I argued that there was a tension between Barth's Herrmannian account of faith and the priority he gave to divine election. Barth's exegesis of the John prologue shows how he might reconcile them, by thinking through the meaning of what it means for Christ's saving mission to be revelation. It is in this light that Barth's appeal to the Spirit's activity in the church as expressed pre-eminently in Scripture should be taken. God's electing authority, which gives Scripture its peremptory authority, can now be understood to be brought by the Spirit of Christ, as Christ's history reveals God's intent for fellowship with humanity. How Barth elaborates the implications of these claims for Scripture specifically is the topic of the next and final chapter.

Chapter 5. Christ's Authority in Church and Neighbour

The *leitmotif* of this study has been how Scripture serves its purpose to claim the reader for God by the authority he confers on it. This question emerged early on as a consequence of our attention to Barth's lectures on Scripture, which repeatedly confronted the reader with a claim to speak for a reality behind the text that was not reducible to its natural properties. It is thus that the question of how the author could claim to speak of God with legitimacy gains such significance. What determined this legitimacy was how Scripture, both in content and form, could be seen to be part of God's saving mission towards humanity. By following this thread, chapters 3 and 4 led us to the central place of Christology in relating human history to God's objective acts. At this point, it was clear that some of the weaknesses of Barth's account of Scripture, particularly the formalism of its authority, were reflective of a deeper uncertainty on Barth's part about the relation between God's being and God's acts in history. Because Barth understands Scripture to mediate divine authority, his account of it would tend to reproduce those deeper tensions.

The challenge for Barth's account is to show how the text, both in its collection as canon and through the individual voices of its authors, is rooted in God's work of salvation. The danger is that either the Bible's authority was simply asserted and Barth had to retreat to the kind of biblicism he rejected in order to offset the dangers of religious subjectivism, or the Bible's authority was an extension of the church's self-understanding, which failed for the opposite reason. In the final section of chapter four, we saw that Erik Peterson's criticism of Barth made just this point. Further, Peterson argued that by attempting to maintain the middle ground between these options, Barth did not in fact have an account of authority at all.

In the conclusion to chapter 4, I argued that by the time of his John lectures, Barth had thought through the implications of Christ revealing the electing God more consistently, and this allowed him to mitigate the arbitrariness of scriptural authority that we detected in his earlier writings. I also suggested how this allowed Barth to maintain his concern for the integrity of faith in relation to revelation, and more broadly the moral freedom of the creature under God's authority.

In this chapter, we will see Barth develop the relationship between the architectonics of election, revelation, and incarnation and moral theology more fully. Barth's explicit response to Peterson centred on the significance of sin for shaping a proper account of authority and obedience in the church to revelation. For Barth, an inadequate doctrine of sin and a low view of the Bible go hand in hand. On the one hand, these are arguments in the Reformed toolkit for anti-Roman Catholic polemics, but on the other, it draws attention to the ascetics of obedience to biblical authority that has been present at least since the lectures on Ephesians. To be obedient to the Bible is to move against oneself, ultimately, as Barth has it in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, to 'give God the right against ourselves'.[440] Biblical authority is never rendered superfluous because its readers never cease seeking to assert their own authority over everything they encounter, most especially God. A principle of limitless self-subversion does, however, quickly bite the hand that feeds. Barth's stress on the relation between the authoritative witness and Christ's particular history goes some way towards protecting him from this problem. The importance of sin in an account of biblical authority becomes clearer, as the legitimacy of prophets and apostles as witnesses lies only in their relation to Christ's mission, and it is only in relation to this mission that the believer can acknowledge her sin and so become obedient in faith. This is one reason why Christology became such a focus for Barth and the richness of his description of Christ's history so important for his exegesis.

In this final chapter, we will be largely occupied with tracing the fruit of this Christological reflection in two of the exegetical lectures from the second half of the 1920s. In the first case, we pick up the theme of chapter 3 in relation to Barth's re-drafted lectures on James, delivered in 1928/29. There, when Barth revisits his account of the conflict between James and Paul, he offers an analysis along the same basic lines, but makes use of canon much more extensively to differentiate the personal authority and witness of the individual apostles from the formal authority of the canon. This is further substantiated by the discussion of the canon in the *Christliche Dogmatik*, which makes this explicit and locates the canon as the second of the three-fold form of the word of God. On the one hand, this will merely substantiate a broader trend towards conceiving of the canon in terms of the community of the church within a redemptive history that we noted in his exegetical lectures in chapter three. On the other, it provides an opportunity to note that Barth does not find it necessary to overhaul many of his basic instincts about how the text ought to be read. Rather than chalk this up to complacency, or the purely pragmatic considerations of a busy lecturer,

[440] *ChrD*, p. 434.

we are better served in emphasising that the way Barth understood the authority of the text was not likely to generate novelty in interpretation, at least in the sense that he expected new historical or linguistic discoveries to emerge that would require decisive re-evaluations. He did not rule this possibility out of court, but because the Bible is authoritative, it meant that a genuine moral relationship is established in the reading of the text, and as such, once this is acknowledged the most significant possible move towards understanding had, in effect, already taken place.

It is this latter point that will occupy us most of all in this first section. I will argue that Barth understands the unity of the canonical witness to include both the fundamental unity of its divine occasion, appropriated to the Spirit, and by extension the public, historical confession of faith of the church. Our concern has been that Barth's earlier references to the canon had shown his understanding of it to be overly formal, and it retained the quality of a brute fact about it, not simply peremptory but content to be *de facto* rather than adequately showing itself to be *de jure*. As we will see in the *James* lectures, most of those concerns may be laid to rest, which is not to say that we are offering an adequate picture of Barth's mature treatment of canonicity.[441] The materials, however, have been gathered.

Canon is, however, one of two elements in Scripture's authority. A persistent question in this study has been whether or not the authority of the witness is undermined by Barth's account of the translucence of the biblical authors and their basic parity with the reader. The worry has been that, so understood, the difference between witness and reader dissolves in the eschatological moment of the Spirit's making Christ known through the text. In part, this risks making the biblical witness an extension of the readers' faith, rather than something authoritative over it. Further, it makes it difficult to account for the Bible as a book by human authors, with its own history and particularity. This is why in chapter 4 especially, the analysis of Christ's history was so important. In light of Christ's identity as one that confers particularity rather than dissolving it into his own history, we saw how the moral relation between author and reader is not bypassed but constitutive of Scripture's authoritative role.

It is the burden of the second half of this chapter to show first that Barth develops just such an account in his lectures on Philippians, and extends these insights in his Münster *Ethics* lectures. Barth's commentary on the Philippians, published in 1928 (first delivered in 1924) is an extended discussion of the relationship between Christian humility and Christ's humiliation and exaltation. It revisits a number of themes we have seen thus far: the

[441] On which see Wood, *Interpretation,* pp. 119ff for the material in *CD* I/2.

significance of the resurrection for revelation and Paul's commitment to clarifying its practical, involving nature. Primarily, however, Barth takes Paul to be trying to show the Philippians what the coming of Christ means for what they owe one another, not simply what they owe God. On Barth's reading, what they owe one another is obedience, and the relationship between Christ's humility and the obedience each owes to another, forms the basis of a compelling account of scriptural authority.

5.1 Revisiting the Canon: James II (Münster 1928/1929)

Barth gave many of his exegetical lectures a second time, and our return to the second delivery of James does not single it out as unusual in that regard. In this particular case, however, it may be somewhat surprising, given the lukewarm picture Barth gave to Thurneysen about his feeling for the epistle. There is no documentary evidence of which I am aware that suggests a particular motivation to return to the material one way or another, though Barth did publish a short summary of his basic interpretation of the epistle in 1927, which suggests that he revisited the material earlier.[442] We might reasonably speculate that his thinking about Gospel and Law at this stage might have encouraged him to revisit James. Yet if this constituted a reason for Barth to revisit this particular epistle and not another, what may be most striking about the 1928/29 cycle is how little substantial content has been changed. As we noted in chapter one, Barth was already impressed in 1922 by the way James held together Gospel and Law, and though he did not simply repeat the lectures, his second delivery does not represent a clear criticism of what he had written just under a decade earlier. A comparison of the manuscripts[443] shows a significant tightening of the argument and a ready use of some of the scholarship to have appeared in the interim.[444] Barth clearly spent enough time with the lecture text in preparation for its second delivery that the lack of major interpretive changes suggests that his views on the text remained fairly consistent from the beginning to the end of the decade, despite the massive theological development Barth had under gone during that time.

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[442] Barth, 'Der Charakter des Jakobusbriefes', in *Almanach 1927* (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1927).
[443] This was made fairly straightforward by the scholarly efforts of Jörg Michel Böhnet, whose editorial work on the *Gesammtausgabe* edition of the Ephesians and James lectures sets a standard for future critical editions of Barth's exegetical lectures.
[444] Especially Martin Dibelius's commentary, published in 1921. Barth evidently got it before he finished the first lecture course, as citations become more frequent towards the end of the cycle, but they are pervasive in the second.

All that to say, what follows is not the discussion of a major change in reading but a restatement of a claim made in the first delivery that signals a development to which we have already drawn attention. We noted in chapter one that Barth's interpretation of James 2:14-26 was provocative, but also suffered from a fairly abrupt appeal to the eschatological horizon of the biblical text in order to avoid inappropriately dissolving inner-canonical tensions. In these later lectures the provocation remains, as does the basic theological basis for avoiding *Unionspolitik*. However, as we give this material an expanded second look, we can see that Barth has been able to give his basic claim about how the relationship between James and Paul ought to be read a more secure foundation, and in a way that tracks with our analysis of his developmental trajectory on this issue.

5.1.1 A Second Look at James 2:14-16

By way of reminder, unlike most Protestant theological commentators, Barth holds that James 2:14-26 is intended by the author to be in conflict with Paul's thought.[445] It is important to recognise that this is not a pseudo-conflict in which James and Paul appear to have different teachings on the doctrine of justification, but can in fact be shown as unified. But, Barth contends, the passage on faith and works is intentionally at odds with Paul, or more accurately the role of Paul's thought in the church. On what terms, then, can a canon of Scripture be spoken of?

In chapter one, we noted that Barth's desire to hold the two biblical authors in tension was largely dependent on an appeal to the dialectically elusive character of both their witnesses. All good theology is on the 'knife edge of truth',[446] and their tension reflects this reality. As such, the unity between the two authors is a reality given in the Spirit and is not predicated on the reader's capacity to reconcile the text's claims. Barth does make mention of the canon at this point, though it exerts little pressure on his account, and functions as more of a regulative ideal. The issue of importance is that both James and Paul are related to the

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[445] Though it has long been the case, certainly post-Reformation, that most commentators assumed an apparent conflict with Paul on justification, it was not typical to think that James intended to put himself in conflict with Paul or Paul's thought *unless* one held to a relatively late date of composition. Martin Hengel, who does defend a position similar to Barth's with even earlier dating (in an essay written well after, and almost assuredly without knowledge of the content of, Barth's lectures), cites Jülicher/Fascher and Zahn who both dismiss the possibility that an early dating, implying authorship by James the brother of Jesus could be in one way or another, intentionally anti-Pauline, though no one is cited who defends this view. A recent Roman Catholic scholar, Luke T. Johnson, only cites Hengel as a defender of just such a position and notes that it is 'unusual'. See Martin Hengel, 'Der Jakobusbrief als antipaulinische Polemik', in *Paulus und Jakobus. Kleine Schriften III*. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) p. 525 n. 42, and Luke Timothy Johnson, *James*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1995), p. 110.

[446] *EkEJ* 22/23, p. 474.

'whole' of the divine revelation that exists beyond of any human conception of it.[447] Barth is evidently of two minds in the first cycle as to how to handle the passage and its inner-canonical tensions. He maintains that there is a not only a notional conflict but an intended one between James and Paul, and this provocative suggestion is consistent with both his first and second lecture cycles. But, in the first cycle, he also is quick to say that a Pauline reading of James may be possible, as well as the reverse, a Jacobean reading of Paul. The real tension is less inner-canonical as it is an instance of the more fundamental tension of all witness to revelation.

In the second cycle, Barth both deepens and expands the detailed exegesis of this passage, while also reproducing some sections from the first cycle wholesale. Most important for our interests is how he frames the passage on the whole, which gives more substance to his basic claim in 22/23 that these authors should be read in conflict. He opens the first lecture on this section in the second cycle by noting that this passage is problematic not only for dogmaticians, but for New Testament scholars, as even they cannot avoid recognising that somehow two conflicting theologies made it into the canon.[448] Yet, it is been the legacy of doctrinal readings of this passage to overzealously defend the coherence of James and Paul on justification. 'Those who carry the train of Jezebel and the Anti-Christ see a conflict here between James and Paul', declared Paul Geyser.[449] Barth differs, and gives a counter-charge: 'Without returning the scolding, I would say in contrast: whoever does not see or would not see a conflict here between Paul and James, he has not read the text calmly and desires without [the text] to master it with his dogmatics.'[450]

The charge of seeking to 'master' the text with 'dogmatics' is familiar in intent from the first cycle, while in expression original to the second. We should register that initially, however, the claim that the failure to identify a conflict between James and Paul is the product of a dogmatic or doctrinal reading seems counterintuitive. We might think that the opposite is the case: it is tension in the text that generates a doctrinal reading and so we should expect doctrinal readings to be required most prominently where conflicts are most obvious. Further, we might see Barth's approach to this passage in the first lecture cycle as in its own way doctrinal, as it depends on the eschatological character of revelation to account for and negotiate the conflict. Barth's tools now are different, most significantly in the

[447] *EkEJ* 22/23, p. 488.
[448] *EkEJ* 28/29, p. 473, not in 22/23.
[449] As quoted by Barth, *EkEJ* 28/29, p.475.
[450] *EkEJ* 28/29, p. 475.

prominence he gives to the canon. Illustrating this is a passage on the significance of the canon for reading the Bible rightly, which is absent from the 1922/23 lectures. Barth says:

> Precisely when we read the Bible as a canonical text we must say: *we*, in so far as we have constructed a Christian or theological standpoint following the instruction of Paul, meet the counter-word, the contradiction of James. He must contradict Paul and must stand as such a contradictor of Paul in the canon, and must be thoroughly understood by us as such, so that we, in so far as we are perhaps Paulinists, and perhaps are more Paulinists than Christians, are contradicted.[451]

At least three things stand out: First, far from flattening out the differences between texts, Barth sees canon as a mechanism that preserves distinctions. Second, since it preserves distinct–in this case contradictory–voices, canon allows the biblical texts to retain a critical edge. Third, the canon is opposed to theological self-determination. The 'we' that Barth speaks of is the church that reads the texts of the Bible in an act of reception, not construction. Canon is therefore employed not to enforce or entail doctrinal harmony, but to undermine it to some degree. Barth goes on:

> It was and is an error of Orthodoxy not to be retained and not to be renewed that the sentence 'the Bible is the Word of God' is interpreted to mean that it is unified in itself as a closed system of explicit truths, in which the individual components must chime (*sich reimen müssten*) in the human hearer as they do in God as the auctor scripturae, when in fact they doubtless only cohere in God beyond Paul and James.[452]

The basic distinction between revelation and Scripture that was so important to Barth's first cycle is not abandoned, but we can see how canon is doing some of the work that dialectics did in 1922/23, as it provides the limit to aspirations of comprehending revelation in human terms. We also get a better sense of what Barth means by 'dogmatics' in this case. Any rejection of a dogmatic reading via an appeal to the canon must overcome the objection that 'canon', especially as Barth employs it, appears inexplicable except as a doctrinal claim. We can now see that 'dogmatics', in this case, is not evidence of a theological reading of the text *per se*, but a presupposition about the relationship between text and revelation that allows the former to limit the latter, rather than vice-versa. The 'dogmatic' interpreter is guilty not of failing to acknowledge conflict but of resolving it on false terms. This happens not only because there is a theologically unbecoming anxiety to the dogmatician's search for unity, but because the basis for the unity which she seeks is ultimately not in the authority of the Bible at all, but in doctrine, which is then read back into the biblical text. Moreover, once this dogmatic solution is in place, James can no longer function as the challenge that Barth thinks

[451] *EkEJ* 28/29, pp. 477.
[452] *EkEJ* 28/29, p. 477.

the epistle intends. It is therefore an intriguing suggestion when Barth claims that canon, properly understood, offers the advantages of verbal inspiration:

> Why should Paul and James not, precisely in their contradiction of one another, themselves be legitimate and necessary witnesses of the Word of God revealed and entrusted to them? We have thus precisely in this presupposition a correct conception of inspiration, indeed of the verbal inspiration of Holy Scripture. It provides every reason to *neither*, with Luther to shut our ears to what is coming, because here is something quite different than what is in Paul, *nor* also, in order to hear and make our hearing possible and agreeable, to make the non-Pauline that we will hear here into something Pauline before we have heard it.[453]

The connection between canon and verbal inspiration tells us something important about how Barth understands the canon within the larger framework of the Scripture Principle and scriptural authority at this point in his thinking. It is, on its own, a rather compressed claim, and to understand it better it will be helpful to turn to Barth's discussion of canon as the second of the three-fold form of the Word of God in *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf,* published in 1927, a year or so before this cycle of lectures got under way.

5.1.2 Canon and the Diversity of Scripture

For our purposes here, the most relevant point that Barth draws out about canon in the *Christliche Dogmatik* is that it is what allows the witness of the prophets and apostles to be historical and public. As a limit, it necessarily has the negative implication that other claims, 'the blustering apocrypha and heretical voices',[454] are not to be heard as God's Word, but what Barth wants to stress is that it is primarily a positive claim that there is a historical form of apostolic witness. The canon means that the 'space of Prophets and Apostles is not left empty'.[455] By reading the canon as the terminus of apostolic succession, Barth can draw out the positive implications of canon as a publicly binding collection of documents that is not, on his reading, dependent on human will in the form of church tradition. Barth makes clear the significance of the public character of the canon in the later section on biblical authority, where he contrasts a reading of the Bible that presupposes a fixed canon with Luther's notion that the content of the Bible can be judged to be the Word of God by what 'promotes Christ'.[456] In the same vein as Barth's criticism of those who would 'master' James with their dogmatics, the Reformed, Barth thinks, saw in Luther a covert tendency to read the Bible in

[453] *EkEJ* 28/29, p. 479. Emphasis original.
[454] *ChrD*, p. 61.
[455] *ChrD*, p. 60-61.
[456] As cited by Barth *ChrD*, p. 443.

light of a 'personal dogmatic'. Evidently, the way Luther read James is one such prominent instance of a broader methodological danger.

Returning to the James lectures, the equation between canon and the desirable qualities of verbal inspiration makes more sense. Barth saw in verbal inspiration the kind of positive limit that he thought was better served by canon, namely, securing these words and no others as authoritative witness. He thinks of verbal inspiration here because of its relevance to the individual texts as opposed to its collection as a whole. What Barth finds attractive in a doctrine of verbal inspiration is that the texts of Scripture are authoritative as Scripture, without regards to their content, but this comes at the cost of failing to distinguish between the text itself and the revelation that makes it authoritative. The canon, for Barth, can be understood to offer the same benefits without the cost to a properly formulated doctrine of revelation. When the church reads the Bible as a canon, it is positively a declaration that here, in these texts, God can be heard. This does not reduce them to interchangeable 'biblical' authors, but rather allows each one to be genuinely heard as an authoritative witness. Put differently, rather than flattening the distinction between the biblical authors, Barth understands the canon to allow them to come to the fore. The immediate consequence of this way of thinking for Barth's reading of James is that he is able to see the conflict he posits between James and Paul as more genuine than he did in the first cycle. For one, he is more ready to acknowledge the distinct but limited contribution that James makes to the New Testament. While in 1922/23 he concludes the lecture cycle at 2:26 by claiming the equality of James with Paul, saying '[James] was a prophet of the Kingdom, which is not of this world, in *his own* way as good as Paul',[457] in 1927/28 he could be more qualified, and so more forceful. James's singular contribution is what is there on the page: 'that faith is only real in *act* or not at all. No other apostle has said it so clearly.' While this claim can be placed over against others, such as Paul, it is as distinct contribution rather than the modulation of a shared theme. As such, its limitations are also clear: 'Not everything is said by it. James's construction invites questions, that cannot by him be answered. How it is that a person [becomes] a believer and, when justified in faith before God, comes to work the work of the justified, on this James keeps silent.[458] Whereas previously, the relativity of the individual witnesses was accounted for by the relativity of all witnesses, Barth here has a stronger sense that to speak of prophets and apostles as authors and authorities requires a

[457] *EkEJ* 22/23, p. 520.
[458] *EkEJ* 28/29, p. 521. The verb in brackets was left out by Barth and added by the editor.

speaking of the particularity of their witness in relation to the whole witness of Scripture, as well as to the indirect relation that exists between witness and revelation as such.

The wrestling Barth did with the plurality of witnesses and their historical location that we discussed in chapter three, particularly in the lectures on 1 Corinthians, has now born fruit in a far more assured and relaxed sense that the canon can be spoken of in its historical location. This is not to deny its occasion by the Spirit, but it is to allow its historical, creaturely character to inform its reception. Most importantly for us, the material reality of the text can represent divine authority in virtue of its creaturely character rather than in contradistinction to it. The tendency of readers to dissolve the witness of Scripture into their own faith, which is the real target of Barth's charge against using dogmatics to 'master' the text, is resisted by the historical, public character of the texts wherein authors offer distinct, overlapping and at times conflictual witness to revelation. Going forward, we look at how Barth develops an account of the authority of Scripture represented by the individual authors. Barth has claimed canon here as a check against pre-determining one's reading of the text. But what the canon does not do is tell us about that reading and how the individual authors may, or may not, represent in themselves the divine sovereignty that has authorised the Bible as a form of the Word of God. For answers to these questions, we turn to Barth's lectures on Philippians.

5.2 The Authority of the Neighbour: Philippians (Münster 1926/1927)

These lectures were originally delivered in the Summer Semester in Göttingen in 1924, then redelivered during the Winter Semester of 1926/27 in Münster, Barth published them in 1928, somewhat revised to be accessible to 'non-theologians'.[459] The Philippians lectures, like those on 1 Corinthians, seemed to have been published with relatively little fanfare. They do not occasion great discussion in the letters we have available. Further, it has garnered little comment in Barth studies, though there are some recent exceptions.[460] As ever, our aim is not to give an exhaustive account of the contents of these lectures, but to provide a sense of Barth's understanding of the epistle, with an eye to our own interests. It is our overall argument that Barth articulates here a conception of the authority of the neighbour grounded

[459] *PB*, Vorwort.
[460] See most prominently Mützlitz, *Gottes Wort*, pp. 198-230 and Westerholm, *Ordering*, pp. 115-128. Maico Michielin's unpublished PhD Thesis 'Karl Barth's Exegesis in *Philippians* and *Shorter Romans*: An Exegesis that Corresponds to God's Activity' (University of Toronto, 2004) anticipates some of what I will draw attention to regarding the significance of Christ's identity for establishing the believer's human identity. See Michielin, 'Karl Barth's Exegesis', pp. 117-127.

in Christology that both clearly informs later accounts of authority, specifically apostolic authority, and that this addresses some of the key concerns about scriptural authority to which we have drawn attention. We can divide our reflections into four sub-sections. First, we will see that Barth understands the basic problem in the Philippian church to which Paul is responding in terms of individualism and political atomism. Second, Barth sees Paul's repair of this problem as exhorting humility, which is seeing the other as greater than oneself. Third, Barth reads the kenotic hymn not as an exemplification of humility, but the sovereign ground of the command to humility in the church. Christ's humiliation and exaltation is the inauguration of the order of the church. Lastly, we will note the consequences of this notion of authority for the exercise of Paul's authority over the Philippians.

5.2.2 The Possibility of Moral Fellowship

On Barth's reading, the overriding goal of Paul's epistle to the Philippian church was to exhort them to a unity which they seemed to lack. This concern for unity is not only present in Paul's repeated exhortation to unity (found most explicitly in 1:27, 2:2, 2:18, and 4:2), but also in his diagnosis of the problems confronting the Philippian church. Barth understands Paul to identify two problems in the Philippian church: their anxiety and their fractiousness. Their anxiety is evident in Paul's repeated reassurances to them that his own imprisoned condition, and their own condition as potential subjects of persecution, should not concern them.[461] In addition to their anxiety, Paul's admonishment against 'assertiveness' and 'conceit' in 2:3, as well as the discussion of a specific rift in the church referenced in 4:2, suggests that struggled to attain peaceable unity.

Barth's reading of this material is creative as it draws both the apparently laudable concern of the Philippian church for Paul's ministry and his well-being, as well as their condemnable qualities together into a single critique, which is their failure to properly see the implications of their standing in Christ. This failure is apparent in the individualistic and voluntarist character of their fellowship. Their concern for Paul, even if well-meant and productive (in the sense of motivating them to offer financial support as detailed in 4:10-20), is in fact evidence of anxiety, as it mistakenly identifies the basis of moral fellowship in sympathetic care. The Philippians are thus concerned for Paul because they transpose their own anxieties on to him and seek in his well-being an assurance of their own. Thus, the anxiety that is the basis for their sympathy ironically arises from the same source of their

[461] *PB*, p. 38 ET, p. 45.

fractiousness, which is a result of a basic confusion as to the source of their 'rights' as members of the body of Christ. In both cases, the Philippians exhibit the need to establish the moral fellowship in which they desire to exist by dint of their own effort.

The political resonances of Paul's language allow Barth to develop this reading. Paul re-directs the Philippian's concerns away from himself towards the call to be in a 'constitution' (*Verfassung*) (πολιτεύεσθαι) worthy of the Gospel.[462] Barth translates Paul's description of those who are motivated by 'selfish ambition' (ἐριθεία) in 2:3 as *rechtaberisch*, the need to always have the right, which is suggestive of the political connotations of the Greek.[463] The repair is equally political in its terms. When turning to the issue of fractiousness directly in chapter 3, Barth mines the political language most explicitly by way of 3:20, where Paul directs the Philippians to remember that their 'citizenship (*Bürgerrecht)* is in heaven' (πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς). Barth elaborates: 'Paul calls that to which Christians hold their πολίτευμα. It is for us authoritative (*maßgebende*), called upon by us, our protective constitution or judicial order and so in this sense: our "citizenship". The issue of the whole chapter is the judicial order that at once obligates and protects humanity.'[464]

This analysis of Paul's diagnosis of the Philippian church and its alertness to the political terminology in which it is couched is significant for Barth's overall understanding of the epistle. It has the advantage of allowing Barth to make the connection between practical exhortation of humility and the kenotic hymn with more force than the exemplarist readings of the hymn of which he is most critical. Initially, we ought to register that the atomistic and voluntarist terms in which Barth describes Paul's diagnosis of the Philippians' problem are consonant with certain Enlightenment characterisations of human moral substance. As we would expect, however, Barth does not leave the analysis at the level of a failure of moral character as such. It is also consonant with his basic characterisation of human sin as the assertion of one's self as lord. As he extends his basic argument through a close reading of chapter 2, Barth is alert to both of these resonances. In the next subsection, we will see how Barth draws on them to substantiate the connection between the call to 'be of one mind', humility, and the kenotic hymn.

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[462] *PB*, p. 39 ET, p.45.
[463] Prior usage of ἐριθεία by Aristotle is specifically for political ambition carried out for selfish ends by unscrupulous means. See Horst Balz and Gerhard Scheider, ed. *Exegetisches Wurterbuch zum Neuen Testament*[3] (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2011), pp. 130-131. In his brief comment on James 3:13-18 (28/29), which similarly condemns ἐριθεία, Barth argues that it represents 'merely earthly… human, and in its isolation surely demonic wisdom.' See *EkEJ*, p. 525.
[464] *PB*, p. 112 ET, p. 114.

5.2.3 The Movement of Humility

Barth offers a close, at times compressed, exegesis of what he takes to be the heart of Philippians, the relationship between the call to be of one mind, which ought to define relations within the church, and Christ's *kenosis*. He frames his analysis in the same basic terms of individualism that we have already observed, though the use he makes of that language seems at odds with the overall critique of individualism. In a somewhat unusual bit of historical speculation, Barth claims that the command to 'be of one mind' is necessary because of the dynamics of new religious movements. The "movement" ("*Bewegung")* of early Christianity had, Barth reasons, a 'centrifugal' force, wherein the individual was thrown back on herself before God, separate and distinct from others.[465] Seeing oneself as united with the rest of the church is necessary, but not an inevitable result of recognising oneself before God: 'It involves a second particular step when one comes out [of individuality] to knowledge of the unity of the church of God and to will this *una sancta* {this "one holy [church]}".'[466] In these terms, Barth seems to be claiming something quite compatible with a voluntarist account of incorporation, which calls into question our reading of his diagnosis of the Philippian problem.

Much turns on what it means for Christians to come to know and will the command to 'mind the one thing'. Initially, we may suppose that the movement from the individual to the collective finds its conceptual parallel in the order of Paul's command in 2:2, which reads 'So make my joy complete by minding the one [thing], in one love, one soul, one mind' (πληρώσατε μου τὴν χαρὰν ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε, τὴν αὐτὴν ἀγάπην ἔχοντες, σύμψυχοι, τὸ ἓν φρονοῦντες). Barth is most detailed in his analysis of this verse. He notes that the command comes in phases: the τὸ αὐτὸ stands on its own, and is for Barth the call to look at the 'one thing' that separates it from any human reality, which is the 'divine source (*Ursprung*)[467] that sets a limit on all individualism. It then moves to the 'common' τὸ ἓν of 'one mind'. Barth reads this as a necessary moment in the call to think and will the unity of the command:

> τὸ ἀυτό is more comprehensive, it is objective (sachlich), qualitative: the one, which one must mind because it is unique, distinct over against all that is human. It is that which simply through its dignity claims the disunited. τὸ ἕν is in contrast the collective, unifying, merging and binding. Only by way of the detour to τὸ ἀυτό is it meaningful to speak of the τὸ ἕν, but then it

[465] *PB*, p. 47 ET, p. 53 The scare quotes are Barth's, suggesting that he is self-consciously making use of historical/sociological terminology.
[466] *PB*, p. 47 ET, p. 53. The brackets are Barth's.
[467] *PB*, p. 47 ET, p. 53.

> is meaningful. Whoever thinks on the one, thinks on the collective. Objectivity (Sachlichkeit), but meaning only objectivity of the unconditioned object, is in every case the way to peace.[468]

The movement from 'objective' to 'common' seems a straightforward extension of Barth's description of the condition of the early church and its centrifugal tendencies. This would be the wrong conclusion to draw. This is a particularly compressed passage, and we need to observe at least two things about it. First, the centrifugal energy results from the individual's reflexive self-consciousness before God, whereas here the thinking on the 'one' works against that tendency. Secondly, we should simply note the philosophical vocabulary that Barth employs, such as *Ursprung* and *Unbedingt* (unconditioned) to describe the objective and its inherently formal, generic sound.

Both the difference between the 'centrifugal' tendency of the early church and thinking on the 'one' and the reasons for Paul's generic language are explicable in the practical inference Paul draws from 2: 2 in 2:3, which is the exhortation to 'in humility place others above yourself'. Barth's main move is to read this exhortation rooted not in the second part of v. 2, the collective τὸ ἕν, but in the 'one thing', yet arguing that thinking the 'one thing' is only possible in the activity of humility.

Barth's reading of the transition from v. 2 to v. 3 involves a familiar presupposition on his part, that knowledge of God is practical, and claims to know or think on God that do not induce action are deceived or idolatrous. Barth's philosophical language is thus intentionally reflective of Paul's own idiom, which he thinks of as part of a bait and switch. Paul's potentially generic 'one thing' that sits above the collective and common is in fact only known in the act that such knowledge authorises. In another familiar pattern, Barth claims that the contrast between the practical value of the particular and fruitless generalities is the basis for Paul making the connection between thinking the 'one thing' and placing the other above one's self:

> Paul gives a positive turn to τὸ ἀυτό: since there can only be humility before the one, this will be an acknowledged presupposition. But, this means that to really think in the direction of the one thing requires the neighbour to occupy a quite different place. The humility before the one is now practical, relevant (*aktuell*). The one indeed is, and therefore humility is demanded, the directing grace under which the community stands. To believe in grace means concretely: to place the other above yourself.[469]

We can see how Barth's language of the 'second step' of willing the church cannot be thought of as the movement from an individual life of faith to a voluntarist association of the

[468] *PB*, pp. 48-49 ET, pp. 54-55.
[469] *PB*, p. 50 ET, p. 56.

church. The movement of thought is not from the singular thought of God to a corporate one, but a movement that happens within the thought about God. It is recognising that thinking about God that does not realise itself in humility before the neighbour is not genuinely thought about God at all.

Here, we come to one of the key ideas in this text, and one which will be significant in our concluding thoughts on Barth's understanding of biblical authority. It is the idea of the neighbour's authority as a consequence of thought about God. Barth claims that in the exhortation to humility, the thought of the one 'becomes practical'. As command correlates to action, and thus to freedom, inasmuch as the neighbour's presence constitutes a command, it is also the possibility of freedom. Barth makes this much explicit. The neighbour is a 'representative of a higher authority',[470] and when in humility one sees the neighbour as higher and considers their point of view, the act of obedience is itself liberating: 'In alien thoughts I learn to think my own thoughts. When I give freedom, I am free. When I obey, I exercise governance. The neighbour is always the barrier, but also the door. There is no way that passes him by.'[471]

As the neighbour is a representative of divine authority, relating to her in obedience is a source of freedom. Thus, Barth puts the authority that the neighbour represents in the kind of terms that we have previously seen him speak of the authority of divine sovereignty. This command means for Barth that the neighbour obligates with the same peremptory force as the command of God, 'perhaps without any grounds, against all grounds, merely because it is commanded, to see the neighbour in thinking on the one…'[472] What is further important to note is that this authority is not merely critical or constraining, but authorises the particular action of setting the other above one's self. Obedience to the neighbour in humility changes the way one is in the world. Barth is therefore quick to underline the moral significance of the command, as it works against the instinctive isolation that Barth has associated with the Philippian church and is more broadly paradigmatic of humanity's sinful assertion of their own lordship. Barth thus sees the irreducibly social character of fulfilling the command as central to its importance:

> This is why we should see that which the other sees, to allow ourselves to be enticed out of our own hut into his–not because that is a holy place, but because only in this coming together of

[470] *PB*, p. 52 ET, p. 58-59.
[471] *PB*, p. 53 ET, p. 59.
[472] *PB*, p. 50 ET, p. 56.

> people, in the collective seeing of things, in the collective obeisance to that which is greater than you and me, can the really holy, true and helpful come at all into my view.[473]

As the culmination of Paul's critique of Philippian individualism, the command to humility has a clear result, which is that there is now a freedom for moral fellowship that allows for a collective orientation towards God. In a striking reverse of their tendencies, this is predicated on obedience to the neighbour.

At this point, it will be helpful to briefly summarise. Much of the foregoing has been concerned with drawing out the nuances of Barth's exegesis of Philippians 2:2-3. Barth's overall reading of Philippians has put stress on the possibility of unity in the church, which the individualistic, voluntarist attitudes of the Philippians makes impossible. Paul's move, as Barth argues, is to show that the relationship with God, which the Philippians are predisposed to think of as terminating in self-consciousness, in fact requires humility before their neighbour. This is achieved by recognising that in the command to humility the neighbour represents divine authority in all its peremptory character. Obedience to the neighbour, however, makes the thought of God practical, substantially authoritative, and correlative to freedom.

Barth's reading of Paul, and his own choice of terminology, turn on a move from general to particular that is strongly reminiscent of Hegel's critique of Kantian formalism, especially as it is assayed in the *Philosophy of Right*. In his discussion of the 'estates' of society, Hegel contrasts abstract universal freedom with the particularity required for actuality and action. Whereas some see any limitation as a compromise of their freedom as a 'purely *external* necessity',[474] if the individual is to enter 'into *determinate particularity*…he must accordingly limit himself *exclusively* to one of the *particular* spheres of need.'[475] That

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[473] *PB*, p. 52 ET, p. 59. Mützlitz draws attention to how Barth develops the thought of being 'in Christ' as also being in the community of the church. It is without a doubt that Barth offers a clearer account of the social correlate to faith by the mid-1920s than he had previously, though my reading of the lectures on the Sermon on the Mount and John suggest this is not entirely down to Barth's reading of Paul. Her further suggestion that Barth in this way anticipates the New Perspective school of Pauline interpretation should be treated with more caution, largely because it may obscure Barth's commitment to forensic justification and classical Christology, which are as central to his reading here as it is in the earlier lectures. See Mützlitz, *Gottes Wort*, pp. 248-250. Francis Watson also draws attention to this aspect, though he is more circumspect about what trends in New Testament scholarship he may precede. Watson is absolutely right, however, to point out that in Christ 'the ethical and the theological aspects are simply two sides of the same act of renunciation…' Watson, '*Philippians* as Theological Exegesis', p. xlix, also pp. xliii-xlix.

[474] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: CUP, 1991), §207 p. 239 (emphasis original). The 'youth' who views limitation as a purely external necessity is surely a jibe at Kant and his formal conception of autonomy, made especially stinging by appropriating Kant's own language of immaturity in his *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment* in *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), pp. 54-55. See Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975), pp. 368-376 for the general background and the critique of Kantian formalism.

[475] Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §207 p. 238.

is, if freedom is to have a substantial meaning, if it is to in fact be compatible with action, than it must exist as part of a set of relations that are limits, in the sense that they do not admit of an abstract, formal conception of freedom. For Hegel, then, freedom and particular relations are not mutually exclusive, nor do they require a Hobbesian negotiated compromise, but they are in fact co-dependent through the recognition of one's self and the other.

We can easily see, *mutatis mutandis*, the outline of Barth's discussion of humility in Philippians. Both Barth and Hegel reject an idea of freedom conceived as formal autonomy apart from any determinate relations and the claim that knowledge of the objective 'one' reveals itself to be uselessly abstract unless it can authorise practical action. We draw our attention here for two reasons. First, without claiming a strong dependence of Barth's account on Hegel's criticisms of Kant in this matter, the parallels lend support to our reading of Barth's struggle to articulate how the formal character of Scripture, as dependent on divine sovereignty, fits materially in the scope of God's saving work without compromising that authority. Second, these parallels allow us to stress distinct features of Barth's reading of humility in Philippians that not only make his account theological, but also inform his own criticism of the legacy of idealist ethics which will occupy us in the next section. For now, we should note the difference between Hegel's language of 'recognition' and Barth's language of obedience. For Hegel, freedom was achieved in mutual recognition as result of society's expression of its rational character.[476] Barth's language of obedience cannot be translated into these terms precisely because it denies an inherent rationality to be expressed. While cast in a move from abstract to particular, it is not ultimately a failure of thought, but of the moral condition of the individual that leads to the anxiety and fractiousness of the Philippian church. It is the character of sin that is determinative, and obedience to the neighbour, as to God, requires a constraint of the will that is possible only as part of a judgment on that sin. This is why Barth's account cannot stop with sociality, and why the Christological basis for the authority of the neighbour is so crucial. To this we now turn.

5.2.4 The Christological Foundation of Humility

In contrast to some readings of the kenotic hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, Barth is not primarily concerned with its significance for understanding the relations between the natures, but to establish that the humility commanded by Paul has its ground in Christ's own work.

[476] My account here is indebted to Robert Pippin's stress on mutually recognitive relations as the basis for freedom that is expressive of the subjective will. See Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), pp. 189-194.

The reading Barth wants to reject is an exemplarist one. The moral fellowship of the church realised in humility will not result, thinks Barth, from Christ's self-sacrifice being understood as model. This is not sufficient to Paul's intent, as it fails to take seriously the relationship between Christ's humiliation and his exalted lordship. For Barth, Paul's argument turns on 2:8-9,[477] and more precisely on Paul's need to elaborate the consequences of Christ being humbled to the point of death. If Christ's humble obedience was exemplary then v. 8 would have been sufficient. On Barth's reading, the move to v. 9 (and following) is a specification of the identity of the one who is humbled that determines him as knowable because he is revealed as Jesus Christ: 'Notice that there is no talk of a return to the "form of God". No, this incarnate and crucified one, this lowliness and humiliation is not dissolved and reversed, but he is exalted, he is given the great name…'[478] Similar to what we observed in Barth's discussion of 2:2, where the 'one [thing]' taken to be a general, unifying force is given practical specificity in the neighbour, here too a non-specific, non-obligating thought of God is specified and shown to have commanding force by Paul's argument. This thought is possible because it is revealed in the resurrection, as Barth elaborates:

> Notice further, it is said even more strongly: therefore God exalted him. In lowliness and humiliation it said 'himself', and it is therewith indicated how this ἑαυτόν {"himself"} shuts the lock against all individual capacity for observation and conception of the divinity of the man Jesus: in his own, his innermost he took on the form of the servant…Again, flesh and blood cannot reveal this. One cannot understand Jesus as the Lord in the picture of his lowliness and humiliation, as one who died on the cross next to something human and so discover something straightforwardly illuminating and motivating and therein, perhaps in the ethos of his obedience [see] his exaltation, and there find his lordship! No, the self-emptying (*Entäußerung*) and humiliation must take its course to the bitter end, μέχρι θανάτου {"unto death"}, the door must fall shut, until nothing remains but the word that God alone can speak, the word of resurrection. Only then, when it is not perforated, does this picture remain what in any event it also is as a manifestation (*Erscheinung*) of saving grace: a claiming holy command. It is for this reason command…: because God has avowed himself to this lowliness and humiliation, because Jesus is raised from the dead, because in the form of a servant he is God's equal… Only the resurrection makes this knowledge possible. God must be here both light and eye, destination and path.[479]

We can now see that the problem with exemplarism is not only that it becomes a principle, and so in its abstraction is unable to be a basis for action, but that the meaning of humility, at least that which is commanded to Christians, is only known through Christ's resurrection. The parallel between Barth's exegesis of 2:2-3 and the kenotic hymn are evident. In both there is a shift from general to particular, a shift that requires knowledge to result in action.

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[477] '…he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name'
[478] *PB*, p. 60 ET, p. 66.
[479] *PB*, p. 61 ET, pp. 66-67.

The implication is that when the church knows the 'one thing', it knows Christ in his humility which in turn means that it is itself obedient to the neighbour in humility. Because of Christ's humiliation, the neighbour is served in humility.

Yet this way of putting it might still suggest a theologically inflected account of mutual recognition. Barth concludes his discussion of the kenotic hymn, therefore, by clarifying that Christ's humility is constitutive of the church's existence. What is crucial for Barth is how Christ's humbling himself to the point of death on the cross is itself the exercise of his lordship.[480] Christ's humiliation and exultation terminate in Christ exercising his *right* as Lord over the church as the one who retained his Lordship through his humiliation:

> God's equal has found his right in this: that he in his indignity and his humiliation is lord over all. God has found his honour in this: that though incomprehensible condescension he prepared his kingdom. And this is the right and the honour that holds also for his own, for his church, the right and honour of ταπεινοφροσύνη {humility}, clearly identical with the command, the command of grace of v. 2, to "think on the one [thing]".[481]

Again, Barth exploits the political resonances he finds in Paul's language to underscore that Christ's work is constitutive of the church's reality, not as a founder, but as a sovereign. This is to say, the exercise of Christ's lordship is not only exhibited in the inauguration the church as a community, but is also the location of its identity. As such, the command to be humble is simply the action that is in keeping with the church's own identity.[482]

There remain several implications to be developed concerning the authority of the neighbour, which Barth does not do here, but will in other writings. Chief among them is why the neighbour is representative of divine authority, since the command seems to be directed at the individual to be humble before the other. In this sense, the neighbour is more the occasion for fulfilling the command, rather than a kind of authority. It is the task of the next section to see how Barth draws on the Christological foundation he has articulated here to justify his claim of the neighbour's authority. Our argument has been that Barth's reading of the command to humility and its foundation in the kenotic hymn is important for his understanding of authority. We must ask, then, if we can identify any such change in how Barth describes Paul's own authority in these lectures.

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[480] This basic thought is given extensive treatment by Barth in *CD* IV.2, §64.
[481] *PB*, p. 62 ET, p. 68.
[482] Though Barth surely has a broad target in mind, the call to humility can be read as an ironic reversal of Kant's opening sentences to *The Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment*, with *Demut* ('humility') being the reversal of *Mut* (*Muth* in Kant's spelling) ('courage'). Instead having the courage to think one's own thoughts for oneself, one should have the humility to think the other's thoughts. See Kant, *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften Bd. VIII* (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1912), pp. 35-42 ET, *Enlightenment*, pp. 54-60.

5.2.5 Paul's Humble Apostleship

Initially, Barth's understanding of Paul's apostolic authority seems largely unchanged from what we have seen so far. Though Barth draws attention to Paul's dispensing with his typical self-description as an 'apostle' in favour of a'slave' (δοῦλος), along with Timothy, of Christ. Barth takes this as a gloss on what it means to be an apostle: 'The designation "slaves of Christ Jesus" precisely reminds one [of apostolic authority]. It moves in the sharpest possible way, more emphatically than "apostle", from the speaking person to that person's lord. The speaker is not a man with his own rights and he does not act as such.'[483] Apostleship as office, not as personality, and its directive, ostensive relationship to God's revelation is consistent with Barth's usage in other lectures. On the one hand, this should not surprise us, as there is nothing in our reading of these lectures so far that would require a substantial re-evaluation on Barth's part of the essential structure of prophetic and apostolic witness. On the other, it is worth noting that this same ostensive movement can now claim a clearer Christological grounding than it has in the past. Given the account of Christ's lordship in humility that Barth will draw out in the lectures, his description of an apostle as one who is 'not a man with his own rights' takes on a new resonance. Barth is more suggestive than explicit, but we can see in these lectures a shift from construing of the ostensive witness of the apostle in terms of the dialectical movement of faith to the objective act of God in Christ. It is notable that the terms with which Barth describes the knowledge to which Paul is seeking to summon the Philippian church have largely dispensed with that of dialectics. Instead, Barth prefers the contrast between conditional and unconditional knowledge (*bedingt* and *unbedingt*), with its own resonances with the Kantian tradition of ethics, and which Barth employs prominently in his own ethics.[484] This is just to say that Barth understands Paul to be primarily speaking here of different kinds of knowledge, rather than of the structure of knowing.

Barth reads Paul's claim that Christ will be 'magnified' in his life or death as a 'proclamation' of the resurrection.[485] Along with Barth's rejection of a simple futurist reading

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[483] *PB*, p. 2 ET, p. 11.
[484] Kant contrasts between the good, which is unconditional and attainable only by reason, and the end of happiness, which is conditional and not, 'at least in this life' at one with the cultivation of reason. Barth reproduces this distinction between unconditional and conditional in the prolegomena to his *Ethics*. See Kant *Groundwork for Metaphysics of Morals. A German-English Edition*, ed. Jens Timmermann, trans. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) IV 396.14-37; p. 20/21, and Barth *Ethik I* pp. 104-110 ET, pp. 63-66.
[485] *PB*, p. 29 ET, p. 36.

of Paul's hope, this may seem to an instance of Barth's 'de-historicized' eschatology, consistent with earlier lectures.[486] We should be wary of overstating this case, however. In part because, as he makes clear, Barth moves the issue away from temporal continuity not to simply de-historicize the eschatological relation. But more importantly for our purposes, the kind of knowledge that Barth possesses because of the resurrection is not understood in correspondingly dialectical terms, but in a simple claim of unconditional knowledge. The importance of these different sorts of knowledge is played out in Barth's exegesis of Philippians 1:12-26, where Paul responds to the anxieties of the church about his imprisonment by assuring them that either way 'Christ will be magnified'. Paul claims that it is possible to relate to future uncertainty without fear. When Paul says, in 1:20, that 'Christ will be magnified through my bodily life…, whether through [my] life or death', Barth notes the inclusive scope of Paul's temporal possibilities, immediately repeated and reaffirmed in the following verse 'To live is Christ, to do die is gain' (1:21). In light of the Philippians' apparent anxiety about their possible futures, this could be read (and often has been) as a frank expression of a futurist eschatological hope, wherein Paul's present circumstances are made relative by the hope of eternal bliss after death. Barth does not deny that Paul can claim this reality–'it is of course not to be gainsaid'[487] –yet this interpretation seems to miss the proper location of Paul's confidence that Christ will, no matter what possible future is realised, be magnified. The futurist hope, thinks Barth, is insufficient to account for the kind of knowledge Paul is claiming in Christ. The problem with the futurist hope is that as it presupposes a kind of continuity with one's present condition, it is ultimately speculative. Therefore, Barth reads Paul's claim that 'to die is gain' in light of the 'magnification' of Christ that is Paul's essential purpose. It is not then his own bliss that characterises his hope, but the union with Christ that will be realised in any of the possible futures that may be Paul's. It is thus that either in life or death, Paul might join in Christ's sufferings.[488]

The difference between how Barth understands Paul's message and its eschatological dimensions here and what we have seen previously, lies in both in the kind of knowledge that Paul is communicating and the criterion for his success in doing so. Barth suggests Paul's language will likely be misunderstood by his readers. When Paul says that while either way Christ will be magnified, 'I know that I will remain and continue with all of you' (1:25) They are likely to think that Paul's knowledge is in a certain future:

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[486] Westerholm makes just this claim. See *Ordering,* pp. 112 n. 100.
[487] *PB*, p. 31 ET, p. 38.
[488] *PB*, pp. 32-33 ET, pp. 38-39.

> Paul certainly does not think by writing [this] what the Philippians in reading it would like to think. They will foremost seek to take his words to mean that it will still long be day, which is precisely what Paul only knows in a conditional way. Considering the whole of vv. 12-26, it may certainly be said that Paul with secret concern is encouraging his readers to think with him the one [thing] that is needful, which one can know unconditionally and must know: "Christ will be magnified".[489]

As ever, the intent of apostolic communication is to get the reader to 'think with', to in some sense occupy the same place that the apostle occupies. We simply note that this enables a certain kind of knowledge, rather than a certain encounter, as Barth would have described in the Ephesians lectures. To be sure, Barth has not simply reversed himself and made knowledge of revelation an objective fact that is available outside of the reality of faith, but that does not mean the change is merely rhetorical. We see this change further in the way Barth accounts for Paul's shifting between imperative and indicative moods as he both exhorts and exhibits the joy that is in keeping with knowing that Christ will be magnified. Paul's strategy as a whole in chapter 2 is to move between imperative and indicative modes, such as in 2:17-18 where he correlates his own joy with the joy that the Philippians out to be exhibiting.[490] Barth reads this as a Pauline strategy of involving the Philippians in his own condition, as a kind of moral demonstration of the way they too should be. What is important for our purposes is that Barth again does not describe this in spatial or preparatory terms, to await God's act, but to induce in them the specific act they see Paul performing: 'Grasped in this act Paul shows himself to his readers. His intent with them is to, so to speak, drag them into this act.'[491]

We might lastly draw attention to the role of autobiography in Philippians. Its prominence in the epistle may seem to grate against Barth's description of Paul's apostolicity as all office, no personality. Barth's reading of the recurrent instances of personal details, most prominently in 3:5-6 is therefore instructive. Barth characterises these and other instances of biography in Paul's epistles: 'Autobiography is in Paul here as in ch. 1, as in Gal. 1, 2 Cor. 11-12, as in Rom. 7 precisely not an end in itself, nor is it merely parergon. Rather they are fully-functional paradigms of the Pauline declaration. In those conditions under which he exists the reader should recognise the conditions under which they themselves exist.'[492] If we compare Barth's own treatment of Romans 7 in *Romans II*, we can see that he has shifted in his exegetical approach to such passages. There Paul is a universal 'I',

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[489] *PB*, p. 36 ET, p. 42-43.
[490] *PB*, p. 77 ET, p. 83.
[491] *PB*, p. 78 ET, p. 84.
[492] *PB*, p. 107 ET, p. 110

paradigmatic in its own way of the condition of humanity caught in the judgment of the Law.[493] The change to the 'conditions' under which Paul exists is not idle, but directs the reader to the reality in which Paul exists, rather than an existential encounter that mirrors, or reproduces Paul's own. Put differently, we might say that though Paul's exercise of the apostolic office does not in any way arise from his personality, it does not have a disjunctive relationship to it, either. Because the reader is directed to the 'conditions' of Paul's existence rather than the structure of his encounter with Christ in faith, there is less risk of the reader dissolving Paul into their own movement of faith.

We have covered a great deal of ground in our discussion of Barth's lectures on Philippians, but our basic aim was to make two points. First, and most importantly, in his exegesis of Philippians 2, Barth suggests an account of the authority of the neighbour that is grounded in Christ's revelation of humble lordship over the church. Second, we argued that one can see related changes in how Barth describes Paul's exercise of his apostolic ministry. Our argument here was more cumulative than deductive, but we noted that Paul communicates knowledge of the unconditioned rather than inhabiting a dialectical movement, and he summons his readers to a specific act, rather than an existential position vis-à-vis God's revelation in Christ. Finally, we saw how Barth's handling of the biographical passages has undergone a shift from focusing on the subjective reality of Paul's standing before God to the broader conditions in which Paul exists, thus reducing the emphasis on existentiality.

More broadly, in these lectures we detected a way of thinking about authority that addresses a key tension in Barth's work that we have traced up until now. Here, in Barth's understanding of the authority of the neighbour grounded in Christ's own humble lordship, we can see how creatures can represent the peremptory character of divine authority in their relations with other creatures. What we have seen here reflects the understanding of Christology and revelation that we detailed in chapters 3 and 4. In connection to what we observed in the second cycle of the lectures on James regarding canon, the authority of the neighbour can be seen as the personal relationship of authority that is the corollary to the canon's public, historical one. What remains in this chapter is to show that the account of authority we have observed is important for Barth more generally, rather than being restricted to understanding Paul in Philippians.

5.3 The Münster *Ethics*

[493] Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1922*, pp. 365-368.

Even a brief turn to Barth's Münster *Ethics* lectures in the concluding pages of a study largely devoted to exegesis requires some justification. The major burden of this section is to show that Barth's Christologically grounded conception of the authority of the neighbour is not an isolated tract of exegesis, but is developed in other areas. More broadly, we have endeavoured to show throughout this study that when Barth speaks of authority, chiefly scriptural in its derivation from divine authority, its expected complement is free human action. In his *Ethics* lectures, Barth develops the account of the neighbour's authority given in his lectures on Philippians in explicit reference to the kenotic hymn and its relation to scriptural authority.

In our discussion of Philippians, we contrasted Barth's reading of the command to humility with a Hegelian ethic of mutual recognition. As we argued, the crucial difference between the two is the Christological grounding for the call to humility, and as such its setting of the authority of the neighbour in the context of sin and reconciliation. At the beginning of his *Ethics*, Barth has occasion to distinguish the philosophical and theological ethics that reproduce this analysis in programmatic terms. He makes a distinction there between a philosophical concern for the neighbour as other and the theological concern for God as other. Properly speaking, the neighbour or *mitmensch*–fellow human–is not the province of theological ethics directly, but philosophical ethics as companion (though not ancillary) discipline. The fellow human is not ignored by theological ethics, but it is not concerned with her directly:

> [Christian philosophy] shares with the church and theology the task of simply confronting man's unprofitable and dangerous recollection of himself with the recollection of the wholly other who stands over against him, of pointing out that this wholly other himself speaks to man. For [philosophy], however, this wholly other cannot be God himself–it differs in this way from the church and theology. Theology, of course, cannot proclaim the Word of God without recalling the neighbour, the brother, in whose claim upon us the Word of God comes to us. But one could not call this reminder the true task of theology. It is simply the great instrument that it uses when and so far as it is a matter of defining the Word of God as the Word that comes to us. This recollection, the changing of the self-responsibility into responsibility to the Thou of the other man, is the true and concretely specific task of philosophy.[494]

On this account, attending to the neighbour and knowing their claim as a fellow human is proper to philosophy. Indeed, what distinguishes Christian philosophy from pagan philosophy is that the neighbour 'must' be heard. Yet, evidently, theology cannot leave the neighbour to one side, either as given by experience or as a domain cordoned off from

[494] *Ethik I*, p. 72 ET, pp. 43-44.

revelation.[495] In terms reminiscent of Barth's reading of the Nicodemus pericope, he goes on to say that the very possibility of the other human making a claim on us is dependent on their actualisation 'in Christ' as 'brother and neighbour'. Christian philosophy (more specifically, philosophical ethics) attends to the fellow human because of this possibility. The fellow human is not self-evidently the 'bearer of the divine Logos', and as such not self-evidently such a possibility. What role, then, for theological ethics in relation to the fellow human? Barth suggests it is to show *that* the Word of God does come to us through our neighbour, or put differently, that in Christ the fellow human *becomes* a neighbour. As such, it is the responsibility of theological ethics to show how the neighbour's authority is genuine.[496] How does it do so?

Before proceeding, we should give a brief overview of the structure of these lectures, as it will be important going forward to see where Barth's discussion of the neighbour falls in relation to his overall argument. Barth's organises his ethics along the lines of the command of God the Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer, their corresponding commands, and the fulfilment of those commands ('with a pinch of salt' the "virtues") in faith, love, and hope.[497] Here, we will focus on the command of God the Reconciler, and its standpoint in 'law' that is revealed as 'authority', demands 'humility', and gives 'love', as this is the area where Barth addresses the neighbour directly.

We can sum up the initial argument of the chapter fairly briefly. The decisive feature of the command of God the Reconciler, and that which gives its particular standpoint as 'law', is that it addresses humanity as elect in its sinfulness. Under the standpoint of law, the Christian asks what she 'ought' to do, rather than what she is 'called' to do by God the Creator. The fulfilment of the command of the Creator is faith, but this faith is now taken up under the designation of sinful human existence, and so justification by faith. This provides the decisive definition of law for Barth, which is that it is the law of Jesus Christ.[498] Running throughout

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[495] See Oakes, *Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 125-134, esp. pp. 133-134 on Barth's broader interest in this material to show that theology is an independent yet not isolated domain from philosophy.
[496] Oakes registers some puzzlement as to why the claim of the fellowman is the province of Christian philosophical ethics and not simply theological ethics. We can see here why this is a false dichotomy: theological ethics recognises the authority of the neighbour in Christ, with the emphasis on Christ, while philosophical ethics does the same with the emphasis on the neighbour. The crucial link is not simply the Word of God that governs both philosophical and theological ethics, but the Word of God in Scripture. Philosophy may take its point of departure from the claim of the neighbour that is met in Scripture's claim to authority, while theology takes its point of departure that the Word of God lays claim through the neighbour. Barth's account of the relationship between special and general hermeneutics in the *Church Dogmatics* follows the same line of argument. See Oakes, *Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 133-134, and *CD* I/2, §19 pp. 471-472.
[497] *Ethik I*, ET, p. 61.
[498] *Ethik II*, p. 118 ET, p. 321.

this section is an extended discussion and critique of an idealist account of law, which is more amenable to theological thought and thus inestimably more dangerous to it than the alternatives of treating law as inner compulsion or the necessity of fate.[499] We will return to the significance of Barth locating a critique of idealism, but for now we can register that the Christian response to idealism is the 'dark particularity' of Christ crucified. Rejecting any general account of theological truth that idealism might furnish, a properly theological account of the law will take its content exclusively from the objective content of Christ's acts. Fulfilment of the law of Christ then is or must be nothing but being obedient to Christ, to 'follow' him in the terminology of the Synoptics, which means for the Gospel writers and Paul, to follow him to the cross.[500] In previous discussions of the *via crucis* in this study, it was a consistent concern that despite its particularity in Christ's history, as it was applied to Christian belief, it lacked content beyond drawing attention to the *simul* and so threatened to become a generalised *askesis*. Here, however, as in the Philippians lectures, Barth deduces the specific act that following the law of Christ entails. Drawing on a number of texts, including Philippians 2:1-11,[501] Barth argues that it is the recurrent witness of the Gospels and of Paul that Christ did not suffer and die for himself but for others. Thus, to be claimed by the law of Christ and to fulfil it is to be claimed for the neighbour.[502]

This, in very brief compass, is why Barth takes the neighbour to be central to the command of God the Reconciler. It will be worthwhile to be more leisurely in our survey of how the neighbour represents Christ's authority. Barth extends the law of Christ to the neighbour out of Christ's own sacrifice for others, and one could suppose that this is a sufficient basis on which to build an ethic of neighbour love as the fulfilment of the command already vicariously fulfilled in Christ. But while Barth structures the command in this way–'[Jesus] directs us away from ourselves to God–this is the sacrifice–and to our neighbours or fellows–this is the point or relation of the sacrifice.'–he[503] does not develop an ethic of benevolence, but as an ethic of humility, which involves a specific type of thinking, which is repentance.

We can gain purchase on how the command of Christ leads to humility by seeing how the command of God the Creator is coordinated to the possession of individual identity, the

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[499] *Ethik II*, p. 68 and 73, respectively, ET, p. 294 and p. 297.
[500] *Ethik II*, pp.130-132 ET, pp. 328-329.
[501] Significantly Barth's reference is not restricted to the kenotic hymn alone, but to the its context as the basis of the command, see *Ethik II*, p. 133 ET, p. 330.
[502] *Ethik II*, pp. 130-134f ET, pp. 328-330f.
[503] *Ethik II*, p. 134 ET, p. 330.

call to life that gives each human their 'I'. Conceptually distinct, if fundamentally unified in God, is the command of the Reconciler that confronts us with an alien righteousness in Christ. It is this moment of confrontation, of justification by faith, that inaugurates a social existence, or more precisely, the possibility of encounter, a 'Thou' confronts the 'I'. Crucially, for Barth, this encounter occurs because the goodness of God with which Christ encounters humanity confronts them as sinners. Thus, the point of differentiation is not simply the encounter of another agent, but of a morally distinct one. Christ bears a goodness that is not the sinner's, and its recognition demands acknowledging that it cannot be an extension of one's own existence. Receiving Christ's goodness results therefore in the opposite of a self-affirmation as one agent over against another, but 'the affirmation of a claim which comes to us and which differs from that which is claimed by our existence'.[504] The basis of the neighbour ethic requires repentance, which affirms one's own moral deficiency, and acknowledges that the other which confronts you possesses goodness that fulfils that lack.

The shape of humility that we saw in *Philippians* is clear at this point, though now the moral dynamics are a good deal clearer. What is crucial is that the command to be *for* the neighbour can only be fulfilled when one is encountered *by* the neighbour as one whose goodness stands over and against one's own sin. Sin and repentance are not theological epiphenomenon to a philosophical account of mutual recognition, but basic to the meaning of the neighbour's authority. But Barth's presentation of this material here is distinguished from what we saw in the Philippians lectures in an important way. As in *Philippians*, it is not merely that Christ encounters the human with his goodness in this way, but Jesus of Nazareth. In the exegetical lectures, Barth developed this theme in relation to Christ's resurrection and the hiddenness of Christ in his humiliation. Here, Barth draws out a different point, not incompatible with the resurrection as revelation, but distinct. What we see in Christ's humiliation and giving himself for others is a human act. Christ's humanity is the condition for the kind of encounter that Barth envisages, because in Christ's humanity 'his specific act is thus the content of the law of God'. If it were not the actions of a 'very man', then they could not encounter and claim other human actions with specificity.

This point is consistent with Barth's account of the kenotic hymn in his Philippians lectures, but stresses a different aspect. Barth alludes to Phil. 2:6 to show how the incarnation is where we see Christ's being for others as sinners.[505] By underlining the necessity of the

[504] *Ethik II*, p. 136 ET, p. 332.
[505] *Ethik II*, pp. 149-150 ET, pp. 339-340.

incarnate Christ as the law of God, Barth can extend the claim of Christ's authority over the individual as sinners to the neighbour. He does this through two Christological analogies: first, through Christ's hiddenness in his humanity, and secondly through the goodness of his divinity. In the first instance, the neighbour lays claim to others as an image of Christ's humanity, as a reminder of the form in which one is confronted by Christ's goodness.[506] Barth is very clear that this is not a simple generalisation of the incarnation (he is cautious about Luther's claim that 'all others become Christ to us'),[507] but affirms that because Christ's divine goodness was hidden in his humanity, one must also be able to be confronted by the neighbour in their humanity. Secondly, Christ's divine goodness confronts one in the neighbour as goodness which genuinely overcomes sin. This is the inverse of the previous point. Here the neighbour claims one as a sinner for whom Christ died, and so claims one precisely in their sin as one who is in need of forgiveness. In the first instance, the neighbour claimed one as a witness to Christ's condescension for the 'I', and in the second instance, the neighbour claims one as a sinner for whom one can be a witness to Christ's forgiveness.

Both of these movements of turning towards the neighbour are brought together by Barth in the peremptory nature of the authority of the neighbour that we observed in Philippians. Because it comes to the human under the condition of sin, God's goodness in and to the neighbour precedes God's goodness to oneself. For Barth, this is a necessary consequence of Christ's humanity, which means that one's relationship with Christ can only ever be *indirect*. So, extending the Christological analogy, Barth unites the two movements in the 'mystical body' of the church and its status as the mediator of Christ as the neighbour:

> His presence, even in that mystical union, in that life of Christ in us, is indirect presence, presence in the witness of Scripture and the church. We hear his Word in and through that of the prophets and apostles…We believe within the church, which is to say at second hand, not at first hand. We do not hear Jesus Christ speak with us directly. When we really *hear* him and really hear *him*, we hear him through the word of others, which by his Holy Spirit acquires the power of truth of his own Word. This is how his Word has come to us and must always come to us. We thus receive God's gift by indirect communication–we even must say: by doubly indirect communication, to the extent that Christ's humanity entails its concealment and this carries with it a second concealment when it comes to us by way of others…It is the way by which the gift of the eternal God can come to us who live in time. Hence it is not an obstacle that we want to be removed. It is a means, a necessary mediation. Only in this indirectness are we directly related to Christ and in him to God.[508]

[506] *Ethik II*, pp. 138-146 ET, pp. 333-337.
[507] *Ethik II*, p. 141 ET, pp. 334-335.
[508] *Ethik II*, pp. 159-160 ET, pp. 345-346.

It is not a re-statement of the Scripture Principle, but it is a summary of the moral theology of mediation Barth now has in place to ground the Scripture Principle.[509] There is no less an assurance of divine hiddenness in revelation, no less a rejection of any way to God but the way of Christ. What we have observed up to now suggests that here Barth offers a much more satisfactory account of how, in that hiddenness, God's Word confronts us in Scripture, as in the neighbour, not as brute power, but as good news. This is not to remove or lessen the affront of God's authority over humanity as sinful, but it is to see how this authority is always *de jure*. And so the Christian never seeks to remove the obstacle that is Scripture, any more than they could remove the obstacle that is their neighbour or the church. It is with profound 'embarrassment' that this authority claims the Christian, because its claim in any form exposes the basic lack of commitment to anything but one's self.[510] But this embarrassment is nothing but being 'judged by God's mercy'.[511]

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown how the insights into the Christological centre of revelation are in evidence in the some of the later exegetical lectures from the 1920s. The material from the Münster *Ethics* showed how Barth expanded the notion of humility found in the Philippians lectures to the broader canvas of the ethics of reconciliation. All that remains by way of conclusion is to point towards how Barth expands this line of thought in the terms given above in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. This magisterial prolegomena, whose '*Kardinalsatz* is the Protestant scripture principle'[512], also contains one of Barth's lengthiest expositions of the double command to love God and neighbour.[513] Here Barth develops at length the way the witness to Jesus Christ is the basis for being the neighbour that can be loved as God commanded. This section serves as the prelude to §19, 'The Word of God for the Church' and Barth's basic critique of modern biblical scholarship's 'lack of love', shown in the systematic refusal to attend to what those authors are trying to say, and must be seen in light of it.[514] This is simply to say that the themes we have traced here are

[509] Recalling Barth's discussion in *TrB* of how there was no need of revelation in pre-lapsarian Eden, here he notes that pre-lapsarian Adam had no authority except the direct authority of God, and it is Moses who introduces the representation of divine authority in the neighbour as feature of God's covenantal plan of salvation. See *Ethik II*, p. 183 ET, p. 359.
[510] *Ethik II*, p. 178 ET, p. 356.
[511] *Ethik II*, p. 179 ET, p. 357.
[512] Wood, *Interpretation*, p. 104.
[513] *CD* I/2, §18 pp. 371-454.
[514] *CD* I/2, § 19 p. 465. See also on this point Burnett *Theological Exegesis* pp. 210-222.

given expansive consideration in Barth's mature thought. It also marks the limitations of what has been said, without denying the significance of Barth's earlier material.

To close, we might summarise the arc of this study by noting the difference between what Barth claimed against Hirsch in 1922: 'If God *reveals* to me through the vehicle of this manifestness the one, the norm, then the *one God* encountered me through the plurality of pious humanness, and then they as such are no longer under consideration'[515] with what he could affirm in 1938: 'Who and what a neighbour is, we can best realise from those who founded the Church, the biblical prophets and apostles. What they do is the purest form of that work of divine mercy which is assumed by the children of God. They bear witness to Jesus Christ.'[516]

[515] Barth, 26.2.1922 (circular), in *B- Th 1921-1930*, pp. 42-43.
[516] *CD* I/2, §18 p. 422.

Conclusion

Though focused on his exegetical lectures, this study has touched on some of the deep currents in Barth's thought. I have shown a shift in Barth's thinking about exegesis and the nature of scriptural authority, which was in parallel to a shift in thinking about the meaning of Christ as the revealer of God to the world. Barth's understanding of the relationship between God's being and acts in history, and how his conception of Scripture as the proper authority for Christian thought and action meet, as it were, in the centrality of Jesus Christ as the one who reveals God's self. In chapter 5 especially, we saw how both through the public confession by the church of the authority of the canon and through the authority of the neighbour as the concrete agent of God's sovereign claim, the exegetical practice of the church is tied to the movement of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

This suggests that the trajectory that would lead Barth to reframing the doctrine of election in *CD* II/2 was already in place in the mid-1920s, as indeed others have suggested.[517] Barth's conviction that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is God's self, without remainder, lays the ground work for his reformulation of the doctrine of election. I will not enter the lists here on the meaning of this decision for Barth's doctrine of God, but I would rather draw attention to some conclusions that may be made about Barth's exegesis in relation to his dogmatic thought. Primarily, I want to simply repeat with more force what I suggested in the introduction, which is that thinking about Barth's development without sustained attention to his exegetical work misses the responsiveness of his thought to the way the Bible talks about God. As I have tried to show in some detail, Barth can be shown to not only be listening, but at times struggling with the biblical text. This remains true when thinking through the *Church Dogmatics*. As Gerhard Bergner points out, when Barth comes to his reformulation of the doctrine of election, the chief reason Barth gives for his departure from Calvin is his continued reading of Scripture.[518] We should therefore take seriously Barth's claim that the text is 'foreign' and not simply an expression of human aspirations. It remains critical and so able to contradict theology and tradition.[519] At several places in this study I criticised some post-liberal readings of Barth's exegesis, with which I have a certain sympathy, for failing to reckon with this point. Part of the purpose of chapter 5 of this study, was to show that this

[517] See D. Stephen Long, 'From the Hidden God to the God of Glory: Barth, Balthasar, and Nominalism', *Pro Ecclesia* 20/2 (Spring 2011), pp. 172-173.
[518] Bergner, *Um der Sache*, p. 340. A point, it should be noted, taken with seriousness by David Gibson in his *Reading the Decree. Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth* (London: T&T Clark, 2009).
[519] Bergner, *Um der Sache*, pp. 340-341.

critical capacity is retained not only in the public confession by the church of the canon, but also in the peremptory authority of the biblical author as one's neighbour. This is how Barth may be best understood when he speaks of the Scripture Principle taking the 'the form of a living theological *praxis*'.[520]

In this vein, while I have sought to highlight some thematic consistencies across these texts, this should not obscure the variety, particularly biblical, of matters to which Barth gave his attention. One of the difficulties, as well as the rewards, of immersing oneself in Barth's theology is its scope. This scope is not, however, a matter of obsessive curiosity but of a focused attention. Barth's reading is in its own way quite limited: Scripture and the classic texts of the Christian theological tradition. Yet within those relatively narrow parameters Barth was no dilettante, but rather, as we have seen, read deeply on the assumption that his reading took place within a moral and spiritual reality in which his actions were implicated. He thus had an obligation, to the Bible pre-eminently, and church tradition derivatively, that could not be laid aside.

This accounts for why Barth returns to the *effortful* nature of exegesis. This is not restricted to–though does not deny–the intellectual effort of reading, but extends to the moral and spiritual challenge such reading poses. These demands are simply a feature of faithful obedience to God, and so it a necessity for theologians and ordinary Christians alike to submit themselves in an iterative fashion to biblical texts. The authority of Scripture is therefore less a re-affirmation of the truth of the Bible's content than it is a claim about the kind of relation that can exist between God and humanity because of the mission of Jesus Christ. It is the way in which the Bible involves the Christian in the double movement of the Christian life, against one's own sin and towards the promised redemption, that is most attractive about Barth's account.

Such a description of authority would be limited if it were only morally and spiritually salutary. The other part of what I have shown is how Barth, from the beginning of the period under review, sought to ground the authority of Scripture not in the experience of reading or the morally superior nature of its content but in the reality of God's acts that are not ambiguous, but definite. If Barth did not always articulate this point with sufficient consistency, the basic conviction was always present. Christian thought is bounded by scriptural limits because it is finally oriented towards a reality that is outside of it. Readings

[520] *TrB,* p. 85 ET, p. 52.

of Barth that find in his thought an invitation to an endlessly open ended reading fall afoul of just this point.

What then is to be done 'after Barth'? Here to, I can only reiterate the call to continued study of Barth's exegetical texts, both on their own and in connection with his and other's work. This is also to hope for the publication of the remaining exegetical lectures in the *Gesamtausgabe* and, in time, their appearance in English translation.[521] This study has also sought to draw attention to the crosscurrents of Barth's constructive dogmatic thought and his exegesis, though this was possible in only a limited way. This task, both in his earlier writing, and in the *Church Dogmatics*, remains largely open.[522] I have also touched on some conceptual issues on which Barth offers some original and challenging contributions that invite further study. Chief among these is authority. It is widely agreed that one of the legacies of modernity has been the dismantling of not only traditional structures of authority, but of authority as a morally and intellectually attractive relation in the first place. Revisionist minded historians and critics of modernity, such as Charles Taylor and Alasdair MacIntyre, have questioned both the actual success of the Enlightenment attack on authority and its desirability, yet we lack much constructive theological reflection on the topic. As far as I can tell, there has been no major work on the subject in Protestant circles done in English since P.T. Forsyth's *The Principle of Authority*, originally published in 1913.[523] More proximal to this study, while there is not a dearth of work on biblical authority, as Michael Rea has recently pointed out, it is routinely equivocated with the question of biblical truth.[524] This constrains a far more morally rich concept to a fairly narrow set of noetic questions. While these epistemic questions are not without importance to Barth, one of the things I have sought to highlight is how much more expansive and suggestive his treatment of the topic is.[525]

In conclusion, there are at least two ways a thinker might be considered by those who follow after. On the one hand, they might evaluate specific proposals for their cogency and

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[521] In the latter stages of the writing of this thesis, this cause was aided by the publication of Ross M. Wright's translation of the Ephesians lectures, see the Introduction.
[522] The major exceptions being the works by Bourgine and Bergner mentioned in the introduction.
[523] See P.T. Forsyth, *The Principle of Authority*[2] (London: Independent Press, 1952). The situation in philosophical circles is not much better, as Linda Zagzebski makes clear in her *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: OUP, 2012). Some the most sophisticated contemporary discussions of authority are, perhaps unsurprisingly, to be found in the philosophy of law, particularly in the work of Joseph Raz and the debates around his theories. See e.g. Raz, *The Authority of Law*. *Essays on Law and Morality* (Oxford: OUP, 1979).
[524] Michael C. Rea, 'Authority and Truth', in *Enduring Authority*, pp. 872-898.
[525] This point is missed by Timothy Ward's treatment of Barth, who criticises him for lacking 'an intelligible theological or ontological link between God's action and the Bible'. See Ward, *Word and Supplement* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 106-130, esp. p. 124.

truth. On the other, they might reflect on thinker's conception of their intellectual task, and how they pursued it. These forms of evaluation are not mutually exclusive, and both may be done together. But for a theologian like Barth, the success of the first kind of evaluation will always be impoverished if the latter is not taken seriously. This is because Barth always operates with the awareness that the task he is pursuing is not, in the end, an independent or voluntary one, but one to which it is possible to be summoned and to which one may owe obedience. Without uncritically recommending this understanding of theology, or the moral and spiritual reality it presupposes, it is to say that to ignore this aspect of Barth's thinking is to do violence to his thought.

I take it that not only his exegetical judgments, but also his understanding of the exegetical task, is therefore integral to evaluating Barth's work. As the title and epigraph of this study suggests, there is a pathos to Barth's reading of the Bible. This pathos is not a new phenomenon in Christian thought, though the context of late modernity in which Barth operated may have sharpened its bite. One of the remarkable things about Barth's exegesis, and his theology as a whole, is he neither attempted to relieve himself of this pathos, nor did he take it as fate. As he said at the end of his lectures on John: 'Offensive because of its insistence on the *one* note. Attend: the one between God and humanity. Audible only when one hears it for one's self. Suffering must be great, so that one can hear. And grace must be great. In this sense begins exegesis.'[526]

[526] *JE,* p. 398.

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