THE CONTRIBUTION OF KARL BARTH TOWARD THE FORMULATION OF AN EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fufillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

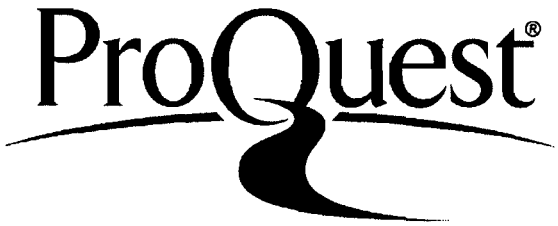
Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

William Terrell Chandler III

May 2010



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

APPROVAL SHEET

THE CONTRIBUTION OF KARL BARTH TOWARD

THE FORMULATION OF AN EVANGELICAL

THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

William Terrell Chandler III

Read and Approved by:

Bruce A. Ware (Chairperson)

David L. Puckett

Stephen J. Wellum

Date May 14, 2010

To Mom and Dad,

to whom I will always be grateful for

their patience and unconditional love,

and to

Dr. David L. Puckett and

Dr. Bruce A. Ware

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

This work is but a small pebble dropped into what appears to be a large body of material now being produced on the subject of Karl Barth's relationship to Evangelical thought. In light of that reality, this product will barely create a ripple. Only in recent years have many Evangelical scholars come to understand the positive contribution Barth's theology can make to the effort of those who seek to protect and defend the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3). As an American Evangelical, I welcome this development. To venture into the massive theological edifice of Barth's thought is both an exhilarating and a frustrating journey. Yet it consistently remains an adventure and, more often than not, a blessing. Even now, the journey continues. I will always remain grateful to Drs. R. Albert Mohler, Daniel L. Akin, and David L. Puckett, who introduced me to the fundamental tenets of Barth's theology many years ago.

Dr. Bruce A. Ware has served as my supervising professor for master's and doctoral studies since the first semester he arrived on The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary campus. That was more than a decade ago. He never abandoned his faith and confidence in me. His encouragement, grace, kindness, and intellect have exercised an influence on me that is greater than I can ever express adequately to him.

William T. Chandler III

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2010

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Christian theological landscape in recent decades has become dotted with a plethora of proposals for constructing a theology of "religions." Although many Christian theologians throughout history have been intrigued by communities whose religious practices differ from those found in Christianity, a massive influx of Buddhist, Taoist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions (to name of few) onto the European and North American continents have somewhat refocused the subjects of discussion in the theological arena. A brief introduction to the theologies of religion produced in the last few years will demonstrate that there are a number of divergent and complex points of view.[1] During this time the various viewpoints have generally fallen into one of three distinct typologies—exlusivist, inclusivist and pluralist. These respective typologies, however, are not now as precise and descriptive as they once were.[2] Theologies of religion are generally grounded in soteriological questions concerning the salvation and

---

[1]Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 2. Knitter's work is perhaps the most comprehensive survey to date of the various attempts to construct a theology of religions.

[2]Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 25. Yong admits that "there are many stripes of inclusivists and exclusivists, as there are pluralists or relativists" when it comes to theories of religion. Due to the developing complexity of views found in the threefold scheme, Knitter prefers to describe the positions as models of "Replacement" (exclusivism), "Fulfillment" (inclusivism), "Mutuality" (pluralism), and "Acceptance" (a mixture of viewpoints found in the other respective models). See Knitter, *Introducing Theologies*, 19-237.

final destiny of persons of faiths other than Christianity. The formulation of respective theologies of religion within academic circles has for the most part been conducted by theologians and philosophers who ascribe to either a pluralist (many paths to the one Real)[3] or inclusivist[4] (One fulfills the many) perspectives. Christian traditionalists (including most American "evangelical" theologians) who affirm that salvation is found only in a person's direct profession of faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord have been more reluctant to develop a theology of religions although there are some notable efforts.[5]

The doctrine of the Trinity has recently found an important place in theological discussion concerning religions.[6] A primary architect of the contemporary revival of trinitarian doctrine is Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner. The German scholar's famous axiom that the "economic" Trinity is the "immanent" Trinity and the "immanent"

---

[3]John Hick and Paul F. Knitter are usually seen as the leading proponents of this position. They advocate a pluralistic "theocentrism" which affirms that there is epistemic parity in every religious viewpoint. Salvation, therefore, is available to persons of different faiths in the same sense that sunlight hits all persons without prejudice. Some of their representative works include John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); idem, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).

[4]Karl Rahner and several post-Vatican II Roman Catholic theologians must be seen as the pioneers of inclusivistic "christocentrism," which states that while salvation is ontologically secured through the person and work of Christ, this salvation "light" (John 1:9) can be mediated to persons in other religions who have never heard or understood the gospel. Persons of other faiths, therefore, can become "anonymous Christians." See Rahner's famous essay, "Anonymous Christians," in *Theological Investigations: Concerning Vatican Council II*, vol. 6, trans. by Karl and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 390-98.

[5]Harold Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); idem, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Millard Erickson, *How Shall They Be Saved? The Destiny of Those Who Do Not Hear of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996). John G. Stackhouse, Jr., ed., *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) is one attempt to move toward constructing an evangelical theology of religions.

[6]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Rowan Williams, "Trinity and Pluralism" in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 167-80; three essays by Williams, D'Costa and Christoph Schwöbel, respectively, devoted to issues involving the Trinity and religious pluralism in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 3-46.

Trinity is the "economic" Trinity has gained wide acceptance in modern theological circles.[7] In brief, "Rahner's Rule" affirms that humans know and experience the triune being of God through God's acts in the history of salvation. God, in Rahner's thought, communicates to us not in terms of unity but as trinity in the economy of salvation because the divine "processions" and the self- relations between the three persons (Father, Son, and Spirit) "are the same as his relations to us; his processions are his missions."[8]

Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity is grounded in his theological anthropology which, in turn, is the "heart" of his theological method as a whole.[9] He attempts to hold together what appear to be two "contradictory" premises: the universal, saving action of the Holy Spirit and, on the other hand, the necessity of supernatural revelation and faith in Jesus Christ.[10] In order for his two premises to hold, Rahner develops the concept that revelation and faith occur at a universal, transcendental level. In other words, humans are always by nature open to God who is the "incomprehensible and ineffable Mystery," and who allows experience of the self and the world to also be an experience of God.[11] Rahner keeps a close correlation between nature and grace. For Rahner actual nature is never "pure" nature but, rather, is installed with a supernatural grace that permits every

---

[7]Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. by Joseph Donceel (New York: Crossroad Herder, 2002), 22.

[8]John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27.

[9]Gary Badcock, "Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Religious Pluralism," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 144.

[10]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 190.

[11]Karl Rahner, "Experience of Self and Experience of God," in *Theological Investigations: Theology, Anthropology, Christology*, vol. 13, trans. by David Bourke (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975), 123-25.

person to be open to God's revelation and salvation.[12] Since humans are by nature "spirit," they are recepients of God's absolute self-communication of himself to the "innermost constitutive element" of their being.[13]

God's self-communication of supernatural grace (*potentia oboedientalis*) to each person means neither the Holy Spirit nor saving grace is exclusive to the Church alone, but gives all humans the potentiality of knowing and loving God. It is from this pneumatological insight that Rahner establishes his doctrine of the "anonymous Christian." Rahner clearly affirms that Jesus Christ is the "absolute saviour" of every person who finds redemption by virtue his being the goal of humanity and prime demonstration of God's love.[14] Christ, by his resurrection from the dead, has established this concrete claim to absoluteness and mediates a "new and unsurpassable closeness of God" to humanity.[15] Christ's death and resurrection mean that God's gracious self-communication via the Holy Spirit has become manifest in history and human experience. Persons of non-Christian faiths and, in some instances, even those who espouse atheism may be regarded as accepting Christ and possess "implicit" faith if they accept this mystery of supernatural grace and undertake in their lives "the duty of each day in the quiet sincerity of patience, in devotion to his material duties and the demands made upon him by the persons in his care."[16] Rahner's anonymous Christianity takes on

---

[12]Karl Rahner, "Nature and Grace," in *Theological Investigations: More Recent Writings*, vol. 4, trans. by Kevin Smyth (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 183.

[13]Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, trans. by William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 116-26.

[14]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), 35.

[15]Rahner, *Foundations*, 279.

[16]Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," 394.

a strong ethical dimension. The human experience of love of neighbor is understood by Rahner as reflecting a genuine love of God.[17] This is true for persons of other faiths whenever they posit "a positively moral act" of their own volition since "this act is a positive supernatural salvific act in the actual economy of salvation even when its *a posteriori* object and the explicitly given *a posteriori* motive did not spring tangibly from the positive revelation of God's Word but are in this sense 'natural.'"[18] Non-Christian religions, although mixed with truth and error, are not to be deemed as preparatory practices for receiving Christ but can be recognized as *lawful* (although in different degrees) because each contains supernatural, grace-filled elements that are given by God on the account of Christ.[19]

The Evangelical Response

Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen are three Evangelical theologians who reject the traditional exclusivist model and are making significant contributions to the theologies of religion discussion.[20] Pinnock serves as the pioneering

---

[17]Karl Rahner, "Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbor and the Love of God," in *Theological Investigations: Concerning Vatican Council II*, vol. 6, trans. by Karl-H. Kruger and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969), 234-36, 247-48. A strong rebuttal to Rahner's conclusions is provided by Paul D. Molner, "Love of God and Love of Neighbor in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth," *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (October 2004): 567-99. Molnar believes Rahner's theological anthropology affirms the idea that human self-acceptance defines what it means for one to be a Christian. It is unneccesary, therefore, for one to have explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and his work.

[18]Ibid., 239.

[19]Karl Rahner, "Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions," in *Theological Investigations: Later Writings*, vol. 5, trans. by Karl-H. Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966), 121.

[20]Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); idem, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 95-123; idem, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996); Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*; idem, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); idem, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic,

theological voice for inclusivist soteriology within the evangelical community. He is, first, committed to the universal accessibility of salvific grace through general revelation.[21] Second, he gives priority to pneumatogical universality (the global operation of the Holy Spirit) over Christological particularity concerning human knowledge of God.[22] Third, he resists the classic "filioque" doctrine in order to affirm the dual missions of the Son and Spirit in work of salvation.[23] Fourth, the attribute of love is God's primary attribute in Pinnock's theology.[24] Finally, he finds an authenticating work of the Spirt in other religions that is evaluated by a set of ethical criteria.[25] In other words, the Spirit is at work in the lives of persons of other faiths when they display the characteristics of Jesus Christ even though they have no knowledge of Christ.

Yong, a theologian nutured in the Pentecostal faith, seeks to develop a theology of religions from a distinct pneumatological approach. He credits his encounter with Pinnock's work as being the catalyst for his theological engagement with non-Christian faiths from an "evangelical" perspective.[26] Yong is convinced that Evangelicals are at an impasse in the formulation of a theology of religions because

---

2005); Terrance Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

[21]Pinnock, *Wideness*, 18-35, idem, "An Inclusivist View," 98-100. I am grateful to Stephen Wellum for the following insights concerning Pinnock's pneumatology and a theology of religions.

[22]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 63, 187.

[23]Ibid., 32, 194, 196-97. Pinnock assumes Rahner's axiom that the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa.

[24]Ibid., 29-31.

[25]Ibid., 200-11; Pinnock, *Wideness*, 96-106. The influence of Rahner's theology in Pinnock's thought can be detected in the aforementioned citations.

[26]Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 32-33.

previous proposals have assumed a Christological approach in addressing the salvation of non-Christians before embracing either a exclusivist or inclusivist position.[27] He does not wish to dismiss the importance of Christology in the formulation task but he feels that a pneumatological starting point may advance the discussion. While committed personally to soteriological inclusivism, Yong believes any new proposal must move beyond issues that are soteriological in nature and adopt an approach that will assist Christians in discovering where the Holy Spirit works within the framework of non-Christian religious practices.[28] The Christological question, then, would be merely postponed until the importance of Christology and pneumatology was understood within a broader trinitarian framework.[29]

Tiessen offers from a modified Reformed perspective a proposal for the salvation of some persons who have no explicit knowledge of Christ due to their never having been confronted with the gospel message. Working within the Reformed tradition, Tiessen is a committed Calvinist who sees salvation as being a "monergistic" work of God.[30] He does affirm, however, that there exists a universal salvific revelation and that God graciously makes himself known to every person in a way that is sufficient

---

[27]Ibid., 27-29; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 33-58.

[28]Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 22.

[29]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 58. Yong's pneumatological model is guided by three controlling axioms. First, God is "universally present and active in the Spirit." This means the Christian must investigate the ways the triune God is present in the cosmos, in nature, in human history, and human experience. Second, "God's Spirit is the life-breath of the imago Dei in every human being and the presupposition of all human relationships." In other words, every human engagement with the "other"—whether it be other human beings, the world, or the divine—is pneumatologically mediated. Third, "the religions of the world, like everything else, are providentially sustained by the Spirit of God for divine purposes." Yong, therefore, dismisses the *a priori* assumption that non-Christian religions are devoid of divine presence and activity. See Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 44-46.

[30]Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 19. This Calvinist position is opposed to the "synergist" position that posits that salvation comes about through a cooperative effort of God and human beings. Pinnock and Yong can be classified as synergists when it comes to the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

for salvation which requires only a faith response from the individual to whom such revelation is given.[31] Tiessen maintains that a person's conversion only comes about through the inner work and testimony of the Holy Spirit but that God, as in the Old Testament period, may accept the faith and sacrifice of some non-Christians because of the Spirit's work in their life.[32] His modified Calvinistic proposal states that a universal "enabling" grace that is given to every individual is grace that justly condemns those persons who fail to respond in faith.

It is for this reason that Tiessen does not accept the claim that divine enabling grace must always accompany the proclamation of the gospel.[33] While there is no salvation to be found in other religions, Tiessen, who promotes an "accessibilist" position concerning the salvation of the unevangelized,[34] maintains that God's grace can be at work in the "formation and development" of other religions and that the Holy Spirit, in spite of the false practices of other faiths, can use certain aspects of non-Christian teaching, tradition, and religious experience (that accord with God's self-revelation in the world) to draw certain persons to saving faith.[35] Furthermore, he is open to the possibility that unevangelized persons who accept the Spirit-implanted "seed" of faith will move toward receiving Christ at some point in their spiritual journey even if that encounter with the Savior occurs at the moment of death.[36]

---

[31]Ibid., 105-13; 120-22.

[32]Ibid., 172.

[33]Ibid., 240.

[34]Accessibilism seeks to find a middle path between exclusivism and inclusivism.

[35]Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 393.

[36]Ibid., 379.

Statement of the Problem

Theologian and philosopher Harold Netland admits that with a few notable exceptions, evangelicals have been "reticent" to develop an adequate theology of religions.[37] Netland notes that although there are a variety of issues and themes that need to be addressed in an Evangelical theology of religions, such a proposal should attempt to explain the "phenomenon of human religiosity itself."[38] I agree with Netland that such an issue must be addressed but I am also convinced that recent Evangelical attempts to discern the presence of God's grace and self-revelation in other faiths gives an unbalanced and unbiblical emphasis to human experience. This dissertation addresses how Karl Barth's theological insights concerning the work of the Holy Spirit and the phenomenon of religion can assist Evangelicals in constructing a more balanced understanding of God's presence in non-Christian faith practices and avoids grounding discernment of such presence in religious experience alone.[39]

---

[37]Netland, *Encountering Religious Pluralism*, 308-09.

[38]Ibid., 331.

[39]There is mixed theological reception to Barth's thought in the history of American Evangelicalism. Those Evangelical theologians who can be rightly or loosely defined as opponents of Barth's method include Cornelius Van Til, Gordon H. Clark, Louis Berkhof, Fred Klooster and Carl F. H. Henry. Evangelical theologians who desire to do "critical" interaction with Barth's theology are Donald G. Bloesch and Gerrit C. Berkouwer. Evangelical thinkers who have made enthusiastic appropriation of certain aspects of Barth's theology include Bernard Ramm, Geoffrey Bromiley, Donald Dayton and Thomas F. Torrance. The three primary surveys of North American Evangelical response to Barth are provide by Gregory G. Bolich, *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980); Richard Albert Mohler, Jr., "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989); Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995). Thorne's study offers the most extensive look at the reception and interpretation of Barth's work across the historical landscape of Evangelicalism. His work is intended to build on Mohler's scholarly effort. Thorne notes that Bolich's intention is for Barth's work to serve as "model and guide" for the "renewal and reform" of Evangelical theology. See Thorne, *Evangelicalism*, xviii. Several contemporary Evangelical theologians find concrete "evangelical" principles in Barth's theology. See Sung Wook Chung, "Karl Barth's Evangelical Principles: Reformation Legacy," in *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology: A Dynamic Engagement*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 195-212. Kurt Anders Richardson, *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) is a work that sees the *Church Dogmatics* as useful for theological formulation in the present-day American context.

Thesis

Foundational to the argument is that Barth's doctrine of the person and work of the Holy Spirit can serve as a corrective to current Evangelical attempts to formulate a theology of religions.[40] The dissertation will argue for the claim that an Evangelical theology of religions should affirm Barth's conviction that it is the Holy Spirit who directs an individual subjectively to seek God in Christ. Knowledge of the triune God, for Barth, is found only in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Although Christ is the objective revelation of God, the knowledge of God in Christ which is necessary for salvation can only be subjectively appropriated through the work of the Spirit.[41]

The dissertation will further contend that present Evangelical efforts to formulate a theology of religions often do not properly distinguish within the economy of salvation the work of the Holy Spirit in making Christ objectively known from an "ethical" criterion where human acts of love, justice and compassion by non-Christians is often cited as evidence of implicit saving faith.[42] This approach produces theological claims which affirm the possibility of supernatural salvific grace for some persons who have no direct knowledge of Jesus Christ since an *a priori* knowledge of God is found not

---

[40]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 236-57, is a recent attempt to apply certain elements in Barth's theology to the formulation of an Evangelical understanding of other faiths.

[41]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 242-79. Subsequent references to this multi-volume work will be designated by *CD* followed by specific volume, part, and page number reference.

[42]Pinnock, Yong and Tiessen each affirm a the central role of the Holy Spirit in effecting salvation, although each may differ in how they understand the Spirit's role. Each affirms salvation is grounded in the atoning work of Christ and that some knowledge of God is necessary for salvation. Yet all three agree that the salvific work of the Holy Spirit can occur apart from an explicit knowledge of the person and work of Christ.

only in nature but, more importantly, through human moral actions. The dissertation argues that such formulations, whether intentional or unintentional, serve to blur the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity in the doctrine of salvation.[43] Barth refuses to collapse the immanent into the economic Trinity because to do so would mean that Christ could be known implicitly through human action rather that explicitly through the revealing power of the Holy Spirit.[44] The models of Pinnock, Yong and Tiessen presuppose a universal "prevenient" grace or universal "sufficient" grace that enables persons to respond freely to God's self-revelation by faith through a personal experience of God's Spirit apart from objective knowledge of the Son. In other words, one may implicitly experience reconciliation with God without explicit acceptance of Jesus Christ as savior and Lord.

The argument of this thesis is intended as a contribution to Evangelical theological engagement with other religions and advocates utilizing particular insights that can be found Barth's pneumatology. It is important to state that this is a selective endorsement and appropriation of particular elements in Barth's thought and does not suggest that Evangelicals as a whole are comfortable with Barth's approach to every doctrine. Barth's stance concerning the reach of divine election and justification, as well as his rejection of any form of general revelation, as presented later, appears problematic to some traditional Evangelical convictions on these subjects. This work also does not

---

[43]Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 27-59. Molnar surveys a number of modern trinitarian approaches but reserves particular criticism for Rahner's approach on this respective point. Molnar's contribution to the debate builds on an earlier work where he critiques and criticizes Rahner's transcendential approach to revelation. Idem, *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper: A Systematic Investigation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996).

[44]John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 29-30. Barth affirms the Western trinitarian teaching of the *Filioque*.

suggest that Barth himself would necessarily endorse or apply all the suggestions offered here as relates to the final formulation of an Evangelical theology of religions model. Barth's aversion to natural theology, in fact, prevented him from embracing the Reformed doctrine of common grace that might have proven helpful in his contention that God's grace encompasses creation, providence, reconciliation and redemption, as well as all human existence. Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck's theology of common grace will be introduced later in support of the thesis and will serve as a corrective to Barth's problematic dismissal of any recognizable vestige of divine revelation in nature or human culture.

Barth's work, however, proves to be an interesting partner in the conversation on how Evangelicals should theologically engage other religions. It will be shown that human experience, in Barth's thought, cannot reveal God because only God can reveal God. The Holy Spirit, in Barth's theology, does not work to effect salvation that consists of "religious experiences, renewed dispositions, or new modes of being in the world."[45] The saving activity of the Spirit, rather, is always Christ-centered in focus.[46] Salvation is by grace and is explicitly tied to knowledge of God in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, and not to a form of transcendental experience or an innate obediential potency within the individual. The Spirit summons sinners to believe in Jesus Christ, to

---

[45]George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 158.

[46]Ibid., 182. Eberhard Busch notes that Barth clearly repudiates "the idea that there is a revelation of the Spirit separate from the revelation of Christ, whose content is something new and totally different from the revelation of Christ." Idem, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Gruder and Judith J. Gruder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 223. For Barth separating the Spirit from Christ led to the Spirit being absorbed into the human spirit.

acknowledge him, to know him, and *confess* him as Lord.[47] It is the intent of this study to show that dissertation's thesis can give assistance to the continuing development of a biblical and confessional theology of religions from an Evangelical perspective.

Karl Barth's Contribution to the Present Issue

Scholars as a whole have given relatively little attention to Barth's thought concerning religions and Christianity's relationship to them. The works that address the aforementioned subject, however, are interesting and creative. J. A. Veitch concludes that the dialectical nature of revelation and religion in Barth's theology is a prominent theme throughout the *Church Dogmatics.*[48] It is Veitch's belief that the negative side of the dialectic concerning religion emerges in the first volume of Barth's work while positive dimension is revealed in volume four.

Barth never constructed a formal theology of religions but, instead, attacked the concept of religion itself because he believed it to be a human attempt to establish a relationship with God apart from revelation.[49] Barth sees the idea of religion as grounded in a natural theology that seeks through human reason to establish knowledge of God outside his revelation in Jesus Christ.[50] Religion can only be rectified and redeemed

---

[47]Thompson, *The Holy Spirit*, 134. Thompson's work is perhaps the most comprehensive study by a Protestant theologian of Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. A detailed analysis of Barth's pneumatology from a Roman Catholic perspective is provided by Philip J. Rosato, *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981). Rosato notes that Barth argues that it is "the work of the God's Spirit, God's own Noetic, who brings man to a new metaphysical state by introducing him to Jesus Christ, God's ontic self-revelation." Ibid., 72.

[48]J. A. Veitch, "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (February 1971): 20-21.

[49]J. A. DiNoia, "Religion and the Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 244.

[50]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1:63-178. This marks Barth's most detailed polemic against natural theology.

when it is taken up (*Aufhebung*) into divine grace and witnesses to the genuine reality of God found in the incarnation.[51] Christianity is the true religion, not because it is intrinsically better than other religions, but only because it has been elected, created, and justified by Jesus Christ and witnesses exclusively to his grace and truth.[52]

Although Barth sees non-Christian religions as human attempts to apprehend divine grace and not genuine responses to divine revelation (which is centered in the life, death and resurrection of Christ), these religions may contain "true words" or act as "parables of the kingdom" that point to the one true Word of God or true "light" that has reconciled the world to himself.[53] If the cosmos is the "theater of God's glory" and the created world reflects the light of the one true light, then faiths other than Christianity witness to this reality "in spite of themselves."[54] The reconciliation of humanity to God means that non-Christians are among those for whom Christ died and for whom the promise of hope applies but who do not yet acknowledge him as Lord or who do not accept or realize the relationship Jesus has established with them.[55]

Peter Harrison believes Barth's criticisms of religion must be read in context (as a polemic against nineteenth-century emphasis on religion) and that "no single doctrine" can be regarded as normative for interpreting the Swiss theologian's position on

---

[51]Ibid., *CD*, vol. 1, *The Word of God*, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (1956), pt. 2: 325-61.

[52]Garrett Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 4 (October 1995): 481-82. Geoffrey Thompson, "Christianity and World Religions: The Judgement of Karl Barth," *Pacifica* 7 (June 1994): 198-99.

[53]Barth, *CD*, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (1961), pt. 3.1:110-23, 139. These are good and true words "that may be spoken *extra muros ecclesiae* either by those "who have not yet received any effective witness to Jesus Christ" or "more or less admitted Christians" who are not part of the confessing community.

[54]Ibid., 18. Thompson, "Barth and World Religions," 196-98.

[55]Veitch, "Revelation and Religion," 18-19.

religion and religions.[56] Barth holds, in Harrison's opinion, a positive view of religions and a soteriology that is inclusive rather than exclusive since Barth affirmed an incipient universalism based on the objective work of Jesus Christ where persons are saved "in spite of" their religions.[57] Harrison does not see Barth among the ranks of Christian exclusivists and believes the Basel theologian allowed for "the possibility that the non-Christian religions participate in the history of God's salvation" via Christ's reconciliation of the world.[58] Paul Chung also finds Barth's universal Christology (Christ's humanity as representative of the *enhypostatis* of the human race) as supportive of religious pluralism's argument that no person is separated from God.[59] Barth's "parables" of truth in fact, according to Chung, acknowledge pluralistic claims to divine revelation. Neither Harrison nor Chung, however, devote attention to Barth's discussion of the work of the Holy Spirit that may serve to undermine certain claims in their arguments.

Brian David Anderson's doctoral dissertation compares and contrasts how Barth, Rahner, and Wilfred Cantwell Smith approach the question of divine revelation and its effect on the relationship of Christianity to the non-Christian religions.[60] Barth's

---

[56]Peter Harrison, "Karl Barth and the Non-Christian Religions," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1986): 214-15.

[57]Ibid., 220.

[58]Ibid., 223.

[59]Paul Chung, "Karl Barth and Inter-Religious Dialogue: An Attempt to Bring Karl Barth to Dialogue with Religious Pluralism," *Asia Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (October 2001): 238-39.

[60]Brian David Anderson, "The Locus and Effect of Divine Revelation Among Non-Christian Religions: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Wilfred Cantwell Smith" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991). There are other detailed studies of Barth's concept of religion and how he understood the existence of Christianity in light of the practices of other religions. Such examples include Allan Wesley Loy, "The Theological Interpretation of the Relation of Christianity to Other Religions" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1963); Osgood Darby Cannon III, "The Concept of Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1975). These works,

approach to non-Christian faiths is examined from an exclusivistic paradigm of Christocentric revelation that is, at best, limited. Anderson traces the development of the concept of revelation in Barth's thought from its earliest stages. He demonstrates that in the second edition of the *Romans* commentary Barth hinted at the possibility of general revelation among non-Christians but that this view is revised significantly in the *Church Dogmatics*. Due to his great distaste for natural theology, Barth's adoption of the analogy of faith for knowledge of God over against an analogy of being means that true faith comes only by an encounter with the preached "Word of Christ." For Barth, since only God can reveal God this means that there can be no mediated form of revelation. God has determined that the objective form of revelation is Jesus Christ and the subjective appropriation of that revelation is the work of the Holy Spirit. This means that non-Christian faiths and all religious systems are eliminated from the possibility of receiving non-cognitive or inferior forms of revelation.

Anderson prefers Barth's method among the three models that are analyzed, but is critical of Barth's imprecise definition of the nature of non-Christian knowledge of God. He acknowledges that while Barth appears to limit revelation to the Word, the Swiss theologian did not close the door completely to revelation outside the Christian circle of faith. Anderson briefly discusses Barth's concept of "other lights," "parables of truth," or words of truth spoken outside the Bible or the church.[61] In the latter years of

---

however, do not address Barth's position as it relates to the contemporary development of soteriological inclusivism and pluralism.

[61]The most extensive discussion of "secular parables of truth" outside the *Dogmatics* is given by George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 234-80. Hunsinger notes that these human words outside the church are "invested and adorned, miraculously (by Christ), with a capacity they do not intrinsically possess." Ibid., 234. John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 63-79, also gives good insight into Barth's understanding of how the prophetic office of Christ serves to enable true words to be uttered in a non-Christian context.

his thought, Barth appears to affirm that there is knowledge of God outside the Christian community that is not a product of natural theology. These truths or words spoken from the "outer circle" of the Christian center have no independent significance since they are a miraculous revelation of Jesus Christ, and they cannot contradict the Word. Despite the miraculous nature of these words of truth, they can only be "hinted at" in the wider circle beyond the center of Christian truth. The farther these truths stand from God's revelation in Christ, the less validity they possess. Barth, therefore, appears to remain vague concerning non-Christian revelation. While I agree with much of Anderson's analysis of Barth and affirm many of his conclusions, he does not address the developments in Barth's thought that might have led to his acknowledging such parables of truth. Further, Anderson does not touch on Barth's later discussion of God's cosmic revelation in the lecture fragments of the final volume of *Church Dogmatics*.[62] Given the parameters of his study, Anderson was unable to give extensive attention to how Barth's Christocentric method might actually affirm a universal, non-salvific revelatory presence of Christ in creation and demonstrate his providential Lordship over diverse non-Christian cultures. It is my intention to pursue such questions in the course of this research project.

Barth affirms Christ's "existence as such is that fact in which God and the world, however they may oppose and contradict one another, are not of course one and the same, but do exist together in an inviolable and indissoluble co-existence and conjunction."[63] The "self-witness" of God's ontological relationship with created humanity is given "irrespective" of whether the one to whom it is given knows it or

---

[62]Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, Lecture Fragments* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981).

[63]Barth, *CD* 4, pt.3.1:39-40.

ignores it.[64] It is an existence of grace whereby humanity is dependent on God's grace in every sphere of life.[65] But does not his claim of Christ as the great "light of life," Roland Chia asks, acknowledge, implicitly, "the concept of prevenient grace or universal, common grace?"[66] It would appear that Barth's indebtedness to neo-Kantian epistemology led him to mistake natural theology with the revelation of God in creation, a philosophical approach to knowledge that caused him to equate the latter with the former.[67]

Methodology

The person and work of the Holy Spirit has assumed a place of importance in certain Christian theologies of religions, particularly as it relates to the question of salvation for unevangelized peoples. The study will argue that failure to properly distinguish between between the immanent and economic dimensions of God's triune being, particularly as it relates to the work of the Holy Spirit in bringing persons to salvation, has resulted in the claim that true knowledge of God is ultimately grounded in human experience. Some Evangelicals have adopted the aforementioned claim into their theological epistemology. Barth's theology, despite its mixed reception in the Evangelical community, offers an important correction to current Evangelical proposals.

---

[64]Ibid., 4, pt.3.1:139.

[65]Roland Chia, *Revelation and Theology: The Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 242.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid., 243. Barth's doctrine of God consistently maintained the premise that the hidden and revealed nature of the Creator could never be the object of human speculation. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 49-68. McCormack's work details how Barth's early thought was shaped by a neo-Kantian approach to religious knowledge he adopted from his teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann.

The next chapter will discuss Karl Rahner's thought in relation to contemporary Evangelical attempts to formulate a theology of religions. Rahner's asserts that "the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity" and vice versa. Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christianity" is a direct product of his belief that the Holy Spirit imparts universal saving grace through supernatural revelation apprehended at a transcendental level. Grace for Rahner is God's self-communication through His Spirit to human existence and experience. Clark Pinnock appears to follow Rahner's view that there is a cosmic work of the Holy Spirit and that other religions, while mixed with truth and error, can provide avenues for communicating genuine salvific knowledge of God. Amos Yong, a Pentecostal theologian, also affirms a universal experience of the Spirit. Yong shuns building a theology of religions on Christology alone and advocates a pneumatological approach that does not subordinate the work of the Spirit to that of the Son. Reformed theologian Terrance Tiessen calls for Evangelicals to consider the prospect that there is a divine "accessibilism" to salvation possible for those who have never heard the gospel message. Tiessen argues for what he claims is a monergistic, "non-restrictivist" special work of the Spirit that produces a positive response to salvation in Christ, although those who respond may not have explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and His work. Each of the aforementioned Evangelical models affirms a bifurcation of the work of the Son and the Spirit in imparting genuine knowledge of God in order for a person of to receive salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3 will note that Barth makes a clear distinction, but not a separation, between the immanent and economic Trinity. Barth's trinitarian doctrine of revelation maintains that content of revelation cannot be separated from the form (Jesus Christ). The divine relations in the immanent Trinity remain immanent apart from the economy of

salvation. It is only the triune God who can reveal Himself as God, and He has chosen freely to do so in the incarnation. The doctrine of the Trinity is primary for Barth because it provides a distinctive Christian idea of God. Barth emphasizes that God's decision to reveal Himself is an act of pure grace since He is sovereign and under no obligation to do so. Jesus Christ is the genuine revelation of God who comes veiled in human flesh. The revealed Word of God reaches its highest expression in the incarnation. For Barth the Word of God revealed (Christ), the Word of God written (Scripture), and the Word of God proclaimed (preaching) serve as the "root" for the doctrine of the Trinity.

Chapter 4 will examine Barth's evaluation of the phenomenon of religion. For Barth religion is essentially an attempt by humanity to grasp God and mold Him into an image of their liking. It is therefore the great concern of godless human beings. His attack on the concept of religion first occurred in the *Epistle to the Romans*. "Religious" people (of all religions) attempt in and of themselves to have a relationship with God apart from revelation. Barth does not merely speak of Christianity's criticism of religions. He finds the Christian religion to be the worst form of unbelief if Christians do not realize that genuine revelation serves judgment upon all religion. True religion results not in its complete abolition (*Aufhebung*) but in its being preserved and justified by the revelation of Jesus Christ. The Christian religion, Barth believes, is true only by divine grace in that it was created in the name of Jesus Christ and does not exist as true apart from its relationship to Him. Barth's critique of natural theology parallels his attitude toward religion. Natural theology attempts to synthesize nature and grace and, thus, develop a pathway to knowledge of God apart from revelation. Barth's theology of revelation gives unconditional priority to specific over a general knowledge of God.

Natural theology reverses this priority.

Chapter 5 will focus on Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, particularly as it relates the saving knowledge of God. Jesus Christ is the objective revelation of God and the Holy Spirit is the *subjective* reality of that revelation. In other words, the Spirit directs and integrates human beings into the objective revelation of Christ. The chapter will show that Barth affirms a Christ-centered pneumatology. The Spirit provides no special revelation alongside that of the Son. The Holy Spirit, rather, always mediates the presence of Christ. Barth repudiates the idea that there is a revelation of the Spirit separate from the revelation of Christ, whose content is new and different from the revelation of Christ. Humans as sinners are guilty of equating their own spirit with the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Spirit has nothing to do with pouring a quality of grace into a person but, rather, works to free the person for God's revelation. The work of the Spirit consists in giving human beings genuine freedom to have God as their Lord. Barth does not deny a genuine human experience of the Spirit as long that experience is viewed in terms of God's activity in enabling a human to accept what Christ has done for them. Sinners are justified by the obedience of faith that acknowledges that God has acted for them in the person and work of Jesus Christ. This obedience is made possible only through the subjective work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings persons into the fellowship of the Christian community and prepares the community to serve as an active witness to the world that God has reconciled it to Himself in Christ.

Chapter 6 will detail Barth's attempt to explain how words of truth may be spoken outside the realms of the Bible and the Church. These words Barth describes as secular "parables" of truth. Jesus Christ as the one and only Word of God, asserts Barth, is alone the one and only light of life. All words of truth are judged in their relation to

the one Truth. Words of truth in the world, just as words spoken in the Bible and the Church, are wholly dependent as far as they coincide and agree with the Word spoken in Jesus Christ, and attest, reflect, and reproduce to the Word spoken. Although the Church cannot close her ears to the truth spoken outside her walls, she must test them by the witness of Scripture. While these words bear witness to truth, they are never to be equated with the Truth (Christ). These "other" lights to truth do not operate in autonomy alongside the one great Light. They cannot, however, be conceived of as outside the one great Light. The miracle of other lights is that they witness to Christ and Him alone. It is the capacity of Jesus Christ to "raise up of stones children of Abraham." Just as Christianty, the Bible, and the Church express genuine truth only because they are holistic manifestations of the one Truth, so it is with words spoken in the non-Christian world. Barth joins John Calvin in affirming that creation is the *theatrum gloriae Dei* because it is the location and setting of the mediation of the life and work of God Incarnate. Creation, in Barth's theology, can attest to God's glory because of Christ's work of reconciliation for the world. The self-witness of creation rests on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ who now rules over the wider realm of claims and practices outside the Christian faith.

Chapter 7 will demonstrate that despite the thesis's argument for giving an ear to Barth's thought, there are certain elements in his theology that weaken his influence among Evangelicals. Despite his rejection of nineteenth century theological liberalism, Barth appears to have never been able to shed a neo-Kantian epistemology that shapes his theology proper. His epistemology is directly tied to his view of God, and God's work in creation. The hidden and revealed nature of God means He can never be the object of human speculation. This is particularly true for Barth's Christology where the

revealedness and hiddenness of God contains Kantian phenomenal-noumenal distinctions. Barth's doctrine of divine reconciliation is also problematic in that he is perceived as embracing soteriological universalism—a charge he rejected consistently. It is only by Christ's reconciliation of the world that humans through faith may now recognize God's work in nature. Such an approach prevented Barth from developing a balanced theology of nature (over against a natural theology). Barth could not embrace the doctrine of God's common grace because he was never able to separate natural theology from the revelation of God in creation.

Chapter 8 will conclude the dissertation. Barth's denial of general revelation receives needed correction through the thought of Herman Bavinck. The Dutch theologian sees grace not as undoing nature or perfecting it, but as restoring it as God intended. It will then briefly sum up the content and reiterate the thesis's argument. The work will conclude by affirming that Barth's insights on the work of the Holy Spirit and his affirmation of Jesus Christ as the one Truth who makes revealed truth universally possible offers to Evangelicals assistance in formulating a theology of religions which finds its foundation in the Word who became flesh.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEMPORARY EVANGELICAL MODELS OF THEOLOGIES OF RELIGIONS

Recent decades witness to a renaissance of interest in theological circles related to the subject of pneumatology. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit, formerly perceived by many theologians to play a subordinate role to the Father and Son in theological discussions, is no longer the forgotten "Cinderella" of the Trinity.[1] This renewed interest in the Holy Spirit is found both in popular publications devoted to personal piety and corporate spirituality and in the diverse theological perspectives (liberation theology, process theology, feminist theology, etc.) located within the academy. Two reasons for the resurgent interest in pneumatology are, first, the rapid growth in the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and, second, a renewed acquaintance with the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of Trinity in ecumenical organizations such as the World Council of Churches.[2] In the meantime, evangelical theologians are beginning to recognize the importance of systematically formulating a theology of the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology has also come to play an important role in current evangelical attempts to construct a viable theology of religions. Perhaps no theologian in

---

[1]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 16. The author depicts the Holy Spirit staying home in Trinitarian doctrinal discussions while the two sisters (the Father and the Son) went to the ball.

[2]Ibid., 12.

the history of Christian thought has exercised greater influence in the theology of religions debate than Karl Rahner. This chapter will explore some leading contemporary models of theologies of religion beginning with Rahner's concept of divine revelation through transcendental human experience as it relates to Christianity's encounter with other faiths. It will be demonstrated that Rahner's axiom "the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity" exercises considerable influence in current evangelical reflection on how God's saving presence is discerned in non-Christian faiths. The work will then briefly survey the evangelical theology of religions models of Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen, and how these respective theologians appear to absorb selective insights found in Rahner's model.[3]

Karl Rahner

It would be difficult, according to Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "to name a theologian who has singularly influenced the contemporary discourse on religious pluralism" more than Rahner.[4] The German professor's ideas, which achieved a broad reading in the latter part of the twentieth century, continues to draw response from notable Christian and secular scholars in the academy as well as various representatives of the world's faiths. Some theologians have embraced certain tenets of Rahner's thought, particularly as it relates to the notion of a divine indwelling grace in nature that occurred in the creation event and how "humanity's common status in creation" makes an

---

[3]It should be noted that Rahner works with a complex ontological framework that neither Pinnock, Yong, nor Tiessen appear to adopt in their respective models. These three aforementioned Evangelical thinkers do come to some similar conclusions as Rahner concerning the salvation on the unevangelized without necessarily being dependent on Rahner's theology.

[4]Jeannine Hill Fletcher, "Rahner and Religious Diversity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 235.

individual a recipient of God's universal self-communication.[5] A basic outline of Rahner's thought concerning the transcendental human experience of God is provided in the opening chapter. Here the focus concerns how Rahner seeks to demonstrate that the triune God brings about implicit faith and salvation to many persons in a non-Christian environment.

There are two presuppositions that guide Rahner's thought concerning the role of Christ in non-Christian religions.[6] First, God's universal and supernatural saving will is present throughout the world. If the idea of transcendental revelation exists among non-Christians, this divine irrevocable self-communication to creation finds concrete historical expression in Jesus Christ. Second, when a non-Christian attains salvation through the acts of faith, hope, and love, the non-Christian religion can be said to play a role in the individual's justification and salvation. This is the reason human beings in "every conceivable historical and social situation of life . . . can have direct saving access to God without necessarily being required to leave [their] objective situation . . . in order to be able to discover the direct reality of God somewhere else."[7] How, then, is Christ present and operative in the faith of individual non-Christians?

---

[5]Ibid., 236-37.

[6]Karl Rahner, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978), 313-15. In chap. 5 of his work, Rahner affirms the possibility of a genuine revelation of history outside the Old and New Testaments. This presupposition is affirmed by the second Vatican Council.

[7]Karl Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, trans. David Morland (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979), 203. It should be noted that the notion of "anonymous Christians" and non-Christian religions as "legitimate" vehicles for acquiring salvation in Rahner's thought applies only in contexts in which persons have not had genuine expose to Christianity and the gospel message. In a Buddhist context, for example, once a person encounters the gospel then being an anonymous Christian for the Buddhist is no longer an option because they are obligated to become part of the church. I am grateful to Dr. Harold Netland for making this observation.

Christ is present, according to Rahner, by means of the Holy Spirit that can also be understood as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.[8] This concept of the Spirit is rooted in a transcendental Christology that sees in Jesus' humanity a "new and unsurpassable closeness to God."[9] For Christ to be the "absolute Savior" he must, of course, be both divine and human since only a divine Jesus can mediate to his own person the self-disclosure of God.[10] Although God's self-communication to creation began prior to the coming of Christ, the incarnation means the assumption of the human nature into the inner life of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and, thus, makes that self-communication concrete in history.[11] In other words, God willed that the transcendental nature of humanity make a place for the genuine self-expression of God in the form of humanity. The human being is incomplete without the incarnation. In Jesus, God has fully communicated the divine self and so has moved the cosmos closer toward the goal of complete redemption.[12] Christ thus can be called the absolute Savior in that he constitutes the "climax of God's self-communication to the world" by fulfilling the promise of God's self-communication to humanity and Christ's perfect acceptance of that divine self-communication.[13]

---

[8]Rahner, *Foundations*, 316. Rahner understands that traditional Christian dogma would also affirm that the Spirit of grace and justification proceeds from the Father and the Son and, thus, is present "in view of the merits of Christ."

[9]Ibid., 279.

[10]Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christology: A Global Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 142.

[11]Ibid., 144. It would appear for Rahner that the incarnation would have been necessary even if sin had never entered the world since Christ's person makes the self-communication of God's presence to humanity possible and gives opportunity for human participation in the divine nature.

[12]Rahner, *Foundations*, 193.

[13]Ibid., 195.

Rahner asserts that to believe that Christ's death changed the divine immutable will whereby God is influenced physically or morally to pour out the Spirit of grace on creation is a mistake.[14] God's free salvific will is the *a priori* cause of the incarnation and the cross. The incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection, rather, are events that serve the "final cause" of God's universal self-communication through the Spirit which is irreversible and historically tangible.[15] In other words, because Jesus is the historical mediation and final cause of this communication, then Spirit that is everywhere can said to be the Spirit of Christ.[16] The reverse is also true. The Spirit is the efficient cause of the incarnation and cross. Therefore, when the Spirit brings justifying faith to an individual practicing a non-Christian faith, this faith always comes to be in the Spirit of Jesus Christ who is present and active in all religions.[17]

Clark Pinnock

Pinnock, professor emeritus of theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, is noted among evangelicals for being one of the most prolific writers

---

[14]Ibid., 316-17. Rahner denies that Christ's sacrifice constitutes a substitutionary atonement that appeases divine wrath or serves as the cause of God's choosing to give salvific grace to humanity. Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," 208, 211.

[15]Ibid., 318. The cross for Rahner is has primarily a "sacramental" causality in that it mediates salvation to humanity by means of grace which is universally operative in the world. It is a sign of this grace and of its victorious activity in the world. Rahner, "The One Christ and the Universality of Salvation," 212.

[16]It should be noted that while Christology plays an important role in Rahner's thought, his theology might best be understood fundamentally as a theology of the Holy Spirit since God's self-communication to all persons is seen in pneumatological rather than Christological terms. Gary D. Badcock, "Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Religious Pluralism," in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 147-49.

[17]Ibid. Rahner here describes the justifying faith exercised by persons in non-Christian religions as "the searching memory of the absolute savior." Although non-Christians cannot be said to explicitly know or remember Christ, they have had a transcendental experience of hearing God's Word and have responded to it.

on a range of Christian doctrines.[18] He is considered to be one of the leading spokesmen for the Arminian wing of the evangelical community and, in the process, has become one of the most controversial figures among traditionalists within the movement. Pinnock's career can best be described as a theological "pilgrimage" that led him three decades ago to abandon his Calvinistic views and adopt a soteriology that emphasized the love and unlimited grace of God, his universal salvific will and the unlimited nature of Christ's atonement.[19] The Canadian Baptist theologian's uncompromising commitment to libertarian human freedom also drove him to make controversial revisions to his doctrine of Scripture[20] and God's absolute sovereignty over human affairs.[21] His affirmation of universal divine grace also prompted him to adjust his beliefs concerning the destiny of the unsaved[22] and the fate of unevangelized persons.[23] Furthermore, Pinnock's theological explorations have served to make him receptive to Pentecostalism's emphasis on charismatic renewal that celebrates the modern-day outpouring of the Holy Spirit. He

---

[18]Barry L. Callen, *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey toward Renewal* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2000), 273-84. The bibliography in Callen's work lists twenty one books Pinnock has either authored or edited. In addition, Pinnock has contributed at least one chapter to twenty seven respective works that have been edited by other persons. Callen's select list of journal articles by Pinnock contains twenty five entries.

[19]Clark H. Pinnock, "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology," in *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989), 15-29.

[20]Clark H. Pinnock, *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984).

[21]Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 141-62, and Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 101-25.

[22]Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William V. Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 135-66.

[23]Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

believes, in fact, that it is "the most important event in modern Christianity."[24]

The most comprehensive overview of Pinnock's theological vision is found in *Flame of Love* where he provides a systematic discussion of the Trinity, creation, christology, ecclesiology, soteriology, religions and truth from a pneumatological perspective. Departing from the traditional evangelical approach, Pinnock adopts an ecumenical attitude concerning issues relating to the Holy Spirit. He openly admits an affinity for many of the theological positions found in the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions.[25] Pinnock believes that truth concerning the Spirit is "scattered throughout segments of the divided church and ought to be gathered from anywhere and everywhere."[26] He is particularly critical of the Western tradition that, in his opinion, has "confined the Spirit to the margins of the church and subordinated it to the mission of the Son."[27] While claiming that his work is not a testimonial, Pinnock desires for evangelicals to become more open to identifying the Spirit's work in places and in ways that might not have been recognized previously.

Pneumatology for Pinnock is grounded in a social doctrine of the Trinity. The Spirit is "One who bonds the loving fellowship that God is and creates access to the Father through the Son (Eph 2:18). The Spirit reaches out to creatures, catches them up and brings them home to the love of God."[28] Pinnock's entire theology of the Spirit

---

[24]Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 18.

[25]Pinnock, *Wideness*, 74-75.

[26]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 18.

[27]Ibid., 10. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 78.

[28]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 21.

springs from this ontology. His understanding of God is one of "pure relationality" and the nature of God is a communion of loving persons who are "not static or standoffish" but reflect "sheer liveliness."[29] The Trinity is a communion of three persons who exist in mutual relations with one another. Each person is distinct from the others, but each is who they are in relation to the others. God exists in a dynamic of love, an economy of giving and receiving. Following Rahner's lead, Pinnock assumes that "the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity. The immanent Trinity (God in himself) is revealed by the economic Trinity (God in history), from which we learn that God is Father, Son and Spirit."[30] A key insight into the Trinitarian structure of the divine nature is found in the Gospels' narratives concerning the person and work of Jesus Christ. Here one finds that Jesus is "conscious of being the Son of God and proclaims the nearness of the kingdom of the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit."[31]

The personal and loving relationality between the three members of the social Trinity also determines God's relationship with humanity. The open, dynamic, loving relations of the Trinity signify that God is not an unchangeable and all-determining monarch, but rather One who invites human beings to join him in shaping the future. According to Pinnock, if God as social Trinity glories not in domination but in loving, then it was natural for him to create "a world that would reflect relationality back to him."[32]

---

[29]Ibid., 23.

[30]Ibid., 32.

[31]Ibid., 26.

[32]Ibid., 44.

Pinnock revises and expands Christian theology's traditional understanding of the role of the Spirit in creation. The Spirit's role is cosmic in breadth because he is present everywhere. He is "directing the universe toward it goal, bringing to completion first the creational and then the redemptive purposes of God."[33] There is no division, therefore, between the acts of creation and redemption. The goal of creation and redemption is the union of the creature with the Creator. There are two fundamental axioms Pinnock seeks to uphold concerning God's relationship to creation. The first is the "universality axiom" that affirms God's universal salvific will for all humanity and, second, the "particularity axiom" that stresses the finality of salvation through Jesus Christ, and that everyone who is saved is so through the person and work of the Son.[34] The power of love is at work in every part of the world, not just in the churches. The Spirit is moving nature and history "toward participation in the love of God, and the whole creation is caught up in it."[35] Since the Spirit prepares the way for Christ by gracing humanity everywhere, this preparatory work is done through a universal prevenient grace that "draws sinners to God and puts them on the path toward reconciliation."[36] The world, created by God through the Son, is also the result of the breathing of the Spirit. The Spirit, therefore, "mediates the presence of God and enables

---

[33]Ibid., 50.

[34]Daniel Strange, "Presence, Prevenience, or Providence? Deciphering the Conundrum of Pinnock's Pneumatological Inclusivism," in *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), 222.

[35]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 52.

[36]Ibid., 63. Clark Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 104.

the creature to participate in God."[37] Here Pinnock makes a distinction between subjective religion or faith, and an objective religion within which one might exercise faith in God. Since God calls on all persons to seek him whether they do so from within religion or outside it, then a person's "heart response and faith direction" toward God's presence is what is important, even if one has no explicit knowledge of Christ or the gospel message.[38] In fact, Daniel Strange suggests that Pinnock's "faith principle" or ethical faith concept among non-Christians can be closely identified with Rahner's supernatural existential, whereby God's essential presence and uncreated grace in every human being means one cannot close themselves off to God unless they choose to do so.[39]

Pinnock's "Spirit Christology" focuses on the work of Christ by emphasizing the dependence of the human Jesus on the Spirit. The missions of the Son and Spirit are intertwined since the two are partners ("the two hands of God") in the work of redemption. Pinnock purposely constructs a connection between the Spirit's work in the life of Christ and his role in creation and redemption. Christ's ministry was a participatory journey in which the Spirit facilitated Jesus' sacrifice to save humanity by way of recapitulation.[40] This means that the Spirit takes Christ on a representative journey for the sake of all humanity. The atonement is not so much concerned with appeasing God's anger as it is with Christ representing humanity in order that humanity might be incorporated into his divine life through faith by the Spirit. As a committed

---

[37]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 60.

[38]Pinnock, *Wideness*, 111-12.

[39]Strange, "Deciphering the Conundrum," 236, 239, 241.

[40]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 93.

Arminian, Pinnock finds this model of the atonement to be universal in its application. Christ's obedience to God and dependence on the Spirit reversed Adam's sin. Humanity is saved by Christ's representative journey and now needs only to accept what has been done and allow the Spirit to conform their lives to the Savior.[41]

The Spirit's function in salvation, in Pinnock's opinion, should be expanded beyond the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith. Justification is a moment in salvation that should be seen as the central motif. Union with God is a personal union whereby the creature participates in the divine life of the Trinity. God has created humans with libertarian freedom and one may reject the divine offer of grace and union. In other words, they can either choose to love God or not love him. Conversion is not monergistic in nature because salvation is never coerced. God does no compel sinners but woos them with his love. Although grace can bring sinners under conviction it is not irresistible. In this sense humans are co-workers with God (2 Cor 6:1; Phil 1:19) in the process of conversion.[42] Entering into union with God means that Christ's filial journey is now the individual's participatory journey by the Spirit, who is completing atonement by effecting transformation in the individual.[43] The final goal of union with God is conformity to Christ who is the new image of humanity. Total transformation and complete conformity to Christ, however, cannot be expected to occur in the believer's earthly life and may continue after death.[44]

---

[41]Ibid., 96.

[42]Ibid., 158.

[43]Ibid., 177.

[44]Ibid., 179. Pinnock also asserts the possibility that many persons who have not had the opportunity to respond to Christ in their lifetime could have a "postmortem" opportunity to do so. While admitting there is no abundant evidence for a postmortem encounter, the theological argument is anchored

Since Pinnock affirms that God's Spirit is at work everywhere in the world, he rejects traditional Christian belief that salvation cannot be found outside the church.[45] General revelation is at the same time gracious revelation and provides potentially saving knowledge of God.[46] He refuses to allow a disjunction between nature and grace or between common and salvific grace.[47] Seeking to avoid the two errors of universalism and restrictivism, Pinnock's concept of the twin, interdependent missions of the Son and Spirit permits him to affirm the particularity of salvation in Christ while safeguarding the universal presence of the Spirit.[48] The Spirit's universal presence holds the possibility that God's salvific grace works through other religions even where Christ is not known.[49] Religions, rather, as responses to general revelation, are being drawn by God's universal spirit toward himself.[50] Although Pinnock believes non-Christian religions contain both elements of truth and error, there are times when God looks favorably on adherents of other religions. He sees Scripture depicting "pagans" such as Melchizedek in the Old Testament and Cornelius in the New Testament as devout men whose lives evidence God's work even before they came to a personal knowledge of him.[51] Again, Pinnock's

---

in his belief that "God, since he loves humanity, would not send anyone to hell without first ascertaining what their response would have been to his grace." See Pinnock, *Wideness*, 168.

[45]Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 105.

[46]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 187.

[47]Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 98.

[48]Ibid., 190-92. Pinnock's commitment to the twin missions of the Son and Spirit is one of the primary reasons he rejects Western church's historical affirmation of the *filioque*. See Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 196-97.

[49]Pinnock, "An Inclusivist View," 100. Idem, *Wideness*, 97.

[50]Christopher Sinkinson, "In Defence of the Faith: Clark Pinnock and the World Religions," in *Reconstructing Theology*, 179.

[51]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 203, 208-11. Idem, *Wideness*, 26-28, 92, 95-97. Idem, "An

theology of the Spirit finds parallel with the thought of Rahner who introduced the contemporary notion of "anonymous Christianity."[52]

Amos Yong

Yong is among a growing number of youthful scholars who are contributing to the formulation of a Christian theology of religions. He first ventured into the arena of discussion on the topic with his work *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, which is a revision of his doctoral dissertation.[53] Yong affirms not only the comprehensive presence of the Holy Spirit in the world but emphasizes the need for Christians to exercise proper discernment concerning the Holy Spirit's (or spirits') activity in other faith traditions.[54] He defines a Pentecostal-charismatic theology of religions as "the effort to understand both the immensely differentiated experiences of faith and the multifaceted phenomena of religious traditions and systems that is informed by experiences of the Spirit in the light of Scripture and vice versa."[55] As a theologian of Asian ethnicity, Yong proposes a theology of religions that is grounded in pneumatology rather than Christology,

---

Inclusivist View," 109. While Christians may ask where God is working in the world and where he is moving in the realm of human experience, Pinnock insists that Christ is the criterion of salvation for those who have never heard of him or his message. Moral behavior and self-sacrifice may provide some evidence of God's gracious presence in the life of one who does not openly confess Christ as Savior.

[52]Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 207. Pinnock criticizes Rahner for going "too far" in regarding all religions as vehicles of grace. Pinnock sees non-Christian religions as perhaps being a temporary but valid means of salvation prior to evangelization.

[53]Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

[54]Yong follows the Wesleyan theological tradition in affirming a universal prevenient grace that makes the salvation of every human being a genuine possibility.

[55]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 24.

particularly as it relates to discerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religious practices. He dismisses the *a priori* assumption that non-Christian faiths are devoid of divine presence and activity. Yong realizes that the pneumatological approach is not without difficulties. What is needed, in his opinion, is a method that properly discerns the Holy Spirit's presence in non-Christian practices.

Yong's proposal is predicated on a Trinitarian distinction between the economy of the Word and the economy of the Spirit. This "shift" to a pneumatological framework in order to understand non-Christian faiths is derived from the concept that there is a distinction between the economies of the Son and Spirit ("the two hands of God") relative to the redemption of the world.[56] Yong radicalizes "Rahner's Rule" in affirming that language of the immanent Trinity can only be retained "if by that we are talking about the mystery of creation, redemption and glorification as manifesting the essential nature of the divine reality, and not about internal or social communion among the divine 'persons' abstracted from relations with the world or pushed behind the veil of a primordial eternity."[57] Although he seeks to uphold the notion that the economies of the Son and Spirit "are mutually related, and should not be subordinated either to the other," Yong also believes "the divine missions should also be seen both as dimensionally affiliated and thus implying autonomy in relationality and vice versa, and

---

[56]Ibid., 61. Yong finds the work of Georg Khodr (Eastern Orthodox), Jacques Dupuis (Roman Catholic), and Stanley Samartha (Protestant) to be helpful to his model because each rejects the *filioque* and sees the economy of the Spirit working through either praxis or human experience in the context of non-Christian religions. Keith E. Johnson, "Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions? An Evaluation of Three Recent Proposals," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 26, also notes that the economic distinctions of the Son and Spirit are a "Trinitarian key" to Yong's proposal.

[57]Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 68-69.

as somehow commonly originating in the mystery of the Father."[58]

In establishing a foundational pneumatology for discerning the presence of the Spirit in other faiths, Yong seeks to establish criteria for such discernment. First, he turns to the issue of religious experience. He receives some help from the work of Donald Gelpi[59] who sees foundational pneumatology as helping one formulate an account of multidimensional aspects of religious conversion in human experience.[60] He wishes to build on Gelpi's model of conversion and apply it to the universal human situation. Yong knows he must overcome the Wittgensteinian notion that an individual's religious knowledge and language is strictly a product of their cultural-linguistic background. In order to counter this challenge, he asserts that God can be seen as the "object" of religious encounters regardless of one's faith tradition, because foundational pneumatology looks to general categories of religious claims that are drawn from the common human experience of the Spirit.[61]

Second, this comprehensive "system" of pneumatology allows for a particular

---

[58]Ibid, 69, quoted in Johnson, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 26.

[59]Donald L. Gelpi, *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984). The "foundational" element in Gelpi's pneumatology is that conversion (intellectual, moral, religious, sociopolitical, etc.) opens one of the pathways for understanding the human experience of God. Yong defines Gelpi's theology of personal conversion to include a matrix of social processes in which there are different domains wherein conversion is experienced other than in the religious realm, and these include the intellectual, the affective, the moral, and the sociopolitical. The dynamics and counter-dynamics of the various aforementioned conversion experiences prior to Christian conversion permits Yong to see Gelpi's theory as useful. In this approach, salvation becomes a multidimensional reality that is found in the various domains in which conversion is experienced. In other words, any theology of conversion will resist systematic definition and a conversion experience in any domain can be understood as a divine prompt for deeper conversion in other domains. See Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 106-08.

[60]Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 59-60.

[61]Ibid., 70.

faith's truth claims to be tested against reality and against other competing religious systems that also claim to interpret reality correctly. This procedure will, in Yong's view, allow the church to adopt a correspondence model of truth as she engages and dialogues with other world religions. This "pneumatology of quest" requires that respective Christian religious claims be open to criticism and correction through an authentic encounter with other faiths.[62] A "pneumatological imagination" must then serve as an epistemic precondition for Christians to acknowledge the Spirit's universal presence and to recognize the public nature of truth.[63] Foundational pneumatology requires the establishment of a robust theology of discernment that is "metaphysically and theologically sophisticated enough to account for the diversity of spirits" (including those that are demonic) even as it seeks to identify divine presence and activity in the world.[64]

Yong admits that spiritual discernment is a complex activity that must operate at several levels relative to the various dimensions of human life.[65] While the Holy Spirit

---

[62]Ibid., 74.

[63]Ibid., 72-73. One might argue that a concession to certain universal truths (from a Christian perspective) found in the faith confessions of the various world religions can be comprehended by appealing to the Reformed doctrine of common grace that accounts for the presence of such truths. Yong, however, appears to resist appeals to common grace because of his conviction that such a doctrine limits the emphasis on God's providential and pneumatological presence in other religions and cultures. See Yong, "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) 'after' Buddhism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2004): 191-207.

[64]Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 72.

[65]Yong's approach to spiritual discernment in other faiths is assisted by the thought of Holiness theologian John Fletcher, a contemporary of John Wesley, who crafted a "doctrine of dispensations" as it relates to God's gracious presence in various human religious practices. In brief, Fletcher believed the various covenants between God and humanity were actually differing dispensations of salvific grace through which God dealt with classes of people. The Old Testament dispensation of saving grace for those under the Noahite covenant and Gentile believers in the one true God Fletcher called the "dispensation of the Father." The believing Jews of the Mosaic covenant were part of a "mediating" dispensation between that of the Father and the Son. The dispensation of the Son includes those under the ministration of John the Baptist and the believing disciples under the ministry of Jesus. The last dispensation includes those

is universally present and active in all dimensions of human life, including all religions, there is also a demonic resistance to the advancement of God's kingdom. Discernment for Yong is ultimately measuring the reality of a respective religion's faith and practice against previously established criteria that reflects definite marks or signs of God's kingdom. Such discernment will require a pneumatological imagination that is willing to employ a "multileveled inquiry" into measuring "fruits" of the Spirit in world religions.[66] Yet this discernment of the marks of the Kingdom remains provisional and always open to revision, given that a determination of the Spirit's absence in some non-Christian practice at present may well be transformed by some phenomenon to later lead the Christian to determine that the ever-active Spirit is now present in that same respective practice.[67] Yong sees the work of the Spirit in non-Christian faiths as, ultimately, directed toward the eschatological goal of serving as a potential "process of purification according to a trajectory anticipating the coming kingdom."[68] While this particular criterion for discernment remains somewhat abstract, he suggests such an approach offers

---

who have experienced Pentecost who have received the fullness of perfection and witnessed the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Fletcher, from this framework of dispensations, developed a set of categories whereby divine saving grace might be discerned among persons and denominations of various theological convictions. For example, Protestants and Roman Catholics may differ on several doctrines but because each is Trinitarian in their confession, all the aforementioned who do become members of God's kingdom do so under the dispensation of the Son. Meanwhile, Deists, Socinians, Unitarians, and even Arians who, though mistaken in their doctrine but acting of sincerity of their convictions, may experience salvific grace under the dispensation of the Father. While not condoning unorthodox Christian doctrines, Fletcher did not eliminate the possibility of salvation for persons who for lack of knowledge of the truth practice their respective faith with sincere conscience. This includes non-Christians who have never heard the gospel message but respond to the light of God's revelation given to them. Fletcher's doctrine of dispensations, in this sense, reflects a Trinitarian progression whereby the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are at work in each stage of salvation. See Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 247-50. Yong wishes to reframe Fletcher's concept so as to develop a pneumatological soteriology that sees conversion as the dynamic process espoused by Gelpi.

[66]Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 254-55.

[67]Ibid., 255.

[68]Ibid., 256.

helpful "heuristic" devices for locating the Spirit's work in other faiths.[69]

Terrance Tiessen

Tiessen does not accept Rahner's concept of "anonymous Christianity," but the Canadian scholar has maintained an interest in matters concerning the universal accessibility of the gospel since completing his dissertation on Irenaeus's theology.[70] Religions, in Tiessen's view, are "ambiguous responses" to the fact that God has not left himself without witness in the world.[71] In affirming universal divine revelation and a consciousness of God in every person, Tiessen is cautious in noting that just because a practice is religious "is no guarantee that it is good for humans or that it aids them in their relationship to God."[72] This is because sin tends steer religious expressions toward forms of idolatry. Christianity is no exception. Yet Christianity is "intrinsically superior

---

[69]Amos Yong, "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World," *Missiology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 175-91. Yong, again, sees the phenomenon of religion as dynamic in nature and that there is an unfinished character to religious traditions and practice. A pneumatology that provides dynamic categories (a multidimensional conversion process, assorted practices of religious traditions, and witness to the Spirit of Christ in human praxis) for comprehending the phenomena of religion will, Yong believes, assist Christians in a developing dialogical and intersubjective approach to religious truth. See also Amos Yong, "The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57, no. 1 (2004): 32-38.

[70]Terrance L. Tiessen, *Irenaeus and the Salvation of the Unevangelized*, ATLA Mongraph Series, no. 31 (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1993). Irenaeus, Tiessen argues, cannot be considered a soteriological inclusivist, as some have claimed, because there is little evidence in the Early Church theologian's writings that he believed persons could find salvation apart from an explicit knowledge of Christ and his work. In fact, Irenaeus was genuinely unaware that there were situations in the world where non-Christians had no access to the gospel. Tiessen posits, however, that Irenaeus's attention to the role of the Trinity in revelation "might," in a different context, have allowed for the salvation of individuals outside the institutional church. Tiessen admits in his study that Irenaeus's writings to combat Gnostic thought provide no warrant for drawing conclusions as to how he would have addressed the present-day issue of the unevangelized.

[71]Terrance L. Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 298. Tiessen believes "ambiguity" derives from when persons formulate religious convictions and construct religious institutions, it must be remembered that demonic deception and sinful human sinful human constructions are at work as well as God's revelation and grace.

[72]Ibid., 312.

because it is the institutional response to the *ultimate* revelation of God in Christ" (although it remains ambiguous in some sense).[73] Nevertheless, Tiessen does not affirm the supposed ecclesiocentrist position that all non-Christian religions are ultimate expressions of evil. Accessibilists, like Tiessen, believe the Spirit of God may be at work even in the religious devotional practices of non-Christians.[74]

While general revelation can be credited as a major factor in the religious practices of people around the world, Tiessen believes there is evidence of divine revelation in other religions that is neither "general" nor "special," in the sense of being an exclusive form that reveals the way of salvation through Christ.[75] The Canadian theologian points to the testimonies of non-Christian persons who claim God became known to them in a dream or vision.[76] While most of these experiences are of persons who later came into contact with the gospel through human messengers, Tiessen does not think it should be assumed that this happened as a divine means of preparation for the gospel and that no one was saved until the message arrived. He emphasizes caution about making such assumptions on two accounts: "first, precisely because we are, by definition, ignorant of what God is doing among the peoples about whom we know

---

[73]Ibid., 316. Tiessen, contra Rahner, does not see Christianity as superior by virtue its being the fulfillment of other religions.

[74]Ibid., 314. Tiessen cites both Sir Norman Anderson and Lesslie Newbigin, concerning their observation of certain Islamic practices, as examples of theologians who believe some non-Christians may unknowingly respond to God's initiative of grace that is uniquely operative in the cross and resurrection of Christ. See Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 152-53, and Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 174.

[75]Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 360.

[76]Many of these testimonies can be found in Phillip H. Wiebe, *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters From the New Testament to Today* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), and Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984).

nothing; and second, because we are not in a position to judge at what point God accepts, as justifying, a faith that is wrought in the heart of a sinner by the gracious act of the Spirit of God.[77] Tiessen's modified Calvinistic doctrine of "universally sufficient enabling grace" proposes that every person, whether confronted with the gospel or not, receives "*sufficient* grace to enable them to believe in [Christ] but that he only draws and persuades effectively the elect.[78] Because all persons receive this sufficient enabling grace at least once in their lives, those who fail to respond are justly condemned for what God has made known to them at that moment.[79] Because the "Spirit of God blows wherever he pleases," Tiessen asserts that the "enabling or regenerative grace that effects (*sic*) salvation" must not necessarily be accompanied by the proclamation of the gospel.[80] It is the faith response of a person to God's self-revelation, rather, that is acceptable to God as a basis for justification. Since salvation comes only via a faith illumined by the Holy Spirit, the acceptance of this "seed" of saving faith may begin one's movement toward Christ, even if that movement is not completed until a personal encounter with Christ at the moment of death.[81]

If God's Spirit can illumine certain persons outside Christianity to bring about in them a justifying faith, is there then a divine purpose at work in regard to the practices

---

[77]Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 364. Tiessen maintains that it is reasonably possible to discern when a person becomes a Christian, but that only God knows the exact moment of conversion. In other words, the point at which a person is saved is impossible to discern, although, as with certain individuals in the Old and New Testaments, it is frequently earlier than the moment they became a Christian and acknowledged Christ as the Messiah. According to Tiessen, the same paradigm exists at present. There are unevangelized persons who may be saved but are not yet Christians. Ibid., 165, 180, 202.

[78]Ibid., 239. Italics mine.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 240.

[81]Ibid., 379.

of other religions? While Tiessen affirms that individual salvation occurs within the context of religions, he rejects the notion that it is being done *through* them.[82] While there may be truth in other religions that owes its origin to divine revelation, this does not mean that "religions themselves are God's intended instruments for leading people to salvation.[83] God, rather, can providentially guide persons in non-Christian religions into truth through the formation and development of other faiths. Tiessen sees this guidance not only as evidence of the Holy Spirit working to reveal truth but also as proof that the Spirit works within the context of non-Christian practices to draw certain persons to Christ.[84]

Concerning the benefits of Christ's atonement, Tiessen embraces the traditional Reformed doctrine of "common grace."[85] He draws on the insights of Richard J. Mouw[86] concerning culture and common grace in order to see a role that various religions might play in God's providential workings. While not suggesting that non-

---

[82]Ibid., 386. Author's italics.

[83]Ibid., 388.

[84]Ibid., 393-94. Tiessen appeals to his Reformed soteriological convictions in asserting that it is only the "elect" whom are drawn to Christ, even if it be through the practices of other religions. He follows the Anglican theologian F. D. Maurice in seeing religions such as Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism being used by God to providentially serve his purposes even though these non-Christian religions are not institutions that God intentionally brought into being.

[85]It was John Calvin who initially introduced the concept of divine common grace, although it would receive further development in the Dutch Reformed thought of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. In Kuyper's thought, common grace has two principle elements. First, there is a *negative element* which sees God's general grace as restraining the devastating effects of sin on creation and the human race. Second, there is a *positive element* found in the constant operation of the Holy Spirit upon humanity whereby civil righteousness is promoted through the Spirit's testimony within the hearts and minds of humans to the existence of God and a moral law. It must be noted, however, that this revelation from the Holy Spirit is by no means special revelation that leads an individual to a saving knowledge of Christ. In other words, common grace is every favor of God bestowed creation and humankind which falls short of salvific grace. See William Masselink, *General Revelation and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 188-89, 210.

[86]Richard J. Mouw, *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids:

Christian religions are purposely ordered by God, Tiessen sees how common grace purposes might be providentially served by them through communities where sin is restrained, the doing of good toward others is encouraged and the needy are looked after.[87] Although he acknowledges that it is important to distinguish between common and saving grace, he does not wish to draw a hard line in defining the two doctrines. Because the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world is intricately related to Christ's work, it is possible that some persons who have not rejected Christ in an explicit sense might be living in a saving relationship with God despite not having knowledge of the gospel.[88] How then is it possible to discern if God's saving grace might be present in certain individuals who practice other faith? Tiessen suggests there are three criteria that might assist in such discernment.[89]

The most important of the criteria is right belief, or to what degree are the truths revealed in Scripture practiced by persons in other religions, even if they remain ignorant of specific doctrines. Second, although salvation from God is never gained through works, does the morality and practices of a person belonging to another religion share characteristics with those practices that should be found in the life of a Christian? Third, it will be God that ultimately judges the attitude or disposition of the person who practices another faith. In other words, a person may lack knowledge of specific Christian doctrines or be theologically deficient in their belief system but still be properly

---

Eerdmans, 2001).

[87]Tiessen, *Who Can Be Saved?*, 402-03.

[88]Ibid., 404.

[89]Ibid., 408-22.

related to God through the enabling faith they exercise.[90]

Experiential Pneumatology

The models proposed by Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen vary in approach and emphasis concerning the presence of the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religious practices. Each model is designed to demonstrate that God is universally present in all realms of human existence and that divine grace enables some individuals to respond salvifically to God's self-revelation apart from the proclamation of the gospel. The Holy Spirit, therefore, can use the faith practices or experience of some persons in non-Christian religions as a conduit for a saving encounter with the one, true God and the his Son Jesus Christ, although such an encounter may not become a epistemological reality during their earthly existence. In this sense, there is in each model a strong eschatological trajectory concerning the finality of revelation and conversion. It is the experience of the Spirit through sincere demonstration of Christ-like virtues such as love, mercy, devotion to worship, and moral demonstrations of the "fruits" of the Spirit that can serve as evidence that many may have entered the kingdom of the Son without yet having attained the knowledge of this Son to whose kingdom they now belong.

Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen appear to, in one fashion or another, follow Rahner's lead in dividing the work of the Spirit from the work of the Son in the economy of salvation. It is this bifurcation of the tasks of the Son and Spirit in imparting divine revelation and, therefore, salvation that Karl Barth determinedly opposed.[91] In breaking

---

[90]Ibid., 422-23.

[91]Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 108. Molnar notes that Rahner and those who follow him have "bequeathed" to contemporary Trinitarian theology the experiential approach to

with the liberal theological tradition of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Barth affirmed that the Holy Spirit is never to be equated simply with the spirit of human inwardness or mysticism.[92] He clearly repudiates the idea that there is a revelation of the Spirit separate from the revelation of Christ, "whose content is something new and totally different from the revelation of Christ."[93] The Holy Spirit, rather, provides true knowledge of God by impressing the objective revelation of Jesus Christ and His work for us upon a human mind and heart that would, otherwise, have no capacity for such knowledge.[94] Such an affirmation goes against most modern doctrines addressing the work of the Holy Spirit. Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen insist that while some knowledge of God is necessary for salvation, each maintain that explicit knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ is not necessary for salvation. In other words, the salvific work of the Spirit can take place apart from an objective understanding of what Christ accomplished. For Barth, Christology and pneumatology are intimately interconnected since the Holy Spirit, while distinct from Christ, directs persons toward the objective reality of Christ and his reconciling work through the written word and gospel proclamation.[95]

---

knowledge of God rather than emphasizing that it is God who freely chooses to reveal true knowledge of Himself through the person of Jesus Christ and the written Word.

[92]John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 79.

[93]Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Gruder and Judith J. Gruder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 223.

[94]Ibid., 225.

[95]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 81.

The Trinitarian foundation of Barth's theology concerning God's revelation to humanity will be the subject of the next chapter. It will be shown that for Barth, it is only God according his triune being who reveals himself as Lord. Because God reveals himself as the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit, the Trinity is the key in Barth's theology to understanding how finite, sinful creatures are able to receive true knowledge of the infinite, holy God. Here Barth's doctrine offers a significant corrective to evangelical social trinitarian constructs that often serve to compromise and divide the roll relationship between the Son and the Spirit in imparting both revelation and salvation.

CHAPTER 3

BARTH'S TRINITARIAN DOCTRINE OF REVELATION

The Immanent Trinity and God's Unique Freedom

Karl Barth is not the first theologian following the Enlightenment era to retrieve a place for the doctrine of the Trinity in modern Christian thought.[1] He is, however, the theologian responsible for leading the twentieth-century "renaissance" in trinitarian perspectives because the doctrine is foundational to the method and content of

[1]Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 17-29. Grenz notes that Friedrich Schleiermacher and his theological rival, Georg W. F. Hegel, both helped revive discussion of the Trinity in western European intellectual circles, albeit in methods very different from Barth. Hegel saw the doctrine as expressing the concrete determination and nature of God as spirit. In Hegel's dialectical concept of the God-world relationship, the doctrine refers to relationships within the triune Godhead that sees the divine as the Absolute-self (God), its being other (the Son) and in its unity with itself (the spirit or *Geist*). The "immanent" Trinity for Hegel, however, is not to be viewed as a divine being that exists as three persons apart from the world. The immanent divine triad, rather, represents the dialectical movement of differentiation and reconciliation with the created world. The abstract being of God (the immanent Trinity) comprises the first moment in a divine dynamic whereby *Geist* (the idea of love that unites the Father with the Son) is related the self-actualization of God in the world's historical process. In expressing the doctrine in logical terms, Hegel sees the abstract *Geist* or divine Being entering into existence with that which is other through the creation of the world. The Son (Jesus) represents the idea of the unity of God and humanity that is actualized in a particular historical individual. In the differentiation and reconciliation dynamic, the death and resurrection of the Son represents for Hegel the God's reconciliation with both creation and within the Godhead. The resurrection is symbolic of the advent of Absolute Spirit that is the goal of the history and marks the complete realization of God in the human spirit. A fine interpretation and summarization of Hegel's Trinitarian thought is provided by Samuel M. Powell, *The Trinity in German Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 104-41.

Schleiermacher is often credited with having dismissed the importance of the Trinity because he placed the doctrine at the conclusion his magisterial work: Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. and trans. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 738-51. Grenz notes, however, that while Schleiermacher found that the Trinity gave no specific "utterance" to Christian self-consciousness and reflection, he did see the triunity of God as an attempt by the Church to pull together various elements of Christian experience. For Schleiermacher, the doctrine of Trinity is found at the close of a completed doctrine of God because it gathers into a single concept what has been asserted in the various aspects of Christian God-consciousness. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Schleiermacher's understanding of God as triune," in *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Marina (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 171-88, gives some important insights into how Schleiermacher wove the doctrine innovatively into his extensive doctrine of God.

his work.[2] Barth's influence remains formidable in contemporary theological debates, particularly as it relates to the role of Trinity in theological formulation and reflection.

In a departure from traditional medieval and Protestant systematic *loci* (and contra Schleiermacher), Barth places his discussion of the Trinity at the beginning of the *Church Dogmatics* because he sees a direct correlation between the doctrine and the concept of revelation. The doctrine of Trinity is, in fact, for Barth the only possible path toward a true knowledge of God.[3] All knowledge of God, if it is to be attained, must come from God because God can be only known by God. The doctrine of the Trinity is constructed naturally from the claim that "*God* reveals Himself. He reveals Himself *through Himself.* He reveals *Himself.*"[4]

Fred Sanders notes that the question of whether Barth would affirm Rahner's Rule is somewhat "anachronistic" since the Swiss theologian had already made a major impact on Trinitarian thought long before Rahner came along.[5] The short answer to the question, however, must be a determined "no" since Barth "would not have assented to it nor recognized his own interests in it had he met with it in its classical form."[6] Given the dialectical nature of his thought, Barth seeks to harmonize the "two poles of God's committed love and sovereign freedom" and present them in such a fashion that one does

---

[2]Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 34.

[3]Powell, *The Trinity*, 183.

[4]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Word of God*, pt. 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1975), 296.

[5]Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 145.

[6]Ibid., 146.

not mutually contradict the other.[7] Indeed, because the problem of revelation in Barth's thought stands or falls with the doctrine of the Trinity, he seeks a close correlation between divine freedom and God's revelatory faithfulness toward humanity so that what can be said of God from the perspective of revelation corresponds to an inner reality within the eternal Godhead.[8]

Barth will not permit divine revelation and God's eternal being to be separated. Were he to allow for such a disjunction, Barth believes that the God who encounters humans in revelation would be some other God than the true God.[9] Furthermore, such a division could lead humans to speak of a God who is not necessarily the God and Father of Jesus Christ in whom God is genuinely revealed to the world.[10] Therefore for Barth, as Eberhard Jüngel notes, God's being *ad extra* corresponds essentially to his being *ad intra* because God is the *interpreter* of himself and in revealing himself God corresponds to his being.[11] The triune God "is to be found not merely in His revelation [Jesus Christ] but, because in His revelation, in God Himself and in Himself too, so that the Trinity is to be understood as 'immanent' and not just 'economic.'"[12] Once more, the doctrine of

---

[7]Ibid., 145. Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) presents a convincing argument that Barth never made a lasting break with the dialectical nature of his thought concerning God's relationship with humanity and that such an approach informed every Christian doctrine discussed throughout the *Church Dogmatics*.

[8]Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 41. Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 146.

[9]Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 42. Grenz notes that such a move would amount to a form of Sabellianism.

[10]Sanders, *Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 146.

[11]Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 36, cited in Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 42.

[12]Barth, *CD* 1, pt.1: 333.

revelation cannot be abstracted from the doctrine of the Trinity. The key to understanding the immanent Trinity lies in the economy of salvation. Barth affirms this link when he states:

> But we have consistently followed the rule, which we regard as basic, that statements about the divine modes of being [Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit] antecedently in themselves cannot be different in content from those that are made about their reality in revelation. All our statements concerning what is called the immanent Trinity have been reached simply as confirmations or underlinings or, materially, as the indispensable premises of the economic Trinity. . . . The reality of God in His revelation cannot be bracketed by an "only," as though somewhere behind His revelation there stood another reality of God; the reality of God which encounters us in His revelation is His reality in all the depths of eternity.[13]

Barth is zealous, however, not to collapse the being of God into the event of God's divine, historical self-disclosure to the world. To do so would deny God's eternal, independent existence and, thus, infringe on his divine freedom by confusing the Creator with his creation. While God is identical with the act of revelation, he is "not reducible to that act."[14] The event of revelation is always an act of God's sovereign grace and is a result of his freedom. While God's love is necessary to his essence and nature, he remains full and complete in his being even without a relation or connection to his creation. This unique freedom of God means that he would ever remain the same even if he had never chosen to create. If there is indeed a correlation between God and humanity, as is evident in divine revelation, then it is a correlation "grounded in God alone, and not partly in God and partly in us."[15] God's being is determined and moved by himself alone and not by anyone or anything external to him. This unique freedom

---

[13]Ibid., 479.

[14]Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 42.

[15]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1: 281.

which is alone proper to God means that it is God who initiates the relationship with his creatures. If there is some form of preexistent relationship between the Creator and creature prior God's turn to the human subject, then coexistence is conceivable even without God. Eberhard Busch notes that for Barth "[i]f an external to him does also exist, then it is only because this other is grounded by God and not in and of itself."[16]

If the distinction in correlation concerning God and the humanity is blurred then, in Barth's view, this opens the path to a classic form of panentheism or mysticism where it is implied that God by necessity permeates the human spirit or constitutes a "world soul." While Barth does not contest that God has partnered with his creation, he rejects the idea that God only *becomes* God when he is united with a created other.[17] God, says Barth, "does not form a whole with any other being either in identity with it or as compounding or merging with it to constitute a synthesis—the object of that master-concept, so often sought and found, which comprehends both God and what is not God. God enters into the closest relationship with the other, but He does not form such a synthesis with it."[18] If such were the case, God would be bound to humanity not because in his loving, divine freedom he chooses to do so, but that he must do so in order to actualize himself. The creature, then, would not only be dependent upon God and his grace but God would also be dependent upon the creature's presence as well and, thus,

---

[16]Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 122. Busch observes that this distinction between God and humanity in Barth's theology would still exist even if human sin did not become a reality, although the fact of its existence further emphasizes the distinction. Because humans have fallen into sin and held captive by it, it is only God by his free initiative who can free them and in mercy does so.

[17]Ibid., 123.

[18]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1: 312.

humanity is deified. In turn, God's absolute deity is robbed and the biblical testimony concerning God's relationship to his creatures is replaced by anthropological reflections on the human experience of the divine.[19]

Despite the fact that God does not need humanity in order to love, he in his freedom and grace chooses to love the creature and not withhold himself from fellowship. God's love for his creatures is his *eternal* love and "our being loved by Him is our being taken up into fellowship of His eternal love, in which He is Himself for ever and ever. . . . this overflowing love is conditioned by the fact that although it could satisfy itself, it has no satisfaction in this self-satisfaction, but as love for another it can and will be more than that which could satisfy itself. While God is everything for Himself, He wills again not to be everything merely for Himself, but for this other"[20] For Barth this is the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity, that God is so free that in himself alone, by his grace, becomes *our* God and makes *us* the object of his redemption.[21]

Barth insists, however, that God's freedom must never be thought of in terms

---

[19]Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2002), 1-25, 108. Molnar's entire argument throughout the course of his work is that by following Rahner's Rule and collapsing the immanent into economic triune being of God, human perceptions of God are then based experiences of faith rather than "allowing God the freedom to determine what can and cannot be said about him." Molnar finds Rahner's axiom to have been adopted in the work Catherine LaCugna, Gordon Kaufman, Sallie McFague and feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson where the inner being of God is identical with the personal history of the experience of the human self. Drayton C. Benner, "Augustine and Karl Rahner on the Relationship between the Immanent and Economic Trinity," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 1 (January 2007): 24-38, points out that Augustine affirmed that missions and processions of the Trinity in the economy of salvation do correspond to what is found in the eternal being of God, but must not be identified solely with the immanent relationship. In doing so he sought to avoid both eternal subordinationism within the Godhead and clearly distinguish between God's immanence and ontological transcendence from the world. Rahner's axiom, according to Benner, "views God as tightly bound to his creation, essentially having no life in himself but rather finding in humanity his one possible means of self-expression."

[20]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1: 280.

[21]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 124-25.

of *potentia absoluta*. This concept of freedom is a perverted human form of autonomy that sees self-determination as an avenue of independence and isolation, free supposedly to exercise to control of one's destiny and the destiny of others.[22] For Barth this is not only a wrong understanding of freedom but really symbolizes no freedom at all. God, rather, does not merely weld a raw, naked sovereignty but is *free* in the sense that He no prisoner to His own freedom. His freedom constitutes an "essential positive quality" whereby God "has the prerogative to be free without being limited by His freedom from external conditioning, free also with regard to His freedom, free not to surrender Himself to it, but to use it to give Himself to this communion [with others different from Him] and to practice this faithfulness in it, in this way being really free, free in Himself. . . . in the absoluteness in which He sets up this fellowship, He can and will be conditioned.[23] This act constitutes God's genuine freedom. In other words, God "elects" or chooses from the very beginning of all His ways to have fellowship with humanity for Himself and, thus, "fellowship with Himself for man."[24] It is an eternal self-determination for fellowship and fellowship with something very specific (human beings). It is God's election of His being *for* coexistence but also *in* coexistence.[25] As freedom for fellowship, He is "the one who loves in freedom" and determines in revelation how He will define Himself.[26] Contrary to the notion of an absolute monarch, God wills to enter into fellowship with his creatures and reveal himself to them, thereby refusing to be himself without the other.

---

[22]Ibid., 107-09.

[23]Barth *CD* 2, pt. 1:303.

[24]Ibid., *CD* 2, pt. 2:162.

[25]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 115.

[26]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1:257.

The Trinity tells us that "God reveals Himself as the Lord" in his act of revelation to the creature who otherwise cannot know the Lord God.[27]

The Triune God Reveals Himself as Lord

But if God has bound himself to sinful humanity, how does he do so in a manner that does not compromise his freedom? Barth, notes Sanders, establishes an economic-immanent axis in God's eternal being that seeks to answer the riddle of how God can reveal himself without "becoming a controllable factor within human experience."[28] This is possible in Barth's estimation because the possibility of our objective knowledge of God is made real because such knowledge has already been actualized with the immanent Trinity. This objective knowledge within the triune Godhead is a divine reality well before the possibility of human knowledge and objectivity exist. Since all human knowledge of God is an act of grace, it can be said that even as God gives himself as an object of human knowledge this revelation remains hidden as it relates to the objective knowledge that God has of himself. In his refusal to collapse the immanent Trinity into the economic functions, Barth explains:

> We call this the primary objectivity of God, and distinguish it from the *secondary*, i.e. the objectivity which He has for us too in His revelation, in which He gives Himself to be known by us as He knows Himself. It is distinguished from the primary objectivity, not by a lesser degree of truth, but by its particular form suitable for us, the creature. God is objectively immediate to Himself, but to us He is objectively mediate. That is to say, He is not objectively directly but indirectly, not in the naked sense but clothed under the sign and veil of other objects different from Himself. His secondary objectivity is fully true, for it has correspondence and basis in His primary objectivity. God does not have to be untrue to Himself and deceive us about His real nature in order to become objective to us. For first to Himself, and then in His revelation to us, He is nothing but what His is Himself. It

[27]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 1: 306.

[28]Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 174.

> is here that the door is shut against any "non-objective" knowledge of God. . . . It is in, with and under the sign and veil of these other objects that we believe in God, and know Him and pray to Him. . . . But he [humanity] always stands indirectly before God. He stands directly before another object, one of the series of all other objects. The objectivity of this other object represents the objectivity of God.[29]

Barth's distinction between God's primary and secondary objectivity means that human knowledge of God in revelation is indeed valid but that humans can only become participants in this knowledge by God's gracious act since this revelation is by no means self-evident.[30] This distinction serves as a pillar for Barth's theology and informs his discussion of each doctrine in the *Dogmatics*. George Hunsinger notes perceptively that the actuality or "actualism" of revelation forms a major motif in Barth's thought where genuine knowledge of God for humans is always an event, an occurrence, a happening, a decision, or in history itself.[31] Because an actuality of revelation exists there is also a corresponding possibility, but this possibility does not mean that God can be rationally apprehended or controlled.[32] It has already been noted that God in his sovereign freedom and love chooses to enter into relationship with human creatures although he has no intrinsic need to do so. Negatively, humans do not have an "ahistorical relationship to God" and have "no capacity in and of ourselves to enter into fellowship with God"[33] Whatever knowledge humanity has of God comes not because its stands at our disposal but, rather, is gracefully given to us by God. The sovereignty of

---

[29]Ibid., *CD* 2, pt. 1: 316-17. Italics mine.

[30]Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity*, 175.

[31]George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 30-32, 67-75.

[32]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1:5.

[33]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 30-31.

divine grace and freedom and the incapacity of human beings to know God means God miraculously provides what creatures lack, and he does so through objects that mediate this divine knowledge. Holy Scripture, the church, the sacraments, faith, and other natural realities are all objects whereby divine knowledge may be mediated to creatures. These objects, however, have no independent, neutral, ahistorical, or ontological relationship to God apart from the event of grace and, in and of themselves, have no capacity for revelation.[34] They only have that possibility for revelation, rather, as God acts again and again to mediate knowledge of himself that would otherwise be impossible for humans to attain.

The actuality of revelation, therefore, is implicitly connected to the secondary objective means for knowledge of God. Divine self-revelation means "God becomes an object of our knowledge by taking form in the creaturely sphere," the only avenue whereby creatures can know him.[35] Yet God is not just any sort of object, an object that gives itself to be known and can be known just like any other object. God, as the object of human knowledge, retains complete power over his own self-disclosure. God's self-disclosure at the same time remains God's self-concealment. For Barth, the Bible attests to a self-unveiling of God to human beings who by nature cannot be unveiled to them due to corruption and sin. Inscrutability and hiddenness is the very essence of God who, as Creator, does not belong to any sphere that human creatures can know directly. Yet by grace this divine self-unveiling takes form and says to everyone to whom it is imparted

---

[34]Ibid., 31. This denial of an independent capacity for divine revelation by created realities is precisely why Barth rejects any form of natural theology. This point will receive extensive attention later in this work.

[35]Ibid., 77.

that apart from God's initiative, genuine knowledge of the Creator can never be attained. Nevertheless, Barth asserts, it is not the form but God in the form that "reveals, speaks, comforts, works and aids."[36] Even in the form He assumes when He reveals Himself, however, God is free to reveal Himself or not reveal Himself because the form never takes God's place.

This remains true even where Scripture itself is concerned, although Barth seeks to affirm its supreme authority. The Bible, according to Barth, cannot be called authoritative in the sense that its status as the Word of God is derived from "proof" texts that lay claim to its being the complete deposit of divine revelation. That would merely be an external proof and, thus, be no proof at all or only secondary in its claims. An external proof from the Scriptural text does not do what it claims to accomplish—that being to prove the existence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, or the factuality of miracles. Scripture serves a definitive role as a "witness" to revelation but is not revelation *as such*.[37] Human language has no capacity in and of itself to be bearer of the Word of God.[38] The testimony of Scripture, rather, becomes the Word of God to us by the power of divine action in the person of the Holy Spirit whereby we by faith

---

[36]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:321.

[37]Bruce L. McCormack, "The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism," in *Evangelicals and Scripture*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguelez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 56.

[38]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 43-48. Hunsinger notes that Barth's approach to theological language should be termed "realism," meaning that its subject matter should be understood by way of analogy. This approach admits the incapacity of human language to refer to God but allows for the occurrence of genuine and proper reference. Barth sees the language of scripture as making neither literal nor univocal reference. Such language, because it is not an independent source of revelation, can become an authentic means of God speaking to us but it must by the miracle of divine grace that overcomes our intrinsic linguistic incapacity to say anything about God. In this way theological language is apprehended by God and becomes a form of personal address to the recipient. By emphasizing the primacy of God as the acting and addressing subject, revelation becomes a "kerygmatic" event where the personal encounter is as fully self-involving for the initiator (God) as for the recipient (human being).

acknowledge and confess the truth of the Word which is believed and obeyed. Revelation and the Bible, while inseparable, are not identical because the latter is a true witness to the former which attests to the lordship of the triune God.[39] Barth is clear that if the Bible "tries to be more than a witness, to be direct impartation, will it not keep us from the best, the one real thing, which God intends to tell and give us and which we ourselves need."[40]

The Bible for Barth, however, is the concrete means by which human beings may attain genuine knowledge of God's Word and that knowledge lies nowhere else. This leads Barth to speak of divine revelation as the "threefold" form of the Word of God, which is the Word preached, written, and revealed (or proclamation, Bible, and revelation). This is not the Word in three different forms but the "one Word only in this threefold form."[41] In this way the threefold form takes on a distinctively Trinitarian

---

[39]John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 35.

[40]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:507. Evangelicals as a whole have, historically, been quite critical of Barth's rejection of the doctrines of verbal inspiration and inerrancy. Indeed, Barth openly states that the Bible is not a book of "oracles" that presents direct "propositional" information and that the writers of Scripture speak as "fallible and erring men" who were "all vulnerable and therefore capable of error even in respect of religion and theology." He fully accepts contemporary historical-critical approaches to research and study of the biblical text. For Barth's detailed discussion as to how Scripture becomes the Word of God, see Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:497-537. One of the most noted Evangelical criticisms of Barth's doctrine of Scripture comes from Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 4:196-200. Henry finds Barth's approach to rest on two incompatible axioms: that the Bible which is humanly fallible can become divinely infallible. Henry believes genuine biblical revelation must be cognitive and propositional in its language and truth claims. He is suspect of Barth's "analogy of grace" where human words and concepts become adequate for the divine truth through a divine miracle. Bruce McCormack, "The Being of Holy Scripture Is in Becoming," 56-57, feels that Barth's view of biblical authority has been misunderstood by Evangelicals because they have failed to give proper context to his statements that are anchored ultimately in his theological ontology. A sympathetic Evangelical attempt to understand and appreciate Barth's approach is provided by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 26-59. Vanhoozer believes that the overarching theological presupposition in Barth's method is that "revelation is a predicate of God as a free, gracious, and active subject." The Word of God, for Barth, is never "available" in a direct, straightforward, and permanent way.

[41]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:120.

character. There can be no distinction of degree or value between the three forms. Barth summarizes how this threefold mutual relationship is conceived:

> The revealed Word of God we know only from the Scripture adopted by Church proclamation or the proclamation of the Church based on Scripture.
> The written Word of God we know only through the revelation which fulfils proclamation or through the proclamation fulfilled by revelation.
> The preached Word of God we know only through the revelation attested in Scripture or the Scripture which attests revelation.[42]

The only genuine analogy to the Word of God is the triunity of God because revelation is not the basis for the Trinity, but the *doctrine* of the Trinity.[43] The names of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can be substituted for revelation, Scripture, and proclamation and *vice versa*, because the same basic determinations and mutual relationships are evident in both triads.[44] Yet because revelation is a concrete, personal event, the task of Christian theology is "dealing with the concept of the revelation of God who according to Scripture and proclamation is the Father of Jesus Christ, is Jesus Christ Himself, and is the Spirit of this Father and this Son."[45] In this unity of the threefold form, however, there is differentiation. To this same God who in unimpaired unity is the "Revealer, the revelation and the revealedness," there is ascribed an unimpaired differentiation within Himself that testifies to a threefold "mode of being."[46] It is God's three-in-oneness that gives answer to the question concerning the subject of revelation in Scripture. Barth summarizes by stating that "the revelation attested in Holy Scripture is the revelation of

---

[42]Ibid., 121.

[43]Ibid., 310-11.

[44]Ibid., 121. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God*, 38.

[45]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:291.

[46]Ibid., 299.

God who, as the Lord, is the Father from whom it proceeds, the Son who fulfils it objectively (for us), and the Holy Spirit who fulfils it subjectively (in us). He is the One God in each of these modes of being and action, which are quite distinct and never to be identified with each other."[47] Barth's argument is thus brought full circle in the statement "God reveals Himself as the Lord" and is the root of the doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to revelation itself as attested by Scripture.[48] God's lordship, however, is prior to his revelation and in some sense is prior to the Trinity since his sovereignty and his freedom is paramount.[49]

Barth rejects to any attempts to find evidence of the Trinity in creation through the expression of *vestigium Trinitatis*. He finds such a concept to contain strong strands of *analogia entis* (analogy of being) which strives to find traces of Trinity that are present and perceptible in the created world apart from biblical revelation. In its strong relationship to natural theology, such an approach creates a second "root" of the doctrine that is grounded in cosmology and anthropology.[50] Barth is aware that throughout the history of Christian doctrine many theologians have attempted to find vestiges of the Trinity in nature, culture, history, religion and human psychology (an analogy made famous by Augustine).[51] Barth does not regard these efforts as merely "idle game" and they may indeed be helpful so long as they are seen in the light of revelation. But, Barth

---

[47]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 2:1.

[48]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 1:307.

[49]Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed Publishing Company, 2004), 274.

[50]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:334-35.

[51]Ibid., 336-38.

asks, is "the Triune God who is supposedly to be found in the world first and then independently, really the One who Holy Scripture calls God? Or was He just an epitome, a supreme principle of the world and ultimately man?"[52] Human language alone cannot grasp revelation but revelation can commandeer human language. The problem is one of difference between interpretation and revelation. "Interpretation," says Barth, "means saying *the same thing* in other words. Illustration means saying the same thing *in other words*."[53] Revelation, ultimately, will submit only to interpretation and not to illustration, because to illustrate the Trinity is to set a second thing alongside revelation and focus attention on the illustration. Thus revelation is no longer trusted in respect to its "self-evidential force." For Barth the only genuine *vestigium Trinitatis* is the "thrice single voice of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit" heard in the Word revealed, written, and proclaimed, which is the first and only "root" of the doctrine.[54]

In explaining the triunity of God, Barth seeks to avoid any hint of tritheism by affirming that the essence of God is a unity of threeness of persons and not three objects of faith which would indicate three gods.[55] Nor does this imply a threeness of essence since there is no plurality or parts within the one Godhead. What the Trinity means, rather, is that "God is the one Lord in threefold repetition, with no addition, adulteration, or alternation. Each repetition is grounded in the one Godhead, and God is God only in

---

[52]Ibid., 342.

[53]Ibid., 345.

[54]Ibid., 347.

[55]Ibid., 349-50.

this repetition."[56] Even though "person" as it is used historically in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is never meant to imply direct relationship to personality, Barth feels such a term has taken on a modern, individualistic interpretation that fosters antitrinitarian thought and lead to extreme expressions of tritheism. Since the unity of God includes a distinction and order in God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, then by what term should the relationship within the Godhead be understood? Barth opts for the controversial German term *seinsweise*, which is translated as "mode of being" or "way" of being, which is not absolute in description but better than the traditional use of "person."[57] He draws criticism from some theologians who accuse him of modalist tendencies by the use of the term.[58] It is clear, however, that Barth rejects this error when he asserts that these "modes" are "not to be understood as three divine attributes, as three parts of the divine property, as three departments of the divine essence and operation."[59] Modalism seeks a true God beyond the three moments (of revelation) in a higher being who has no distinctions. Barth counters such claims by affirming that the "revelation of God and therefore His being as Father, Son and Spirit is not an economy which is foreign to His essence and which is bounded as it were above and within, so that we have to ask about the hidden Fourth if we are to ask about God. On the contrary, when we ask about God,

---

[56]Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, reprint 2001), 15. Bromiley here cites Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:350.

[57]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:359.

[58]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), and Catherine LaCugna, *God for Us* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991) are two of Barth's most noted critics in this area. Much of their criticism comes, likely, from their acceptance of the basic premises of "Rahner's Rule" in the economy of salvation. Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, 289, states that while modalism laid to Barth's account, his insistence that in God there is but one subject, not three, "the one God in self-repetition . . . in three different modes the one personal God" is ambiguous enough to bring Barth very close to affirming God's being as "unipersonal."

[59]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:361.

we can only ask about the One who reveals Himself."[60] What God is towards human beings, he is eternally and antecedently in himself. And what God is antecedently and from all eternity, God is towards human beings.[61]

In explaining the significance of this threefold repetition in God's being, Barth notes:

> What we have here are God's specific, different, and always very distinctive modes of being. This means that God's modes of being are not to be exchanged or confounded. In all three modes of being God is the one God both in Himself and in relation to the world and man. But this one God is God three times in different ways . . . so different that this difference, this being in these three modes of being, is absolutely essential to Him . . . this difference is irremovable. Nor can there be any possibility that one of the modes of being might just as well be the other, e.g., that the Father might just as well be the Son or the Son the Spirit, nor that two of them or all three might coalesce and dissolve into one. In this case the modes of being would not be essential to the divine being. . . . because in denying the threeness in the unity of God we should be referring at once to another God than the God revealed in Holy Scripture—for this very reason this threeness . . . and the distinctiveness of the three . . . must be regarded as ineffaceable.[62]

Furthermore, the "Father, Son, and Spirit are distinguished from one another by the fact that without inequality of essence or dignity, they stand in dissimilar relations of origin to one another."[63] There a unity in the Trinity which is set before the world in revelation so that there is no need to opt between revelation and unity. Here Barth sees the ground of God's revelation as being that of subject, predicate, and object, which is the same as *revealer*, *revelation* and *being revealed*.[64] Yet where there is difference there is

---

[60]Ibid., 382.

[61]Alan Torrance, "The Trinity," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 82.

[62]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:360-61.

[63]Ibid., 363.

[64]Bromiley, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 15-16. Italics mine.

also fellowship because there is "a definite participation of each mode of being in the other modes of being (perichoresis). Just as in revelation, according to the biblical witness, the one God may be known only in the Three and the Three only as the one God, so none of the Three may be known without the other Two but each of the Three only with the other Two."[65]

The triunity of God, however, is revealed to us only in God's work (Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer). There is a distinction of the essence of God in totality (which is incomprehensible) from His essence as the One who works and reveals Himself. "The comprehensibility (of God's being) with which it is presented to us, primarily in Scripture and secondarily in the Church doctrine of the Trinity, is a creaturely comprehensibility," although it is not relatively different from the comprehensibility with which it exits in God Himself.[66] Nevertheless, this free gift of revelation that remains veiled even as it is unveiled is not without truth as it relates to the knowledge of God. In a real sense, the triunity of God is known from God's work *ad extra* that also corresponds to a unity even in distinction. Barth understands Scripture assigns to one or other persons within the triune Godhead specific acts and deeds of God, and that these have come to be known in Christian doctrine as "appropriations." These references are valid and helpful as long as they remain biblical and are not arbitrary or exclusive in relationship to divine triunity.[67]

Barth's exposition of how revelation unfolds to us and its corresponding

---

[65]Barth, *CD* 1, pt.1:370.

[66]Ibid., 371.

[67]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 1:373-74. Bromiley, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 17.

relationship between God's economic and immanent being and activity leads him to strongly defend the *Filioque* doctrine that has been taught in the Western tradition of Christian thought.[68] The reason for his acceptance of the Western model is related directly to Barth's understanding of role of the Holy Spirit in the perichoretic relationship of the triune Godhead. The Holy Spirit, for Barth, acts as the communion of the Father and Son while at the same time remaining a distinct person or mode of being. Drawing on the economy of salvation, Barth affirms that the "Holy Spirit is the bond of union between God and humanity in Jesus Christ and between Christ and humanity and these unions in turn reflect how God is in himself."[69] There is a genuine correspondence between God's being and action *ad intra* and what he does for humanity *ad extra*. John Thompson provides a concise summary of Barth's view:

> The central emphasis is that of the Spirit as the mutual self-giving and impartation of the Father to Son and Son to Father. It is the same Holy Spirit who enables and creates communion between God and humanity. This communion shows both the reality of our participation in revelation and is indicative of the place of the Spirit in the divine life. Since God and humanity are related to one another and we share in divine revelation by the Holy Spirit this reflects the reality of God's being as participation, sharing, mutual self-giving of Father and Son by the Holy Spirit.[70]

This union and communion of the Father and Son through the Holy Spirit demonstrate that God is love in this mutuality of relationships. Although Barth is not favorable toward a "social" Trinitarian model, he does affirm that this divine fellowship is the basis for the possibility of a creature's union with God and with other human

---

[68]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:480. In doing so, Barth rejects the Eastern Orthodox doctrine that says the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone in the economy of salvation.

[69]John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 26.

[70]Ibid., 27. Thompson also references Barth's quote in *CD* 1, pt. 1:470 that the Holy Spirit is "act in which the Father is the Father of the Son . . . and the Son is the Son of the Father."

beings.[71]

> As God is in Himself Father from all eternity, He begets Himself as the Son from all eternity. As He is the Son from all eternity, He is begotten of Himself as the Father from all eternity. In this eternal begetting of Himself and being begotten of Himself, He posits Himself a third time as the Holy Spirit, i.e., as the love which unites Him in Himself. . . . God already negates in Himself, from eternity, in His absolute simplicity, all loneliness, self-containment, or self-isolation. . . . God is orientated to the Other, does not will to be without the Other, will have Himself only as He has Himself with the Other and indeed in the Other. He is the Father of the Son in such a way that with the Son He brings forth the Spirit, love, and is in Himself the Spirit, love.[72]

Barth finds both a formal and material defect in the Eastern position. First, Barth notes that the Eastern doctrine does not dispute that in revelation "Jesus Christ as the Giver of the Holy Spirit is not without the Father from whom He, Jesus Christ, is. But the Father as the Giver of the Holy Spirit is also not without Jesus Christ to whom He Himself is the Father."[73] But the Eastern position fails to read from revelation its statements about the being of God "antecedently in Himself." This means there is a difference between the God revealed to us and who He is *ad intra* form all eternity, and the basis of our faith, therefore, is evacuated of real content.[74] Second, the *Filioque* expresses recognition of the communion between the Father and the Son. "The Holy Spirit," Thompson explains, "is the love which is the essence of the relation [between the Father and the Son]. And recognition of this communion is none other than recognition of the basis and conformation of the communion between God and man as a divine, eternal truth, created in revelation by the Holy Spirit. The intra-divine two-sided

---

[71]Ibid., 28.

[72]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:483.

[73]Ibid., 480.

[74]Ibid., 481.

fellowship of the Spirit, which proceeds from the Father and the Son, is the basis of the fact that there is in revelation a fellowship in which not only is God there for man but . . . man is there for God.[75] Barth's acceptance of the *Filioque* has direct implications for his understanding of role of the Holy Spirit in making revelation a possibility and a reality.

The Centrality of Jesus Christ in Divine Revelation

Barth's doctrine of revelation has come to commonly be described as "Christocentric" because of the primacy given to the person of Jesus Christ in his theology. It can be noted, however, that placing Christ at the "center" of one's theological edifice is hardly original since it could be said that Jesus is given central place "in all orthodox theologies and even in many liberal ones."[76] Yet Barth's exposition of revelation fundamentally differs from other systems of Christian thought in that Jesus Christ is the center *and* the beginning *and* the end of all of God's ways with humanity. It has been noted previously noted that for Barth revelation is an event, it is God's act of unveiling what has been previously veiled. And the event of revelation is identical with Jesus Christ who is "the one, true, eternal God who makes Himself known to us, in whom we believe, whom we acknowledge and confess as *our* God."[77] Because revelation has a trinitarian structure, we know God only in His self-disclosure as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The three persons, however, do not have identical roles in the act since only the Son becomes incarnate. The concrete enactment of revelation is the history of Jesus

---

[75]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in Karl Barth*, 31. Barth, *CD* 1, pt.1:480.

[76]Henri Blocher, "Karl Barth's Christocentric Method," in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham, UK: Apollos Press, 2008), 26.

[77]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 36.

Christ. Yet knowledge of the three persons is generated by the divine action that takes place in the Son and we fail to grasp who Jesus is if we fail to give attention to the Father's mystery (of revelation) or Spirit's work of personal disclosure.[78] In other words, it is through the incarnate Word that we come to understand the nature of God as triune. John Thompson offers a succinct analysis:

> The revelation in Jesus Christ is of one who is Lord, who is God; and this points to a Revealer who is the same Lord, the same God, the same subject of revelation. It points also to one [Holy Spirit] who might in one sense be called the person who completes revelation, brings revelation to humanity, involves us in it. This . . . is God again in another form, the same God, the same Lord; thus we have the one God as the Revealer, the revelation, and this reaching out to and involve humanity, what Barth calls revealedness. The one God in revelation distinguishes himself from himself not as another God, but as three ways in which the one God exists, comes to us, is known by us and experienced. To put it in more traditional language God reveals himself as the Father through the Son by the Holy Spirit—God above us, God for us and God in and with us.[79]

It has been noted previously that because in revelation God remains concealed even as He is revealed, so it is that Jesus Christ comes veiled in human flesh. This is illustrated by the fact that many in Jesus' day saw Him only as a man and it is only the eyes of faith opened up by the revelation of Father that permits one to see Jesus as the Messiah. Since God Himself can be known only indirectly, His revelation must always come to humanity "clothed in the garments of creaturely reality" in order that we might be able to apprehend it, whether it meets us in the humanity of Jesus Christ Himself or in the earthly vessels of Holy Scripture and Church proclamation.[80] The revelation of the

---

[78]Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 38.

[79]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in Karl Barth*, 20.

[80]Barth, *CD* 2, pt.1:16-17. Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1964), 64, 71. When it comes to human knowledge of God, Barth draws a distinction between primary and secondary objectivity of God to finite creatures. God is primarily and immediately objective

Word is concealed from us not only by its worldly form but also by human sinfulness that prevents us from recognizing and accepting it as God's Word. Human faith must be created by God's grace through the work of the Holy Spirit in order for God's Word to be recognized and accepted. Because God always remains the Subject of revelation and never the object, true revelation remains His act and His work for all ages and in relation each individual person. Revelation is not revelation until it "gets through" to human beings and is acknowledged and accepted by them.[81] Therefore, Jesus Christ in the unity of His person and work is the objective aspect of revelation while the work of the Holy Spirit in persons to enable them to receive this objective revelation in faith represents the subjective aspect.[82] It is the Holy Spirit that guarantees not only acceptance of the Word in Christ but also makes personal participation in revelation possible. The nature and work of the Holy Spirit is summed up by two expressions: He is "the Lord who sets us free" and "by receiving Him we become the children of God."[83] For Barth revelation and reconciliation are, therefore, inseparable.[84]

---

only to Himself within His innertrinitarian life, whereas human beings can know Him only in secondary or mediate objectivity, or objects appropriate to human comprehension.

[81]Hartwell, *Theology of Barth*, 69.

[82]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:1-279.

[83]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 1:456.

[84]Bruce L. McCormack, "Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness," in *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 177-96. McCormack states that Barth's perspective on revelation and reconciliation is grounded in his theological ontology. For Barth there exists no dualism between the objective procuring of salvation in the past and a subjective appropriation of salvation in the here and now. Jesus Christ's work of atonement accomplishes not merely the possibility of reconciliation but the *reality* of it. Justification is not first made effective when the Holy Spirit awakens faith in the creature but, rather, the Spirit awakens faith in the creature so that they might live from and toward the reality of a justification that is already effective for them even before they come to know it. This problem of participation in Christ's salvific work is resolved by Barth's doctrine of election which by God's electing grace all are "in Christ" long before the appearance of Jesus in time. The Holy Spirit's task, therefore, is not to make us mere

In Barth's view "true knowledge of God, the world and man is not possible apart from the knowledge of God's work of reconciliation in Jesus Christ because it is only in and through that work and thus in and through Jesus Christ that we come to know who and what God and man really are and that the world has been created by God and for what purpose."[85] The centrality of revelation in Jesus Christ in Barth's thought excludes any second sources of revelation whether termed general, partial or progressive in nature. These second forms of revelation outside the person and work of Jesus Christ cannot provided genuine knowledge of God and, thus, leads only to the construction of human epistemological idols. Such an approach assumes that human beings have an innate "readiness" to receive divine revelation. It is in the being and action of God, however, that such capacity or readiness is given to persons and it is in God's hands alone to give such readiness. The readiness of human creatures to receive and acknowledge revelation can never be independent or grounded in the nature and activity of the human being.[86] Barth's insistence that human readiness for revelation must be grounded in Christology rather than anthropology leads him to reject any concept or form of natural theology.[87]

---

participants in Christ's completed work. The Spirit's work is to awaken us to the truth (revelation) that we are justified sinners in Christ and to point us toward a way of life that corresponds to what we are in Him.

[85]Hartwell, *Theology of Barth*, 70.

[86]John Webster, *Barth* (London: Continuum, 2000), 79-80.

[87]Bromiley, *Introduction to Barth*, 61-63. Barth asserts that the beginning point for knowledge of God lies in God Himself. God is ready to be known because He already eternally knows Himself and His "readiness" is grounded in His very being, nature, and activity. But that does not imply that humanity carries such an innate readiness. God must initiate this readiness in human beings toward genuine truth and grace that comes through Jesus Christ. Apart from this divine initiative, human creatures, in their resistance to God and to grace and truth, create alternative routes for pursuing "inauthentic" knowledge of God which, for Barth, is without merit. Because humans do not possess a religious *a priori* for knowing God, to begin with false concepts and analogies is what lies at the core of natural theology. Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 1:75-127 provides as extensive explanation and defense of his rejection of natural theology. A greater examination of Barth's arguments against this method will be provided later.

The incarnation of the eternal Word, Jesus Christ, is the reality of God's revelation to the world and constitutes the real freedom of God to be our (human creatures) God. Jesus Christ, therefore, is the objective reality of revelation.[88] This is the precise reason Barth grounds revelation itself in the Word becoming flesh and this is an actuality in which we read off the possibility of revelation. Despite the reality of human sinfulness, it is not the darkening of human reason that leads God to become incarnate in Christ but simply "the majesty of God in His condescension to the creatures."[89] The objective reality has several implications for the possibility.

First, it demonstrates that God can cross the boundary between Himself and humanity, or bridge the gap between His existence and an existence that is not identical to Himself so that He in His gracious freedom should be our God.[90] Second, in Jesus Christ God is free to reveal Himself in such a way that the Son becomes man and not God the Father nor God the Holy Spirit. In the incarnation the Son is never without the Father and the Holy Spirit but in the work of becoming man the order the Trinity represents the Father as the divine *Who*, the Son as the divine *What*, and the Holy Spirit as the divine *How*.[91] Third, the reality in Christ reveals that He is free in such a way that the Word assumes a form (human) that can be known to us and can be known by analogy with other such beings. God is accessible to us because He is visible to us, although there is no given *analogia entis* between God and human creatures.[92] Fourth, in the incarnation

---

[88]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:1-3.

[89]Ibid., 31, cited in Mangina, *Karl Bath*, 39-40.

[90]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:31-33.

[91]Ibid., 33.

[92]Ibid., 35-37.

the Son remains fully God so there is no lessening of His divinity even as He remains veiled in the unveiling.[93] Finally, the Son becomes what human beings are—flesh. Although He remains sinless in His humanity, He stands under the curse of sin and judgment that He freely took upon Himself in becoming a man.[94] In brief, there is a divine necessity whereby revelation, in order to be revelation, had to take place in the incarnation.[95] With Jesus Christ serving as the bridge between God and the world and between God and us, he is the point of departure for every dogmatic proposition as it pertains to revelation, election, creation, reconciliation, and redemption.[96]

If indeed God is free for us in Jesus Christ as the objective reality of revelation, then the Holy Spirit as the "subjective reality" of revelation and thereby also its "subjective possibility" that makes human beings genuinely "free" for God. It has already been noted that there is a necessary unity in the objective and subjective aspect of the triune act of revelation. It is the person and work of the Holy Spirit who makes individual human beings "open and ready for God, for His Word, for Jesus Christ, creating in them that faith whereby they come to believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and as their Lord and Master whom He, the Holy Spirit, Himself reveals to them as such" and causes them to become a new creation.[97] But how is this subjective reality to be comprehended? First, the Holy Spirit acting upon us is also "God" and His work upon

---

[93]Ibid., 38.

[94]Ibid., 40.

[95]Bromiley, *Introduction to Barth*, 23.

[96]Barth, *CD* 1, pt.2:1-202. The rich Christology formed by Barth in his prolegomena volume sets the stage for his extensive and detailed discussion of the Christologically-determined nature of election, reconciliation, and redemption found in *CD* 2, pt. 2:3-506 and *CD* 4, pts. 1-3.1.

[97]Hartwell, *Theology of Barth*, 84. Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:203-42.

us is also revelation and knowledge of Him as also revelation.[98] Barth designates the Holy Spirit as the Redeemer and Lord and in revelation "is God Himself to the extent that He can not only come to man but also be in man, and thus open up man and make him capable and ready for Himself, and thus achieve His revelation in him."[99] Just as the God has come to us in the incarnation of the Word, the One who has already come to humanity comes to us again in the Holy Spirit. Here we see two acts in one and the same revelation.[100] This means, simply, there is not a second revelation to that which is objective revelation. That is why the subjective reality of revelation can never be made into an independent theme whereby the revelation of the Spirit is separated from the revelation of Christ since the work of the Spirit is "enclosed" in the objectively reality.[101]

How then in the freedom of the human being is it possible for God's revelation to reach us? In different words, how is revelation a subjective possibility? First, through "the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it is possible for God's revelation to reach man in his freedom, because in it the Word of God is brought to his hearing."[102] The revelation of the Word alone is insufficient since the Word must become accessible to us. The Holy Spirit completes the process of revelation and fulfils an epistemic dimension by ensuring

---

[98]Barth, *CD* 1, pt.2:207. The work of the Holy Spirit in creating this actual and real knowledge of God will be the focus of discussion in chap. 4.

[99]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt.1:450.

[100]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 223.

[101]Ibid., 224. Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:240. Here Barth demonstrates clearly that his doctrine of the Holy Spirit finds little common ground with the pneumatological models of Karl Rahner, Clark Pinnock, and Amos Yong. This point will merit further attention later.

[102]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:246. Cited in Roland Chia, *Revelation and Theology: The Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 145. Chia notes that there are three propositions that Barth provides in evaluating the Holy Spirit's role in the subjective possibility of imparting revelation. Chia's insights are quite helpful and valuable.

that the ontic in Jesus Christ becomes noetic for the human.[103] The Holy Spirit, as the Spirit of Truth and the spiritual power of the Word, creates a human knowledge that corresponds to the truth of God Himself.[104] This knowledge of faith is a miracle of grace and through the experience of faith the Spirit incorporates an individual into revelation. Jesus Christ, the Word of God, brought to our hearing by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, makes it possible for us to be recipients of revelation. This work of the Spirit "is the divine act of lordship, the mystery and miracle of the existence of God among us, the triumph of free grace."[105]

Second, it is by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that "it is possible in the freedom of man for God's revelation to meet him, because in it He is explicitly told by God's Word that he possess one possibility of his own for such a meeting.[106] It has been noted that Barth rejects the idea that humans have any given capacity for revelation. Humans are not free for God and, negatively, it is not in our being to receive revelation. "It is not merely that man lacks something which he ought to be or have to be capable of it in relation to God. He lacks everything. It is not merely that he is in a dangerous or damaged state, but in his being toward God he is completely finished and impotent. He is not a sick man but a dead one."[107] That the Word of God is acknowledged and received by us is due solely to the freedom of God as He comes to us. "To become free for God we must be convinced that we are not already free. We must make room for the miracle

---

[103]Chia, *Revelation and Theology*, 145, 148.

[104]Ibid., 146.

[105]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:248.

[106]Ibid., 257, cited in Chia, *Revelation and Theology*, 146.

[107]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:257.

of acknowledging the Word of God."[108] The occurrence of revelation, therefore, is always a miracle and a product of divine mercy and omnipotence.

Third, it is by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that human beings in their freedom can be met by revelation because the Word of God is exalted "to be the master over men, puts man unavoidably under His mastery."[109] How does this mastery actually produce freedom rather than enslavement? First, by the power of the Spirit, we have found the One from whom we can no longer withdraw in terms of our partnership with Him.[110] Second, we also discover the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, an authority under which we are always responsible and subject both on our obedience and disobedience.[111] Third, in Jesus Christ we are subject to a command of obedience and allegiance to Him. It is a command that strikes us at the very core of our being and for which there cannot be "subterfuge nor excuse."[112] Fourth, this power of command, however, meets us in our "irresponsibility" to achieve what only God can bring to completion. It is God who forgives us, receives us and adopts us into participation in the Word of God. It is a task that does not depend on our fitness since in and of ourselves we are quite unsuited for the work. But when we are placed under the Word and under the command of the Word then we are really free.[113] Fifth, this mastery gives us formation and direction as we adapt ourselves to Christ the master. We by the work of the Spirit are

---

[108]Ibid., 258.

[109]Ibid., 270, cited in Chia, *Revelation and Theology*, 147.

[110]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:270.

[111]Ibid., 271.

[112]Ibid., 272-73.

[113]Ibid., 274-75.

conformed to Christ for Christ's sake as we become children of God.[114] Finally, this mastery means that our concerns are no longer our own but, now, Christ's concern is ours. It is an interest or concern which does not permit other rivals or idols because it is with humiliation and comfort that we come under submission to the Word of God and His lordship. It is both limitation and liberation for us.[115] In Jesus Christ, "God says 'Yes' to man, and in the Holy Spirit, man can say 'Yes' to God.[116]

Because revelation is singularly a triune event, there can never be a separation of Holy Spirit from the person of Jesus Christ who is revelation *en toto*. Any attempt to do so is simply absorption of the divine Spirit into the human spirit. This is what Barth saw as one of the chief errors or faults in of post-Enlightenment, Neo-Protestant thought, particularly as it pertains to human experience and religious practice, even more so for those who practice the institution of "Christianity." It is not Barth's wish to deny that God's revelation can be present in the realm of human religion. It is crucial, however, to discern what it means for God to be present in religion. In other words, the "problem" of religion must confront the question as to whether "what we think we know about the nature and incidence of religion must serve as the norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or, *vice* versa, does it mean that we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation?"[117] It is to Barth's insights on the legitimacy and worth of human religiosity that we now turn our attention.

---

[114]Ibid., 276-77.

[115]Ibid., 278.

[116]Chia, *Revelation and Theology*, 147.

[117]Barth, *CD* 1, pt.2:284.

CHAPTER 4

BARTH ON RELIGION AND THE RELIGIONS

It is common in modern theological thought to find thinkers who caricature Barth as disinterested in or condemnatory to the concept of religion due to his distinctive emphasis on the "Christocentric" trinitarian nature of revelation. A significant portion of this criticism has come from Protestant liberal and progressive Roman Catholic theologians who accuse Barth of bigotry and exclusivism in divine revelation because of his declaration that "Jesus Christ, as he is attested to us in Holy Scripture, is the one Word of God whom we have to hear, and whom we have to trust and obey in life and in death. We reject the false doctrine that the church could and should recognize as a source of its proclamation, beyond and besides this one Word of God, yet other events, powers, historic figures, and truths as God's revelation."[1] Barth's Christological affirmation is, naturally, accepted by his critics as having a direct correlation to his view on religion. Paul Knitter finds Barth's theology of revelation to be one of a "total replacement" where

---

[1]Karl Barth, "The Barmen Declaration," in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 149. Barth drafted this declaration in May 1934 on behalf of group of pastors and theologians as the statement of faith of the "Confessing Church" against the German Evangelical Church that had capitulated to Adolf Hitler's policies of nationalism, Aryan racism and militarism. It is an absolute repudiation of the concept that God's will, revelation and truth are discerned in the policies of a national political state. Jordan J. Ballor, "The Aryan clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Natural Theology, 1933-1935," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 3 (2006): 263-80, states that Barth in the confession finds the central issue at stake in the church struggle is the need to reject natural theology while Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who also affirms the confession, believes that the German Evangelical Church's acquiescence to the "Aryan clause" is the primary reason for the "Confessing" Church's need to break with the state Church. Carl E. Braaten, *No Other Gospel: Christianity among the World's Religions* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 49-50, provides examples of a few theologians who either misread or dismiss Barth's critique of religion.

non-Christian faith communities are so lacking, or so aberrant, or of "no value" that in the end Christianity must be viewed as the religion of truth.[2]

There is no question that Barth as a "Christian" theologian is among the most strident critics of the practices of human religion. It is never his intention, however, to abolish the concept or institution of religion. Barth, in fact, believes religion is an unavoidable human phenomenon, something that cannot be escaped. It is the "last and the most inevitable human possibility" and is the "frontier by which all human possibility bounded."[3] Religion, however, because it is something that only has human capacity and authority, is the outer limit of human achievement and can go no further. It is the furthest reach of human grasping and is the limit and consummation of human achievement.[4] For Barth, religion is the "law" that now has dominion over humans who are engulfed in an uncertainty that exists within the realm of possibility. There is a contrast in religion, a positive and negative pole, a "yes" and a "no." Religion produces a moral, legal and dogmatic ordering in human practice which we see as positive because we believe it bears witness to our relationship with God. This ordering occurs even where the secular is emphasized over the theistic. This positive, however, reaches the summit and then falls into the "abyss" because, negatively, we remain confronted with the "memory" of

---

[2]Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 23. In an earlier work, Knitter frames Barth's evaluation of religion as a "conservative Evangelical model" in response to the question of religious pluralism. See Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 80-87.

[3]Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press) 1933, 231.

[4]Matthew Myer Boulton, *God against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 26. This study of Barth's thought on religion is very insightful. Boulton sees Barth as affirming the existence of religion due to the "Fall" of humanity whereby genuine knowledge of God is disrupted. In the absence of such knowledge, human beings, in the KRISIS of sin and separation from God, attempt to stand aright before their Creator by carrying out an "independent act" of worship that is divorced from complete dependence on God.

the lost direct relationship with God.[5] This dualism controls the world of religion and, consequently, sin abounds. To be under the "law" of religion is to be under sin because the one true God, whom humanity can no longer know, is now transformed into a god of this world who is worshipped. Prior to the "Fall," the possibility of sin existed only in "primal form," or as a "secret" possibility that the union between God and human beings could be broken.[6] While this union was not a union of identity since there remains an "infinite qualitative distinction"[7] between the Creator and the creature even before the rebellion of sin, the fact of this distinction was lovingly hidden by God and human beings lived in an intimate and dependent relationship with God that insured genuine human freedom. This distinction, however, allowed for an equality of "friendship." Humans did not know about assuming an alleged independence and self-sufficiency that would lead them to do exactly what they ought not to do—the attempt to live as "some second thing" apart from and by the side of God.[8]

The entrance of sin and rebellion, however, brings the knowledge that human beings are "merely" human and stand in radical separation from God. Humans must now invent a new vantage point from which to attempt to establish intimacy once again with God who is now "mere God." The original intimacy which was prior to religion now gives way to religion.[9] Religion is now created as a "gesture of adoration" that becomes a human form of worship.[10] The human liturgy is the very act which God did not intend

---

[5]Barth, *Romans*, 230-31.

[6]Ibid., 246.

[7]Ibid., 10. Barth adopts this phrase from Søren Kierkegaard.

[8]Boulton, *God against Religion*, 36.

[9]Ibid., 40.

[10]Barth, *Romans*, 247. Here Barth refers to Michelangelo's painting "Creation of Eve" where

originally for human beings to perform, not because God is not worthy of worship, but because such acts now become *leitourgia*, a "work of people" to stand aright before God.[11] Worship now takes a place over against God and beside God as "some second thing." It becomes an "independent action" that presents God with offerings and sacrifices, and delivers and dedicates goods and services and, in word, *works* or *leitourgia*.[12] Worship (or religion) is a human offering that grasps at a "specious and illicit" independence where the work of people is opposed to the original work of people-with-God and is a presumptuous attempt to reestablish a relationship that has been severed.[13] The possibility of religion becomes a reality through this dissolution of the divine-human relationship and religion now the "occasion" of sin. Religion is "the working capital of sin; its fulcrum; the means by which men are removed from direct union with God and thrust into disunion, that is, into the recognition of their—creatureliness."[14]

Barth's polemic against religion did not occur in a vacuum. In fact, the seeds of his polemic are rooted in the first years of his devotion to a nineteenth modernist theological tradition that gave great place to the concept of religion. Theses early days of Barth's intellectual journey as a student and, later, as a pastor are crucial to understanding his eventual rejection of all human efforts to stand aright before a "wholly other" God.

---

the woman, following the Fall, becomes the first "religious personality" where she poses "herself in the fatal attitude of—worship" and, thus, behaves as she ought not as she has now set herself "over against God" since she is now separated from God and from all possibility of intimate friendship with Him. The very act of worship, with its characteristic adoration, reverence, praise, and confession, indicates a reversal of this friendship and emphasizes the drastic inequality between the Creator and the creatures.

[11]Boulton, *God against Religion*, 41.

[12]Ibid., 43.

[13]Ibid., 44.

[14]Barth, *Romans*, 248.

Barth's Early Attack on Religion

Barth, as the son of a conservative Reformed Swiss pastor and professor named Fritz Barth, determined early in his study for ministry to reject his father's orthodox, confessional theology and gave himself over to German theological liberalism. He became immersed fully in liberal theological thought and practice as a student at Berlin and Marburg where he encountered two men, Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Herrmann, respectively, who exercised immense influence on the young student. Herrmann's theology, in some respect, would guide Barth's thought throughout the remainder of his life. In Berlin, he gave devoted reading to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Critique of Pure Reason*, as well as Friedrich Schleiermacher's *On Religion*. He also devoured the insights found in Herrmann's *Ethics*. Although he also attended universities at Berne, where his father taught, and at Tübingen following his Berlin experience, the younger Barth's enthusiasm for liberal thought led him to seek his father's for permission to study at Marburg. Despite his father's strong reservations, Barth was eventually allowed to move to Marburg where he became an avowed disciple of liberal experientialism.[15]

Herrmann in many respects became the founder of the "Ritschlian school" and insisted that liberal theology did indeed contain the essential message of the Christian faith through understanding the "inner life of Jesus."[16] Barth, who made no secret of the

---

[15]Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 33-52; Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 31-77; Gary Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 14-46 are among several good works that detail Barth's early theological development. Each provides extensive discussion of Barth's embrace of the Ritschlian school of liberal theology that was dominant at Berlin and Marburg.

[16]Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 15. "Ritschlianism" is a school of thought applied to those

fact that early in his ministry training he "blindly" followed Schleiermacher's experiential approach to doctrine, absorbed Herrmann's writing and teaching "through every pore."[17] Ritschlian theology made a strong distinction between religion, or the spiritual life of the person, and what it considered to be the "speculative" metaphysics of older Christian dogmatic formulations. Thus Ritschl's followers rejected the dogmatic claims of the orthodox traditionalism, medieval Catholicism, or even German Pietism.[18] For Ritschlians, Christian religion is both historical and moral, and is essentially a practical matter. The theologian's task is to explicate the meaning of the content of God's self-revelation as historically realized in the person of Jesus Christ.[19]

Ritschl's theology, because of its unwavering commitment to Kantian epistemology, viewed Christian faith as steeped in "value judgments," or truths that are known concerning the nature of God and Christ in the sense of their "worth" for us. In other words, God is known only in His value for us as revealed in the work of Christ and as appropriated by faith.[20] Jesus, as the Founder of the perfect moral and spiritual religion, lived out his ethical calling or vocation that was directed toward the purpose of realizing the Kingdom of God. Christ, for Ritschl, is the revealer of God in that Jesus

---

theologians who adopted, in one form or the other, the ideas of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889), Germany's most prominent theologian in the late nineteenth century.

[17]Busch, *Karl Barth*, 45.

[18]James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and The Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 271. Ritschl's followers were critical of what they considered sterile dogmatism of Protestant "confessionalists" as well as mystical and individualistic expressions of faith they believed could be found in Catholicism and Pietism.

[19]Ibid., 273.

[20]Ibid., 274-76. While rigorous historical and scientific study of the facts concerning Christianity and the person of Christ is important to Ritschl, the results of such research can make no determinations related to the validity of judgments of value. Such value judgments transcend the discovery of mere historical facts. Historical-critical investigation of the events recorded in the Gospels is not integral to the estimate of historical figure of Jesus. For Ritschl, faith is the absolute, necessary condition for any real knowledge of God in Christ.

saw His ethical vocation as fulfilling the will of God in establishing the Kingdom, and he fulfilled that calling perfectly. His saving work, therefore, consists in both the *justification* and *reconciliation* that is accomplished through His moral influence on His followers or His community, the Church.[21]

Herrmann, like his mentor, repudiated Christianity's dependence on metaphysics. Unlike Ritschl, however, Herrmann's emphasis on the "inner life" of Jesus led Herrmann to reject his teacher's notion that the discipline of historical enquiry could in any way serve to ground communion with God in the events of history.[22] Herrmann, therefore, rejected the idea that Christian revelation was to be identified with doctrine and he maintained a deep suspicion of proofs of faith from science, natural theology, or apologetics. For Herrmann, faith and revelation are miracles and events that occur in "supranaturalist" terms, as an encounter with a reality that cannot be produced from within but must be revealed to the human being.[23] The encounter with the historical fact

---

[21]Ibid., 278-79. Ritschl's magnum opus is the three-volume work, *The Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*. Ritschl understands the nature of Christ's *divinity* in the service He renders and the benefit He bestows on others. Christ's fulfillment of His *ethical* vocation leads directly to the *religious* valuation of His work. Christ, as the unique bearer of God's ethical lordship over humanity, is the only mediator of justification and reconciliation who opens up the possibility for us of a changed relationship to God. The Church, however, is the community within which individual salvation is realized in that it is through communion with other followers of Christ that one becomes aware of sin, hears the promise of divine forgiveness, and becomes both a receiver and agent of reconciliation.

[22]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 52. This was Herrmann's contention even if the focus of such enquiries were on the life and teachings of Jesus. Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 15-17, notes that one of the likely reasons for the developments in Herrmann's theology was a split in the latter years of the nineteenth century between church-oriented Ritschlians and those who became part of the "History of Religions" movement led by Ernst Troeltsch. Acting fully on the historicism of the Ritschlian school, the History of Religions approach carried such scientific study to its logical end and gave no superior place to the rise of Christianity. They maintained, rather, that most religions are syncretistic blends of various sources and traditions, including Christianity. All religion, therefore, is relative to culture and place so that cult and liturgy merely form the experiential center of all faith practices. Christianity, therefore, simply emerged within the context of religious history but is not distinctive from other religions except in the forms of myth it espouses and ritual it practices. Dorrien believes that the prospect of a triumphant historical relativism in theology caused Barth to embrace Herrmann's alternative method.

[23]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 55-56, 68. It is evident, as McCormack notes, that the themes and basic tenets of Herrmann's theology such as revelation as "event," a miracle and self-authenticating as well as an opposition to natural theology remain paramount in Barth's theology

of Jesus, according to Herrmann, awakens both faith the revelatory experience and personal faith of the individual as they discover the inner life of Christ and His liberating power. In other words, the inner life of Jesus must take hold of one personally and not simply be appropriated through the testimony of others.[24] It is the incomparable moral life of Jesus that exercised redemptive power over Christ's first disciples and, now, they serve as a source of revelation by "helping us to see that it is possible to live a truthful, authentic existence."[25] It is through Christ's sinless, selfless surrender to God's lordship over his life that we are able to discover the power of God living in Him and, thus, experience the same power that Jesus experienced. Jesus alone is the revelation that grounds our faith and demonstrates that we are accepted as God's children.[26] Assured that Herrmann's insights gave direction to the future of modern Christianity, Barth began his ministry as a convinced "Marburger" and devoted disciple of his theological master.[27]

In July 1911, Barth became a pastor in the small Swiss industrial town of Safenwil where he would work and preach for the next 10 years. He was, as expected, content to preach messages crafted in Herrmannian liberalism although it did not take many months for the ethos of the theology he adopted to begin to become alien to him.

---

throughout his life despite his eventual break with the liberal tradition. McCormack (42-49) also points out that while Herrmann's theology would exercise the greatest influence on the younger Barth, certain aspects of the Marburg "neo-Kantianism" of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp that guided Herrmann's theology would always remain in the background of Barth's thought and work.

[24]Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*, 283. Certain tenets of Herrmann's theology served as harbinger to some forms of twentieth-century religious Existentialism. It is no irony that Rudolf Bultmann, the leading Existentialist New Testament scholar of the century, was also a student of Herrmann.

[25]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 62.

[26]Ibid.

[27]Karl Barth, "The Principles of Dogmatics According to Wilhelm Herrmann," in *Theology and the Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith (London: SCM Press, 1962), 238-39.

McCormack suggests that prior to 1914 Barth was far from ready to break with his liberal allegiance, but it is evident early in his ministry that on a personal level the "world" of his teachers no longer held much attraction for him.[28] There appear to be two primary reasons that ground the eventual separation from his liberal roots. First, Barth began to accept, under the influence of the writings of Zurich pastor Herrmann Kutter and Basle pastor and journalist Leonhard Ragaz, a necessary relationship between the gospel and socialist politics. Safenwil, an industrial village, found its labor classes involved in a struggle to overcome miserable living conditions and better working conditions. Barth became involved in the trade-union movement and adopted an ethical idealism that sought to promote the Kingdom of God through the externalization of Jesus' message to assist those who were economically and socially oppressed.[29] Second, Barth found his small congregation not only disconnected, for the most part, from his Marburg-inspired messages that focused on the themes of "life" and "experience," but he also wrestled with an "inner disquiet" when he came to the biblical text that he found perplexing and disturbing.[30]

Barth's struggle to understand the genuine meaning of the Kingdom of God as

---

[28]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 79.

[29]Ibid., 83-91; Busch, *Karl Barth*, 68-70, 75-80; Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 32-36. Barth also observed the same social miseries during his time as an assistant pastor in Geneva before his move to Safenwil. He discovered the social ethics of Herrmann and Harnack to be far too individualistic and detached from social and political considerations. Barth was convinced that this led to a disjunction between the human spirit and the reality of the world. Although Barth never became a Marxist, he is convinced the spirit of Jesus' message condemns the gathering of material goods for self-seeking purposes and should, rather, be utilized for the common good. Swiss Christian socialism was radically social democratic while the German Christian socialist movement was conservative. Barth's involvement in Swiss Christian socialism earned him the nickname of "the Red pastor." One of Barth's early lectures that outlines his newfound approach to Christian social action is found in Karl Barth, "Jesus Christ and the Social Movement," in *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 19-37. In this address Barth maintains a Herrmannian theological tone but it no longer has an existential focus.

[30]Busch, *Karl Barth*, 61-64; Dorrian, *The Barthian Revolt*, 31-32.

well as his encounter with Swiss socialism led him as early as 1913 to question Herrmann's positive view of religion. It is noteworthy that his sermons begin to highlight the themes of judgment and the wrath of God, divine attributes that were essentially ignored in Ritschlian theology.[31] Even more significant is Barth's pessimism concerning the validity of human righteousness juxtaposed to God's holiness. He came to see religion as an ambiguous affair that is externally pious in its claims to love the truth but ignores the greatest injustices. For Barth religion is simply a self-serving form of worship that ignores the broad dimensions of human sinfulness.[32] Rather than God's presence being reflected in acts of human religiosity, there is a chasm that separates us from God who is "wholly" otherness and not subservient to the cultural spirit (Zeitgeist) of the times.[33] Yet one major occurrence remained that would propel Barth to give up most of his confidence in nineteenth century theological liberalism.

Barth's final break with the theology of his teachers came at the outset of the First World War and has been widely documented and referenced. He would later recall that "black day" of October 3, 1914 when ninety-three German intellectuals signed a manifesto affirming support for the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II as a turning point in his theological journey. Most of Barth's theological professors, many of whom had exercised great influence on him, affixed their names to the document. Harnack, in fact, was the author of the Kaiser's public address calling Germany to war. From that moment on Barth concluded that he "could not any longer follow either their ethics or dogmatics

---

[31]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 93.

[32]Ibid., 98-99. McCormack provides these early insights from a collection of Barth's sermons that were delivered in 1913. This collection of sermons has not been translated into English.

[33]Ibid., 100. Here is seen the theme that will become the linchpin in Barth's theological development after 1914.

or their understanding of the Bible and of history. For me at least, 19th-century theology no longer held any future."[34] Liberal theology and culture Protestantism for Barth had become indistinguishable and were now used as warrants for affirming German militarism, something Barth saw as the culmination of the theology of experience whose linage carried from Schleiermacher to Herrmann.[35]

Barth thus began in earnest his search for a new theology and it was in the biblical text that had heretofore puzzled and confounded him that he saw the beginnings of a new path. It was this "strange new world" within the Bible where he discovered and later crafted a theology of the Word of God. He acknowledged that in the Scriptures the reader found history, morality, and even religious practices. But, Barth argues, "if we wish to come to grips with the contents of the Bible, we must dare to reach beyond ourselves. The Book admits of nothing less."[36] Liberal theology had simply relegated study of the Scripture to the academic exercise of biblical criticism. This had robbed the Bible of any spiritual truth or impact. For Barth there "is a spirit in the Bible . . . that carries us away, once we have entrusted our destiny to it—away from ourselves to the sea. The Holy Scriptures will interpret themselves in spite of our human limitations. We need only dare to follow this drive, this spirit, this river, to grow out beyond ourselves

---

[34]Karl Barth, "Evangelical Theology in the 19th Century," in Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. Thomas Wieser (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 14.

[35]Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 37-38, 43. Dorrien notes that it likely took Barth six years to accept that he no longer belonged to the tradition started by Schleiermacher. Yet it is clear Barth was ready to move away from a tradition that assumed beginning with Schleiermacher that the meaning of Christianity had to be adjusted to accommodate the beliefs and values of modern culture. This is why liberal theologians like Harnark believed that the German war effort was a righteous cause being waged for the "salvation" of European culture.

[36]Karl Barth, "The Strange New World Within the Bible," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 33. Barth delivered this address at a church in the autumn of 1916.

toward the highest answer."[37] This spiritual world of the Bible that is found beyond human limitation happens when it is read in *faith* and "unfolds to us as we are met, guided, drawn on, and made to grow by the grace of God."[38] Barth now found in the text "not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men . . . . Not the history of man but the history of God! Not the virtues of men but the virtues of him who hath called us out of darkness into his marvelous light! Not human standpoints but the standpoint of God!"[39]

The "wholly other" nature of God for Barth means the world remains the world but God is God. McCormack asserts that a consequence of this discovery by Barth was that he began the quest to think from a standpoint lying in God Himself rather than from a standpoint lying beyond the world, history, and human possibilities, with the result that he began to develop a *critical* realism as it relates to human knowledge.[40] Another immediate consequence of Barth's new starting-point was that he turned his theological canons on the subject of religion. Because a divide separated God and humanity, religion belongs only to the world of human possibilities but it is steeped in error, confusion, and pointless striving after the holy. This negative assessment was made evident in Barth's

---

[37]Ibid., 34.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Ibid., 43, 45.

[40]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 129-30. The great insight here, to McCormack's credit, is Barth's critical realism in no way reflects the classical realism of medieval and post-Reformational theology. The older theology took its beginning point in the "uncritical" assumption of the existence of an objectively real empirical world that presents itself to the human knower to be known. Based on observations made of the world, first principles were invoked to account for the order observed. Such an approach was "uncritical" because it did not account seriously for the role of the knower in constituting the "objects" of knowledge. It also identified first principles with the god described in the biblical witness. Barth accepted in full the validity of Kant's epistemology and the philosopher's critique of metaphysics. The "real" for Barth could not be known empirically. The "real," rather, is God in his self-revelation as opposed to the empirical world which is a mere shadow of divine presence. Taking the path of classical realism was never a possibility for Barth.

address at Aarau in 1916 in which the "Righteousness of God" is contrasted with worldly attempts to acquire such righteousness. The human conscience, says Barth, testifies to the righteousness of God. We may earnestly seek to silence that voice that speaks to us but the conscience is the one place where God's righteousness is manifest.[41] There are two wills pertaining to God's righteousness. God's will is pure, clear, constant, and free from caprice and fickleness. The human will is unrighteous and selfish, self-seeking, warped, weakened, divided against itself, and distraught.[42] Although the conscience knows of the "wholly other" who speaks to it, we turned inward and do not allow this voice to speak to the end. Humans, resentful of God's righteousness, go off the build a "tower of Babel" of "human righteousness, human consequence, human significance."[43]

In taking righteousness under our own management, humans out of pride develop various types of moral, cultural, and religious endeavors. In other words, the "righteousness of God which we have looked upon and our hands have handled changes under our awkward touch into all kinds of human righteousness."[44] Humanity erects towers to the state, law, and above all, religion. In fact, for Barth there can be no greater exercise in self-delusion and escape from the voice of conscience than religion and, in particular, Christianity.[45] The flight to Christianity becomes part of the lie and illusion of human righteousness whereby those who practice the religious life can go their way undisturbed even as vices of "capitalism, prostitution, the housing problem, alcoholism,

---

[41]Karl Barth, "The Righteousness of God," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1957), 10.

[42]Ibid., 11-13.

[43]Ibid., 15.

[44]Ibid., 17.

[45]Ibid., 19; McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 133.

tax evasion, and militarism" continue to flourish.[46] Yet the human's deepest longing for genuine righteousness remains unfulfilled. The only means of achieving the righteousness of God, Barth maintains, is not by human acts, speech, or reflection but by "listening" to the voice of conscience we have sought to suppress. It is a righteousness that comes from beyond our futile efforts and it requires humility in giving ourselves over to God. In humility, "faith" is born when we stop speaking and let God speak from within us.[47]

It was during Barth's revolution in thinking that he began an in-depth, exegetical study of the book of Romans. He spent months filling his notebooks with his paraphrase of the letter. His efforts led him in early 1919 to publish what would be the first edition of his work on the letter written in an "expressionistic" style.[48] The subjects of Barth's criticism in *Romans* I fall primarily into four major groups: Liberalism and Pietism, Idealism and ethics, Christianity or "religion," and Christian Socialism.[49] Barth saw in each of these movements a faulty individualism that centered on making the human the creative subject of culture and history.[50] Barth emphasizes two points in *Romans* I over against all Christian and secular groups, trends, and movements of the day. First, humans can never make God's standpoint their own particular standpoint

---

[46]Barth, "The Righteousness of God," 19-20.

[47]Ibid., 25. Barth refers to God's voice working in us as a "seed," but an unfailing seed that overcomes unrighteousness. Out of faith a new spirit is created which grows into the new world of the righteousness of God. Later Barth will reject the idea that there can be any potential seed for righteousness in the human will apart from God's dramatic, transformative in-breaking into the human spirit that creates such faith.

[48]Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief 1919*, ed. Hermann Schmidt (Zurich: TVZ, 1985).

[49]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 140. Although Barth had been involved in the Swiss Christian socialist movement, he had grown suspicious of identifying the Christian expectation of the Kingdom of God with the socialist expectation of the future. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 40.

because no individual or group stands on God's side over against others. All stand in judgment before God. This eliminates any form of individualism, particularly the religious form.[51] Second, the kingdom of God is not a reformation of the "old aeon" but the dawn of a new one, not a development within previous possibilities but a new possibility of life. Here there is a clear distinction between the kingdom and all human attempts to reform.[52] God stands over against humanity and its culture and against all earthly attempts at divinization and peace apart from the true God. Only God alone can bring true rest but such rest does not come without disruption and upheaval.[53]

Romans I did not find wide readership but it did catch the attention of a small group who were inspired by its spiritual passion and metaphorical flow. It also caught the attention of liberal scholars such as Harnack and Adolf Jülicher.[54] Nevertheless, no quicker than the book received notice Barth scraped the work and began a complete revision that would finally be published three years later. Barth was dissatisfied he was being misread so it appeared that some vestige of his liberal tradition remained. He wanted to distance himself from metaphors such as "organic" and "seed" that could, if taken literally, indicate that an "undisturbed divine reservoir" remained in human beings that simply needed to be awakened by the voice of God.[55] Barth's claim in the second

---

[50]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 141.

[51]Busch, *Karl Barth*, 100.

[52]Ibid.

[53]Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 15.

[54]Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 55-56.

[55]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 180-81. Barth's terminology in *Romans* I carried over, no doubt, from his address on "The Righteousness of God." It is clear that Barth did not want in any way to suggest that there is a continuous connection between God's being and the human being. But some reviewers such as Emil Brunner to whom the "undisturbed divine reservoir" reference is credited, clearly

edition that "no stone has been left standing on another" is likely an exaggeration of the theological distance that separated each work.[56]

The principal emphasis in the second edition of *Romans* is the radical discontinuity between God, the world, and humanity. In language reminiscent of the thought of Søren Kierkegaard, Barth introduces the concept of the dialectic of time and eternity, a motif that, in one form or the other, will remain in his theology. Barth describes the world as one in which "men find them imprisoned" to religions and philosophies that while comfortable, are mere illusions.[57] The Gospel stands over and against all these attempts to grasp the unknown God. The more aware humans are of the limited character of their possibilities that are open to them, the more clearly it becomes how far we are from God. The Gospel of salvation cannot be directly apprehended or directly communicated in the nature or within our souls.[58] It is hidden in order that it might provide the opportunity for faith because faith directs itself towards Him who is invisible. The Gospel demands a free choice between "scandal and faith," and is presented us always and everywhere and at every moment. The ones who put their trust in God alone have set themselves within a realm that contradicts the course of the world.[59]

The concept of religion becomes structural element in the revised second edition. The Pauline term "Law" that is used extensively in Barth's chapter on Romans 7

---

misunderstood Barth's overall argument. It would not be the last misunderstanding Brunner would have with Barth.

[56]Barth, *Der Römerbrief, 1922*, vi, quoted in McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 182.

[57]Barth, *Romans*, 37.

[58]Ibid., 37-38.

[59]Ibid., 39.

in the first edition is replaced with the modern term "religion."[60] Whereas God's law in Pauline theology brings death and condemnation, religion in Barth's thought, as the supreme possibility and necessity of human existence, culminates in sin and death, and is "identical with that capacity by which our direct union with God is destroyed."[61] Religion, while promising peace, brings disruption and discord because humans, under law, are slaves to sin:

> Religion, though it come disguised as the most intimate friend of men, be they Greeks or barbarians, is nevertheless the adversary. Religion is the KRISIS of culture and barbarism. Apart from God, it is the most dangerous enemy man has on this side of the grave. For religion is the human possibility of remembering that we must die: it is the place where, in the world of time and of things and of men, the intolerable question is clearly formulated—Who then, art thou?[62]

If this is the reality, then is it not best to embark in a war against religion? This, Barth maintains, is simply a human impossibility. We may indeed move from one department to another along the "shelf in the emporium" of religion but we cannot escape from the store to wander "into the blue."[63] We are circumscribed by this most inevitable human possibility no matter how refined, bold, or courageous the varieties may be because they remain severely limited even as they promise a new and higher order of being. Grace brings freedom but it is not another possibility. That is because grace "is the impossibility which is possible only in God, and which is unencumbered and untouched by the final possibility, the ambiguity, of religion.[64] There is a dualism in religion where

---

[60]Karl Barth, *On Religion*, trans. Garrett Green (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 8. The introduction is adapted from Garrett Green, "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion," *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 4 (1995): 473-86.

[61]Barth, *Romans*, 251.

[62]Ibid., 268.

[63]Ibid., 230.

[64]Ibid., 231.

the "Either" never dissolves the "Or;" and we never find the "Yes" that transcends the conflict between "Yes" and "No," nor the life that transcends death.[65]

Religion is indeed the last step in human progress. There is no way to formulate the relation between the infinity of God and our finite existence, at least in terms of religion.[66] Nor can we escape from sin by removing ourselves from religion and taking up some other superior thing even if that were possible.[67] Religion "as the final human possibility, commands us to halt. Religion brings us to the place where we must wait, in order that God may confront us—on the other side of the frontier of religion. The transformation of the 'No' of religion into the divine 'Yes' occurs in the dissolution of this last observable human thing."[68] Indeed, God and God alone in His power and freedom can still encounter the person devastated by religion. In *Romans*, revelation for Barth overcomes religion by being centered in Christ's resurrection event. In the resurrection, the Father, the unknown (*Deus Absconditus*), becomes the revealed God (*Deus Revelatus*), yet he does not surrender his right to be free and sovereign.[69] In the

---

[65]Ibid. The existentialist thinking of both Kierkegaard and novelist Fyodor Dostoevsky are woven all through the second edition of *Romans*. Kierkegaard's writings did play a partial role in Barth's theological development between the first and second editions, although the Dane's influence is often overstated. It is from Kierkegaard that Barth appropriated the concept of the invasion of the eternal into a moment in time as well as the dialectic of time and eternity. During this period, Barth also read the most prominent and stringent critics if religion such as Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx, Franz Overbeck, and Christoph Blumhardt. Overbeck, a professor of theology at the University of Basel (1872-1897) and a close friend of Friedrich Nietzsche, eventually rejected the Christian religion. Overbeck believed that post-apostolic Christianity had replaced the gospel faith with institutional Christianity. Yet Barth found useful elements of thought in Overbeck's attacks on bourgeois culture-Protestantism and liberal theological apologetics. It was from Blumhardt that Barth saw the viability in affirming thoroughly eschatological Christianity that focused with anticipation on a new outpouring of the Spirit of the risen Christ. It was the joyful anticipation of God's kingdom. See Dorrien, *The Barthian Revolt*, 62-66.

[66]Barth, *Romans*, 245.

[67]Ibid., 241.

[68]Ibid., 242.

[69]Ibid., 80.

resurrection the world of the Spirit and the world of the flesh touch as a tangent touches a circle.[70] The genuine knowledge of God is found by faith placed in the person of Jesus who is disclosed as the Christ, the revelation of God, in his resurrection from the dead.[71] Although faith played an important role in the work, Barth had yet to show how faith and knowledge of God were related.[72] He had not yet defined an explicit way in which the noetic content of revelation takes hold of the individual.[73] His first attempt at putting his thought into systematic form continued to make the question an essentially existential matter.[74] He, therefore, abandoned the project after one volume and went in search of a new methodology. It was in his study of Anselm that he found the method for which he had been searching.

In his study of Anselm's *Proslogion*, it affirmed that any attempt to understand begins with a prayer of faith. Faith is a spiritual gift from God which cannot question its own basis and leads to the desire for understanding. For Anselm, theology is a "thinking after" faith ("Faith seeking understanding"). Barth learned through Anselm's work that the reality of the Word of God must precede and ground every attempt to think about it. Anselm's method maintains that the attempt to gain theological knowledge is a human

---

[70]Ibid., 30.

[71]J. A. Veitch, "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (February 1971): 3-4.

[72]Ibid., 8.

[73]Karl Barth, "The Humanity of God," in *The Humanity of God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 42-46. In the address many years later Barth would acknowledge that the emphasis in his earlier writings on the "wholly other" character and the "infinite qualitative distinction" between God and world allowed little place for God's genuine "dialogue" and "togetherness" with humanity. God's character, rightly understood, must include his *humanity* as well as his *deity*.

[74]Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991).

activity that occurs on the basis of a prior act of God. To "prove" the existence of God for Anselm does not mean "proof" as it is normally understood. To "prove," rather, means to *explicate* the meaning of the object of faith as it has already been given.[75] For Barth, the reality of the incarnation must now ground the possibility of all that will be said concerning God in the person of Jesus Christ. Barth's earlier theology even as it focused on God's divinity had done so in abstraction from the concrete reality of Jesus Christ. For Barth there would now be an exclusive "Christological" concentration for every doctrine addressed in the great theological landscape of the *Church Dogmatics*. The entire concept of religion and its place in the world would also undergo a transformation as it now is possible for humanity and religion alike to be redeemed.[76]

Religion as *Unglaube*

Section 17 in the *Church Dogmatics* devoted specifically to the discussion religion is Barth's last detailed excursus on the subject although references the themes discussed are scattered throughout his massive work.[77] His attention to religion follows his discussion of the Holy Spirit as the subjective reality and subjective possibility of revelation. Barth with intention, as will be seen in more detail later, placed discussion of the Holy Spirit first because God's revelation comes through "the outpouring of the Holy

---

[75]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 424-38. McCormack argues that, contrary to the thesis espoused by Hans Urs von Balthasar, Barth's taking up of the *analogia fidei* from Anselm never abolished the dialectical character of Barth's theological method. The *analogia fidei* becomes an epistemological principle. For Anselm what is hidden from us (the Word) must reveal itself in order to make itself known to us, and it is God Himself alone who does this. Knowledge of God is dependent upon God's gracious decision. From Anselm, Barth will stress that ontic necessity and rationality have ontological priority over noetic necessity and rationality. This marks Barth's last attempt to shake off any remnant of existential philosophy that remained in his thought.

[76]Barth, *On Religion*, 10.

[77]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 280-361.

Spirit" who is the "judging but also the reconciling presence of God in the world of human religion . . . ."[78] A certain amount of difficulty is encountered in comprehending Barth's use of "abolition" (*Aufhebung*) as it relates religion. The term can mean to "abolish" or "annual" as well as to "elevate" and "exalt," and, here, it takes on a dialectical character.[79] Whereas in *Romans* the dialectic of "Yes" and "No" within the relationship of revelation and religion retained the character of "sign," in the *Dogmatics* Barth introduces "True Religion"—religion elevated by revelation and, thus, justified and sanctified.[80] He begins the first of his three subsections on the subject, however, by looking once again at the human experience of religion, or "The Problem of Religion in Theology."

Barth, as he does in *Romans*, acknowledges that religion is an inescapable human reality. It is difficult at any time and place human history not to find peoples who feel it their duty to worship God or gods in the form of established cults (pictures and symbols of deity, sacrifices, acts of atonement, prayers, scriptures, formation of communions, etc.). Furthermore, Christian "piety" does not differ formally from other forms of piety and, in this sense, stands alongside the other religions of the world.[81] If, however, God's revelation to humans is both a reality and possibility, then it must "also" be regarded as "Christianity" and therefore as religion.[82] The question is how this "also"

---

[78]Ibid., 280.

[79] Veitch, "Revelation and Religion," 12. The term *Aufhebung* might be better termed "sublimation." It is a term lifted from G. W. F. Hegel's idealistic philosophy although Barth is certainly not using it in this context in the same fashion in which Hegel did.

[80]Ibid.

[81]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:282. Barth affirms that the Christian religion can be studied historically and comparatively in relation to all other religions.

[82]Ibid., 283.

is to be understood. This also raises the question whether theology and the Church and faith are willing to take the basis of their existence seriously. If indeed the proposition is accepted that God's revelation is a religion among the other religions, then does this mean that "what we think we know of the nature and incidence of religion must serve as the norm and principle by which to explain the revelation of God; or, *vice versa*, does it mean that we have to interpret the Christian religion and all other religions by what we are told by God's revelation?"[83]

Barth claims that "Neo-Protestantism" opted for the former alternative and constructed a revelation of religion rather than a religion of revelation.[84] In a detailed historical survey of such developments, Barth sees the beginning of this "catastrophe" in the work of several eighteenth century Reformed theologians who practiced a form of "rational orthodoxy."[85] Religion in the dogmatic work of this period began to emerge as an independent theme and one that was presupposed for a subsequent understanding of revelation. They began with the universal needs of humanity and ended with Christianity as the religion that most perfectly fulfilled that need.[86] The Protestant liberalism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and Troeltsch followed along this same path. It amounted to a mistaken reversal of revelation and religion that denied Reformation confession that human beings belong to Jesus Christ and are made complete in Him.[87] It demonstrated a

---

[83]Ibid., 284.

[84]Osgood Darby Cannon III, "The Concept of Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1975), 106-07.

[85]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:288.

[86]Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 107.

[87]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:292.

lack of faith and rejection of divine lordship as theology lost its true object of revelation and its uniqueness. Man thus became the center, measure, and goal of all things.[88]

A choice must be made between revelation and religion. It must be "either-or" because if they are conceived as equal spheres, then revelation will always be misunderstood. If we are to speak of revelation then we must only speak of Jesus Christ and of the human being that belongs to Him, since God's sovereign action in revelation never excludes the human.[89] The solution to the problem of religion is Christological in nature. It employs the *analogia fidei* in relationship to the incarnation of the Word as *assumptio carnis*. Just as the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ is the unity of a completed event so, similarly, the unity of divine revelation and human religion is that of an event, although it remains an event to be completed.[90] It is on the basis of the *assumptio carnis* that revelation can transform and exalt religion. The meaning and function of religion must be evaluated in light of revelation.

A judgment of religion and religions, while it must be charitable, cannot be done as if we ascribe to this activity of humans some unique "nature" that can be used to gauge and weigh the value of one practice over another, such as distinguishing a "higher" religion from a "lower" or a "living" activity over a "dead" one. The subject of religion is the human being for whom (whether they know it or not) the Word of God is intended, for whom Jesus Christ lived died and rose again. Revelation "singles out the Church as the *locus* of true religion" but it does not mean that the Christian religion as the true

---

[88]Ibid., 293.

[89]Ibid., 295. Barth, once again, demonstrates how revelation is no longer a general term, but refers specifically to the event of Jesus Christ.

[90]Ibid., 297. Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 109.

religion is fundamentally superior to all religions.[91] Christianity is the true religion only insofar as it lives by the grace of revelation. Contrary to pluralism, Barth does recommend tolerance because it is believed all religions are essentially alike, nor should we adopt a relativism that fails to speak the truth. Tolerance means that we are sympathetic toward the "godless" human being who has been reconciled to God through His grace.[92]

Religion, therefore, remains *unglaube*, the one great concern of godless man.[93] This judgment is not made in the human sphere but only repeats the judgment of divine revelation. This judgment applies the Christian religion as well as all religions. This, again, is not a negative value-judgment or renunciation of human values such as the "good and beautiful" that is discovered in almost all religions, including Christianity. It simply means there is no place for relative human greatness in light of divine revelation. Biblical revelation attests to two elements that must be affirmed in evaluating religion as "faithlessness." First, revelation is God's self-offering and self-manifestation.[94] Revelation presupposes that any attempt by humans to know God is completely and entirely futile. It is in revelation that a person learns something new: the God is his God and He is Lord. The person who becomes a genuine believer will not say that "he came to faith from faith, but—from unbelief [unfaith], even though the attitude and activity

---

[91]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:298.

[92]Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 112. Barth here alludes to his doctrine of election to which he will give later attention in the *Dogmatics*. In Jesus Christ, Barth asserts, all humanity is "elected" in Him for salvation and justification.

[93]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:300. *Unglaube* is translated as "unbelief" in the original English translation of Barth's *Dogmatics*. The more accurate translation of the word is "unfaithfulness."

[94]Ibid, 301.

with which he met the revelation, and still meets it, is religion."[95] Revelation encounters the person in religion who strives to know God and construct a concept of deity on his own. In faith, human religion is shown by revelation to be a resistance to it. Revelation can never be conceived as a fulfillment of religion or a person's religious capacity. Second, revelation is an act in which God reconciles the person to Himself by grace.[96] It also presupposes the human is incapable of attaining justification and sanctification in their own. The revelation of Jesus Christ maintains that our justification and sanctification, our conversion and salvation, have been bought and achieved once and for all in Him. Our faith in Jesus Christ consists in our affirming and accepting this fact.[97] What is certain is that religious attitude and activity is never consistent with revelation, but actually contradicts it. Our striving to reconcile God to us is an "abomination" in God's sight whether it begins or ends in idolatry.[98]

Barth echoes his assertions from *Romans* when he implies that religiousity is a fundamental and essential reality in human behavior that leads to religion in the sense of objective system of beliefs and practices.[99] The two primitive and normal forms of religion are the conception of deity and the fulfillment of the law. In both forms, the human is self-satisfied before he starts and in his self-confidence believes he creates his own deity and finds justification through meeting the demands of the perceived law. His need differs completely from the person of faith who, in their "neediness," and with

---

[95]Ibid., 302.

[96]Ibid., 307.

[97]Ibid., 308.

[98]Ibid., 310. Cannon, The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 114.

[99]Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 115.

empty heart and hand relies entirely upon the revelation of God.[100] Apart from revelation, there is a non-necessity and weakness in all religions because each is "fundamentally only an externalization, expression, representation, and repetition of something that existed without form or activity."[101] Yet the history and phenomenology of religion show that such external practices are subject to change. Religion, Barth notes, is influenced and conditioned by historical circumstances. When this happens, the human is confronted with several alternatives. Religion may change with him (demonstrating a lack of truth and certainty), it may resist change, or it may do both. Yet religion is in a continual struggle for survival. Even if we escape from one religion to another, such doubts and uncertainly in our search for personal righteousness is ultimately not alleviated.[102] We may give up any outward expression of religion completely but that does not mean we abandon our religious nature even as we settle for personal introspection.

Barth illustrates his point by directing attention to the practices of mysticism and atheism. Mysticism, the conservative form of introspection, only renounces objective forms of belief and practices. The mystic insists upon interpreting everything that is taught and practiced in a particular religion according to its inward and spiritual meaning. The mystic, however, still needs material for his spiritualizing and it comes from the external expression of religion.[103] The atheist, however, even as he declares war on organized religion and the existence of God aligns himself with the powers of

---

[100]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:315.

[101]Ibid.

[102]Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 116.

[103]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:319-20.

secularism that affirms powers and authorities in conflict with religion in the name of liberation. But in doing so "it exposes itself to the danger that all kinds of new and disguised, and sometimes not so disguised, religions may arise behind its back and whenever possible with its support."[104] In brief, both mysticism and atheism have simply exchanged one demonstration of religion for another. If the power and crisis of religion is to be broken, it must come from outside humanity itself. This occurs with the revelation of God.

Jesus Christ and True Religion

No religion in Barth's theology is true. If there is to be true religion, it must be spoken of only in the sense of the "justified sinner."Like the justified person who is made right with God by grace alone, so religion is a creature of grace.[105] There is a positive dimension to Barth's dialectic method as well as that which is negative.

> The abolishing [*aufhebung*] of religion by revelation need not mean its negation: the judgment that religion is unbelief. Religion can just as well be exalted by revelation, even though the judgment still stands. It can be upheld by it and concealed in it. It can be justified by it, and—we must at once add—sanctified. Revelation can adopt religion and mark it off as true religion.[106]

Barth's critique of religion as "unfaithfulness" did not exclude Christianity nor can it be declared true simply in comparison to non-Christian religions for that would imply it is not guilty of idolatry and self-righteousness. It is through the analogy of faith or, better, the affirmation of faith which accepts both the judgment and grace of God that Christianity can be made true. The Christian faith does not live by the self-consciousness with which it can differentiate itself from the non-Christian. Christians apply God's

---

[104]Ibid., 321.

[105]Ibid., 326.

[106]Ibid. Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 120.

judgment first and foremost to themselves and then to non-Christians only in so far as they recognize themselves in them, as ones who still stand in need of faith in the promise of revelation.[107] The power of the Church given by grace exists in weakness and humility. The history of the Christian religion is one which this truth has often been forgotten much to the detriment of a real knowledge of truth.[108] We can only speak of the truth of the Christian religion within the doctrine of the *iustificatio impii*. It is in the knowledge of grace, in the knowledge of the justification of the ungodly, that the Christian faith attains to its knowledge of the truth of the Christian religion.[109]

Christianity, however, is not truth simply because it is a religion of grace, for such a religion of grace remains a religion in contradiction to grace. It is the reality of grace itself, rather, which adopts and marks Christianity as the true religion. A religion of grace can be justified and constituted the true religion only by grace and not by anything in and of itself.[110] True religion exists in the world of human religion as an event in the act of the grace of God in Jesus Christ, in the event of the outpouring of the

---

[107]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:127, 131.

[108]Ibid., 332-37. Barth provides a summary of some periods in the history of the Church where this quest for claims to superiority were trumpeted and promoted. His argument is that Christianity moved away from the power of grace and, instead, was offered as the fulfillment of a general religious possibility. There remained in these period, however, moments when revelation and grace were evident in spite of the misdirection. But because Christianity is a religion of revelation, the resistance to revelation is, in Barth's view, a sin committed with "a high hand."

[109]Ibid., 338.

[110]Ibid., 339-44. Cannon, "The Concept of Religion in Karl Barth," 123-24. Barth illustrates this point by making a phenomenological comparison between Christianity and two Buddhist sects that represent the "Pure Land" school, the Jodo-Shin sect and the Jodo-Shin-Shu sect. Barth admits that these sects should be classified as religions of grace since they stress faith as opposed to achieving salvation through human effort. Revelation, however, is synonymous with the name of Jesus Christ in what He has done for us through His life, death, and resurrection. Jesus Christ is the grace of God. The devotionalism demonstrated in the Buddhist sects may indeed mark them as religions of grace but they remain human attempts to create situation in which grace operates. They are not genuine responses to the Revelation--- Jesus Christ—who gives grace and forgiveness. The Christian religion is true only that it acknowledges its existence due to the "name" of Jesus Christ and nothing else. The validity of the truth in all religion must be interpreted through the exclusive confession of Jesus Christ as God's revelation to the world.

Holy Spirit, and in the event in the existence of the Church and the children of God.[111] It is only by this grace that followers of Jesus Christ attain the status as the bearers of true religion. There are four specific aspects that pertain to this truth. First, the name of Jesus Christ and the Christian religion is related to an act of divine creation.[112] The name of Jesus Christ alone has created the Christian religion. Without Him it is not something different. It is nothing at all. Second, Christ's relationship to Christianity is an act of divine election.[113] The Christian religion does not possess any reality of its own and it never can. If it is real, it is so based on the free election that is grounded in the compassion and inconceivable good pleasure of God. In terms of the covenant between God and Israel, it can only be understood in the terms of the fulfillment of that covenant in Christ.

Third, the relationship between Christ and Christianity is an act of divine justification and the forgiveness of sins.[114] If the Christian religion is to be true, as has been noted previously, it must be justified. Barth provides the analogy of the sun's relationship to the earth in speaking of Christ's relationship to the Christian religion.[115] Just as the sun lights up one part of the earth and not another means that light is given to one part while the other is in darkness. Yet it is the same earth regardless. There is nothing in the earth to dispose it to the sun because without the sun all of it would be engulfed in darkness. The fact that the day shines on one part does not derive in any

---

[111]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:344.

[112]Ibid., 346.

[113]Ibid., 348.

[114]Ibid., 352.

[115]Ibid., 353.

sense from the nature of the particular part as such. If the Christian religion lives in the light of truth, it is simply because of God's free gracious revelation of the truth to it. It is by this grace alone that Christianity "has the commission and the authority to be a missionary religion, i.e., to confront the world of religions as the one true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and challenge it to abandon its ways and to start on the Christian way."[116]

Finally, the name Jesus Christ applied to Christianity is an act of divine sanctification.[117] Christianity is made holy because it is justified; it is made holy in order to demonstrate the truth. The Christian religion is a sacramental area created by the Holy Spirit in which Jesus Christ continues to speak as a sign to His revelation. The object, Christianity, contains no power in and of itself. But it receives power as it is seized by revelation and children of God are created through Holy Sprit as those who hear God continually speaking through His revelation. The actuality of the Church's existence is unassuming but always visible and significant.

Natural Theology as Antichrist

There is perhaps no individual in the history of modern Christian thought who has proved to be a stronger opponent of natural theology than Barth. He anathematized every human effort to use unaided reason to reach an understanding of the nature of God or to demonstrate God's existence. In brief, Barth rejects natural theology because God is the sovereign, free Creator of humanity and all knowledge of him comes by grace.[118]

---

[116]Ibid., 357.

[117]Ibid.

[118]Robert G. Crawford, "The Theological Method of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25 (August 1972): 320.

He clearly affirms a theology of revelation over against natural theology that holds to an *analogia entis* (analogy of being), where "a certain likeness is seen between the final being and the supreme being of which the latter was the utmost cause."[119] He primarily opposes the *analogia entis* because "it makes the difference between God and man one of degree not quality; it assumes that man has a knowledge of God apart from grace; it starts from man not God; it reduces the action of God to a minimum, i.e. stressing his Being rather than his Act."[120] It is for this reason that Barth regarded the *analogia entis* "as the invention of Antichrist."[121]

If God is to be known at all by "fallen" man, then it is God who must reveal himself. Sinful humans in and of themselves have no capacity to receive divine revelation. Human attempts to acquire knowledge of the God consistently result in the creation of images that are only reflections of themselves. It was this flight into idolatry in the nineteenth century that was, in Barth's opinion, correctly analyzed by Ludwig Feuerbach as "theology that had long since become anthropology."[122] To believe that one cannot arrive at the knowledge of God is a negative consequence that can be understood only in light of the belief that a person can know God only as God comes to him.[123] In speaking of human efforts to obtain knowledge of God, Barth observes:

> The beginning of our knowledge of God—of this God—is not a beginning which we can make with Him. It can be only the beginning which He has made with us. The sufficiency of our thought-form, and of the perception presupposed in

---

[119]Ibid., 321-22.

[120]Ibid., 322.

[121]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1:xiii. It was the acceptance of this doctrine in Roman Catholicism that caused Barth to declare he could never become a convert to Catholicism.

[122]Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 58.

[123]Ibid., 60.

> it, and of the word-form based on it, collapses altogether in relation to this God. Of ourselves we do not resemble God. We are not the master of God. We are not one with God. We are not capable of conceiving Him.[124]

A principal reason for Barth's rejection of natural theology "is based in his understanding of the nature of God."[125] For Barth the actualizing of authentic knowledge of God is an act of grace. God is not someone about whom we can know anything through the use of natural theology. God is free to reveal or not reveal himself. Because God is free to love the world, he has chosen by his grace to speak to the human race. A "prescriptive definition of God is He who comes to men in such a way that they can really know Him without His losing His own freedom and identity in doing so."[126] In knowing God, we do not objectify him and control him. God, rather, "breaks through the shell of objectification" to confront humanity as he is in himself, putting persons in touch with objectivity and not with their personal objectifications.[127] In this sense, divine revelation is a miracle. Natural theology is about making God an objectification—it does not deal with God.

For Barth a theology of revelation gives unconditional priority to the *specific over the general.*[128] Moreover, reality takes precedence over possibility. God has given and still gives himself to be known. Natural theology reverses the relationship in constructing a general possibility for knowledge of God and thereby gives to humanity

---

[124]Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:190.

[125]Joseph D. Bettis, "Theology in the Public Debate: Barth's rejection of Natural Theology and the Hermeneutical Problem," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (December 1969): 389.

[126]Ibid., 390.

[127]Ibid.; Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:180-81.

[128]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 69.

the standard to measure what is genuine revelation.[129] In natural theology the knowledge of God is always possible for the human—always accessible. In Barth's theology God is known solely in the concrete "act of His revelation" toward humanity.[130] Barth finds that the two different approaches point to a *different* God, different paths of knowledge that attempt to conceive the same God by different routes.[131] An individual who embraces natural theology demonstrates that he not open to receiving God's grace nor is there readiness on his part to know God.[132] The individual has determined that apart from God's grace he can know God. The God of the person of natural theology "is a false god. . . . But as a false god it will not lead him in any sense to a knowledge of the real God. . . . It's knowledge and knowability will make him an enemy of the real God."[133]

The medium by which God has chosen to authenticate his self-revelation is in the existence of the man Jesus Christ.[134] In Jesus Christ God, who cannot be "objectified," has chosen to render himself a possible object of human knowing in an act of supreme condescension—that being the incarnation of the Word. The incarnation is "the primary objective condition for the possibility of God's self-revelation in the world."[135] Apart from Jesus Christ, God is unknown. Revelation means an unveiling that that which is veiled. God in the incarnate Son withdraws the veil and discloses

---

[129]Ibid., 68.

[130]Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:262.

[131]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 69.

[132]Barth, *CD*, 2, pt. 1:135.

[133]Ibid., 86.

[134]T. H. L. Parker, "Barth on Revelation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 13 (December 1960): 370-71.

[135]Trevor Hart, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 51.

himself, shows himself, and makes his presence known.[136] God's self-revelation is always particular in that he reveals himself "to some rather than all in the economy of revelation and redemption."[137] Barth does not deny that there is a general revelation of God's presence in the world. He only denies that humans possess a natural capacity to receive that revelation.[138]

Barth in 1934 became embroiled in a theological dispute with Emil Brunner concerning the issue of "nature and grace."[139] Brunner desired to rehabilitate natural theology by anchoring it the doctrine of the *imago Dei* and find a "point of contact" in human nature whereby God's reveals himself.[140] Barth's simple reply of *Nein!* to Brunner's essay indicates that the author of Barmen could not affirm the validity of revelation that was non-Christological in origin.

Barth has no intention of giving systematic attention to the issue of natural theology. He describes "natural theology" as "every (positive or negative) *formulation of a system* which claims to be theological, *i.e.* to interpret divine revelation, whose *subject*, however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose *method* therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture."[141] Brunner argues that

---

[136]Parker, "Barth," 373.

[137]Hart, "Revelation," 47.

[138]Paul Avis, "Karl Barth: The Reluctant Virtuoso," *Theology* 86 (May 1983): 165-66.

[139]Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Frankel, reprint. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002); John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formulation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 149-69.

[140]Rodney Holder, "Karl Barth and the Legitimacy of Natural Theology," *Themelios* 26, no. 3 (Summer 2001), 28.

[141]Karl Barth, "No!" in *Natural Theology*, 74-75.

the human being possesses a formal and material aspect.[142] The formal gives humans superiority over creation and, as rational creatures, they have a capacity to receive words and be responsible for their decisions. The formal structure cannot be destroyed by sin. The material image, that which included original righteousness, has been lost in the fall. Brunner believes he stands in the tradition of the Reformers in affirming that God has written his moral law upon the conscience of every person. Scripture declares that it is the knowledge of the law of God through general revelation that translates into knowledge of God and, thus, leaves one without excuse.[143]

Barth sees Brunner's affirmation of the moral law as an attempt to resurrect Thomism. Barth agrees with his opponent that the formal sense of the *imago Dei* has not been destroyed. Even a sinful man is a man and "not a tortoise." Does that mean, however, "that his reason is therefore more 'suited' for defining the nature of God than anything else in the world?"[144] Barth does not think so. He sees Brunner's view as affirming that humans can contribute to their salvation. If Brunner holds to total depravity, Barth reasons, then how do humans retain any capacity for revelation? Barth challenges Brunner not to "stare at the serpent" of natural theology "with the result that it stares back at you, hypnotises you, and is ultimately certain to bite you, but you hit and kill it as soon as you see it!"[145]

For Barth the normative source of the knowledge of God is Jesus Christ as He is revealed to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. Such knowledge, therefore, cannot

---

[142]Emil Brunner, "Nature and Grace," in *Natural Theology*, 23.

[143]Ibid., 25.

[144]Barth, "No!," 79.

[145]Ibid., 76.

consist of various experiences and sensibilities ascertained by human beings on their own, for these are ambiguous at best.[146] It is the person of the Holy Spirit which makes the objective reality of Christ's reconciling and redeeming work a genuine possibility for us. Even as the revelation of Jesus Christ is God's objective Word to humanity, so by the Holy Spirit we are made recipients of the Word. This form of divine revelation is not at our disposal or ability to grasp, but in and through Holy Spirit we are opened to this revelation. Knowledge of God in the person of Jesus Christ cannot be the object of a general or independent knowledge preceding revelation. This is the theme of natural theology. Christ can be known and confessed only on the basis of revelation and in faith.[147] This is the work of the Creator Spirit who creates faith and brings us into the new reality of our redemption and reconciliation in Christ. In Barth's view, the work of the Holy Spirit in the world judges natural theology to be false and useless.

---

[146]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 223.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN REVELATION

A common complaint among some students of Barth's theology is that it lacks a fully developed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. There are those who even believe the subject of pneumatology in his thought subsides into Christology in light of Barth's concentration on the person and work of the Son.[1] Other theologians, however, find these judgments to be too simplistic and misguided, seeing Barth's pneumatology as both rich and even complex but presented in such a fashion that revelation, reconciliation, and redemption are regarded as inseparable.[2] Indeed, some have delved extensively into Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit and found it to have a direct impact for his discussion not only of the aforementioned doctrines as they pertain to salvation, but also those concerning the incarnation, Scripture, the Church, Baptism, sanctification, ethics, creation, eschatology, etc.[3] Even his most strident critics admit that he devotes some

---

[1]Robert Jenson, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 28 (1993): 296-304; Eugene F. Rogers, "The Eclipse of the Spirit in Karl Barth," in *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John McDowell and Michael Higton (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002), 173-90; Rowan Williams, "Barth on the Triune God," in *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, ed. Stephen Sykes (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), 147-93. The apparent misgiving each of these theologians have concerning Barth's pneumatology is that the Spirit is denoted in impersonal terms as the "power" of Jesus Christ as if the Holy Spirit has no other function than to bear witness to the objectivity of the Son. The criticisms of these writers appear to center on their belief that Christ-statements in the *Church Dogmatics* tend to make Spirit-statements superfluous.

[2]George Hunsinger, "The Mediator of Communion: Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 149.

[3]John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991); Philip J. Rosato, S.J., *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981); Thomas A. Smail, "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *Theology Beyond Christendom*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 87-110.

2100 pages of his writing to the subject of "Spirit" in bold-face thesis.[4]

Barth, in fact, did not live long enough to complete all that he desired to do with the person and work of the Holy Spirit. A projected volume five of the *Church Dogmatics* where the eschatological content of his theology would have fleshed out the doctrine's role in the final consummation of all things related to reconciliation of creation did not come to fruition.[5] In his last years Barth hinted that there was a need for a theology of the "third article" where everything that might be said about God the Father and God the Son might be "shown and illuminated" in its foundations through God the Holy Spirit.[6] Instead, the reader finds the doctrine scattered throughout his many works rather than finding a compact, systematic treatment of the subject.

Barth's treatment of each doctrine, particularly the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, is centered in Jesus Christ. Concerning revelation and reconciliation, the relationship between what has taken place "there and then" and what continues to take place "here and now" is the decisive issue at stake in Barth's doctrine of the Spirit's saving work.[7] Redemption, nevertheless, which is the realization of the future of reconciliation is a specific category reserved for the saving work of the Holy Spirit. Barth's fully-orbed pneumatology may well have unfolded in this fashion:

> Everything about the Spirit as seen less directly from the standpoints of revelation and reconciliation was, from the standpoint of redemption, to have been placed center stage, redescribed teleologically as a whole, and thereby amplified and enriched. A twofold perspective would result. Whereas reconciliation was redemption's abiding ground and content, redemption was reconciliation's dynamic consequence and goal. Redemption as the peculiar and proper work of the Spirit

---

[4]Rogers, "The Eclipse of the Spirit," 173.

[5]Smail, "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 87.

[6]Karl Barth, "Concluding Unscientific Postscript on Schleiermacher," in *The Theology of Schleiermacher*, ed. Dietrich Ritschl, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 278.

[7]Hunsinger, "The Mediator of Communion," 149.

> represented the consummation of all things, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal life in communion with God. It was the absolute future which would at once reveal and impart Jesus Christ in his inexhaustible significance for the whole of creation. Whereas from the standpoint of reconciliation the work of the Spirit served the work of Christ, from the standpoint of redemption the work of Christ served the work of the Spirit.[8]

For Barth, to the chagrin of his critics, pneumatology is not primarily related to anthropology or ecclesiology but to Christology. Its anthropological and ecclesiological implications can only be derived and explained from its Christological foundation.[9] The Holy Spirit in Barth's theology must be understood as "the mediator of communion," in which the Spirit unites believers through faith in a definitive union and communion with Christ but also, at the same time, gives them an indirect share in the primordial communion between the Father and Son. The Holy Spirit is the bond of love between the Father and the Son and between the Son and believers. The mediation of the Spirit, therefore, moves in two directions simultaneously: "from the eternal Trinity through Jesus Christ to humankind, and from humankind through Jesus Christ to the eternal Trinity."[10] In chapter three of this work, discussion was given concerning the place and function of the Holy Spirit in directing and integrating the human being into the objective revelation who is Jesus Christ. In this way the Holy Spirit is the subjective possibility of revelation of the objective reality and guarantees genuine knowledge of God. The Spirit, however, is also the subjective reality of revelation about whose work nothing specific can be said other than through repetition seals the objective reality of revelation upon

---

[8]Ibid., 149-50. While the projected volume on "redemption was never begun, the volume on "reconciliation" remained uncompleted.

[9]Smail, "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 91.

[10]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 151. Here Barth stands with Augustine and Jonathan Edwards in affirming this aspect of the doctrine.

us.[11] Additional discussion of the Holy Spirit's work will continue to be soteriological in focus although other aspects of the Spirit's work may be touched upon in the process.

The Holy Spirit as the Mediator of Christ's Presence

Barth points out that it is the Holy Spirit acting upon persons to bring them to faith and obedience that constitutes the content of the biblical witness to revelation. Just as God has determined to be free to reveal himself to the human being, so human being must be free for God. Yet it is not a relationship where humans serve as partners or co-workers with God. The subjective aspect of the possibility for human receptivity of revelation depends on the "outpouring" of the Holy Spirit.[12] We cannot import into the process of revelation any other source of divine knowledge since the human being alone can never know God apart from his acting upon him. Revelation cannot be conceived in general sense as having an eternal definition and eternal meaning for all time. Revelation has its own time and can reach persons of all times only as it enters into this time.[13] Scripture tells us not only of Jesus Christ but also of those who are recipients to his word, work, and deeds. These recipients of revelation—specific people at a specific time and place—constitute a specific community, the Church.[14] The Church is the area where God turns persons into recipients of revelation because she derives her existence from Jesus Christ. When identifying the Church, "we do not mean merely the inward and invisible coherence of those whom God in Christ calls His own, but also the outward and visible

---

[11]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance , vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956), 239.

[12]Ibid., 204.

[13]Ibid., 210.

[14]Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 27.

coherence of those who have heard in time, and have confessed to their hearing, that in Christ they are God's"[15] The church is not an arbitrary construction created, formed, and introduced by individual men on their own initiative and authority. The church, rather, has its origin in Christ who is the Word that became flesh. Despite the sinfulness of our nature and kind, we are justified and sanctified by that which meets the nature and kind found in Jesus. Only in such a community can the saying *ecclesiam nulla salus* remain true.[16] It is the unity of Christ and the human person that gives purpose and legitimacy to the work of the Holy Spirit in the formation of the church.

Barth gives no place to any form of Spirit-oriented Christology whereby the Son originates from the Spirit eternally and Spirit becomes the focus of the Son's work rather than the other around.[17] Spirit-oriented Christologies tend to define salvation as consisting of exclusively or chiefly in effecting something *in nobis*, whether it be religious experiences, renewed dispositions, or a new mode of being the world. For Barth Jesus Christ does not impart or bear witness to the Spirit so much as the saving

---

[15]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2: 211.

[16]Ibid., 215. Concerning the significance of the Church for the subjective possibility of revelation, Barth here notes that this is not a Roman Catholic doctrine in the strictest sense but is a biblical and universally accepted Christian doctrine.

[17]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 158-59. Barth rejects this concept on both systematic and exegetical grounds. The systematic reason pertains to the doctrine of *perichoresis*. The mutual indwelling of three modes of being, Barth notes, has nothing to with a "circle of mutual origins." While the *perichoresis* is complete and mutual it does not describe the origins of the three modes of being. Rather, it simply provides further description of the *homoousia* of the Father, Son, and Spirit. Although Barth's exegetical arguments are less detailed, he sees no reason to interpret certain biblical passages (Matt 1:18; Luke 1:35; Mark 1:9ff) concerning the Spirit's place in Jesus' life history as implying a Spirit-oriented Christology. He sees that such passages can be accommodated to the framework of a Christ-centered pneumatology that he finds predominant in the New Testament. He does not believe the aforementioned passages suggest that the Spirit makes it possible for the divine Son to be the Son since they always make reference to Christ as a human and of "another essence" than that of the Spirit. See Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1: 485.

significance of the Spirit is to impart and bear witness to the Son.[18] In fact, it is in the mystery of the incarnation that the creative power of the Holy Spirit insures that the salvific operations of the Word and Spirit can never be separated. The Spirit's role is highlighted in the ancient doctrines of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* as it relates to God and humanity in the incarnation.[19] Christ as a human being did indeed come into being through the Spirit as he was conceived in and birthed by his human mother, Mary. Yet he never needed to be gifted and impelled by the Spirit as was necessary for the prophets, apostles, and us since he had the Spirit from the very first.[20] For this reason Christ is from the beginning the supreme existence of the spiritual man and, wholly sanctified, gives the Spirit to others without reserve or limit so that his being in the flesh is directly as such his being as Spirit also.[21] Through the hypostatic union, as effected by the Spirit, the distinction between God and humanity and Creator and creature is manifested, and through the incarnation the mere idea of divinization of the creature is rendered impossible.[22] The Spirit is significant in that, first, he equips Christ to accomplish

---

[18]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion, 157-58; Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 1: 452. This refutes completely the pneumatological models of Rahner, Pinnock, Yong, and, to a degree, Tiessen as well.

[19]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 42. The doctrines of *anhypostasis* and *enhypostasis* were used to defend the belief that the human nature which God assumed in Christ never existed prior to nor apart from its assumption by God. In the act of the incarnation, *anhypostasis* states that Christ's human nature has no independent existence, while *enhypostasis* states that the human nature has its existence in and through the existence of the eternal Son. In this way, the incarnation becomes a unique and once-for-all-time event in human history. See Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (New York: Mouton Publishers, 1984), 55-64, for a detailed account of Barth's treatment of these doctrines.

[20]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2: 324. Barth gives full affirmation to the doctrine of the virgin birth.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 42; Smail, "Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," 95. Smail notes that Barth emphasizes the importance of understanding that as the Spirit acts on Mary to enable her to conceive and bear the word, so the same Spirit sanctifies the human nature of Jesus and makes the hypostatic union possible.

salvation through his incarnation, death, and resurrection; and, second, because through preaching and the sacraments he unites believers with himself in eternal communion.[23]

Because human beings alone have no capacity for revelation and no inherent ability to receive the Word, it is the Holy Spirit who is the subjective possibility for such an event in uniting God with humanity.

> It is the freedom of the Holy Spirit and in the Holy Spirit that is already involved in the incarnation of the Word of God, in the assumption of human nature by the Son of God, in which we have to recognize the real ground of the freedom of the children of God, the real ground of all conception of revelation, all lordship of grace over man, the real ground of the Church. The very possibility of human nature's being adopted into unity with the Son of God is the Holy Ghost. Here, then, at this frontal point of revelation, the Word of God is not without the Spirit of God. And here already there is the togetherness of Spirit and Word. Through the Spirit it becomes really possible for the creature, for man, to be there and to be free for God. Through the Spirit flesh, human nature, is assumed into unity with the Son of God. Through the Spirit this Man can be God's Son and at the same time the Second Adam and as such 'the firstborn among many brethren' (Rom 8:29), the prototype of all who are set free for His sake and through faith in Him.[24]

For Barth, "the only content of the Holy Spirit is Jesus; His only work is His provisional revelation; His only effect the human knowledge which has Him as its object (and in Him the knowing man himself)."[25] The Spirit acts as the mediator of the communion of love and knowledge between Christ and to those whom he gives faith. This is not a mere cognitive knowledge of Christ for it claims those addressed as whole persons. It is in the power of the Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel that Christ is present to believers and believers to him.[26] Where Jesus makes himself present by the power of the Spirit, he also imparts himself to those persons whom he wills to reveal and disclose

---

[23]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 160.

[24]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2: 199.

[25]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 2: 654.

[26]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 161.

himself, thus by virtue of his self-presentation making them able to belong to him.[27] This communion of God and man through operative work of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless, remains always an unceasing miracle of grace.

Human Freedom and the Work of the Holy Spirit

Barth roots the very essence of human freedom for the knowledge of God in the realty of "faith." From beginning to end faith is the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith in Barth's theology derives from the premise that the reconciliation of humanity has taken place in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Our participation in the salvation made complete in Christ does not have to be added as a "second thing."[28] It is a work that is wholly and utterly accomplished in Christ and one in which we are indeed already participants. For Barth the "life of the Church and life of the children of God is, as the work of the Holy Spirit, nothing but the unity of the Father and the Son in the form of time, among and in us men whose existence as such is not yet home with the Lord but still in a far country, although in Jesus Christ it is no longer in the far country but already at home with the Lord."[29] It is the Holy Spirit who creates the life of faith in the believer. Faith does not consist in an "inward and immanent transformation" in us, although there can be no faith without such a transformation. The work of the Spirit "is man's new birth from God, on the basis of which man can already live here by what he is there in Jesus Christ and therefore in truth."[30] The ontological basis of reconciliation is evident in that

---

[27]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2: 654.

[28]Ibid., *CD* 2, pt. 1: 157-58. Barth's doctrine of reconciliation is both universal in scope and controversial as proposed. Particular aspects of this doctrine will be present themselves for consideration later.

[29]Ibid., 158.

[30]Ibid.

we are objectively included in Jesus Christ now and forever but it is not until we receive the gift of the Spirit and obtain faith that this truth is ours.[31]

Faith is indeed a human activity although it is never a human possibility since it is oriented to and comes from Christ by the Holy Spirit.[32] It is never something we can summon from our own being. Humans must choose Christ and, in truth, have only one real course to follow for the opposite choice is the unreal, absurd course that leads to death and destruction.[33] Unbelief, although ontologically impossible, is real and actual since humans in their sin reject and contradict their ontological reconciliation in Christ. The only *real* alternative for us is faith since unbelief is spiritual slavery even as it is a terrible *actuality*.[34] The Holy Spirit alone is capable of delivering us from the servitude of sin and provides us with genuine freedom to live the reality of our being in faith. The Holy Spirit is the power in which Jesus Christ makes us genuinely free for faith and belief and to accept what is ontologically real—our reconciliation.[35] The Holy Spirit provides "awakening power" in which Christ summons the sinful person to his "community" and, therefore, as a Christian to believe, acknowledge, know, and confess him as Lord.[36] Barth is firm in his belief that faith is realized with the context of

---

[31]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 134.

[32]Ibid., 135.

[33]Ibid. Barth deems the possibility of one's rejection of reconciliation within the same context as he views the existence of evil—as an "impossible possibility." Ontologically, evil and unbelief have been abolished in the completed work of Christ. Yet both evil and unbelief remain actual in the present time even as they ontologically unreal. An extensive study of Barth's thought on the question of evil and suffering is found in R. Scott Rodin, *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997).

[34]Ibid., Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 1: 746.

[35]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 1: 748.

[36]Ibid., 740.

believing community whereby the believer becomes a member of the body of Christ and in faith lives "by and for and in and with this fellowship" of individual Christians.[37] There is no place here for the existential experience of faith or for a type of "anonymous" Christianity.

Barth rejects the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit is either an exercise in divine determinism or human free will. Determinism would mean that only God is the acting subject works of the believer and, thus, leave no space for genuine human agency and freedom.[38] When human freedom, however, is emphasized at the expense of divine grace then Pelagian or semi-Pelagian forms of autonomy emerge where the human freedom forms a synthesis with divine grace in effecting salvation.[39] Such an alternative for Barth allows for a systematic coordination of nature and grace and affirms a "point of contact" between God and humanity that he views as a sinister outgrowth of natural theology.[40] Barth, in a very real sense, does acknowledge that human freedom

---

[37]Ibid., 750-51. George Hunsinger notes that the principal work of the Holy Spirit between the first and second coming of Christ is to form the community of Christ. The Spirit gathers, builds, and sends her out into the world to proclaim hope. In Christ the individual is presupposed to be a part of the community even as the community comes into being in and for each member. The Spirit does not bring salvation in a private manner but corporately brings persons in through revelation. Salvation comes to the individual only in the "existence of the community" and vice versa. There can be no individualism at the expense of the community. The Spirit works first in the community and only then in the individual since the being of the Christian is one in relation to other believers. While the believer does not cease to be an individual, it is in the *koinonia* of the community that the work of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled. The community is one of true fellowship and not of abstract collectivism where the individual's membership is not required or of particular significance. The primacy of the community does not exclude but includes the significance of the individual in the consummating work of the Spirit. This community lives in love with one another and upholds each other as forgiven sinners. Only by the Holy Spirit do her members become free for this active relationship as well as witness to the world. See Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 171-72; Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 2:311-14; idem, *CD* 4, pt. 1:149-51, 643-739; idem, *CD* 4, pt. 2:614-726, 816-18; idem, *CD* 4, pt. 3:681-901.

[38]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 163.

[39]Ibid., 163-64; idem, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 207-18 details Barth's rejection of both determinism and synergism.

[40]Karl Barth, "No! Answer to Emil Brunner," in *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Frankel, reprint (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 121.

"cooperates" with divine grace but what he does deny is that this cooperation has any effect in procuring salvation.[41] While grace makes human freedom possible in the mode of acting, this freedom is always a gift. This freedom is imparted to faith in the mode of receiving salvation, partakes in it, bears witness to it, but never effects in bringing it about. This human freedom is given by the miraculous operation of the Spirit is a consequence of salvation but never its cause.[42] We as sinners are incapacitated to rightly respond to God and grace, therefore, does not perfect human nature but actually contradicts and overrules it.[43]

In Barth's account of the "awakening to conversion," he uses the analogy of Christ's resurrection to that of the sinner who is awakened from spiritual death. It is only by the mystery and miracle of God that this awakening takes place. This awakening does take place and under the conditions of human action but it remains a law of divine action. "It involves," Barth notes, "the total and most intensive conscription and co-operation of all his inner and outer forces, of his whole heart and soul and mind."[44] It takes place "wholly and utterly on the earthly and creaturely level" but has its origin and goal in God alone. The order of the action is specifically divine. By the power of the Spirit, "the jolt by which man is wakened and at which he wakens, his awakening itself as the act in which this takes place and he rises, is not the work of one of the creaturely factors, co-efficients and agencies which are there at work and can be seen, but of the will and act of

---

[41]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 165.

[42]Ibid. This applies to both the objective and subjective reality of salvation, what has taken place *extra nos* and *in nobis*.

[43]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:270.

[44]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 2:556.

God who uses these factors and Himself makes them co-efficients and agencies for this purpose, setting them in motion as such in the meaning and direction which He has appointed."[45] That which is creaturely is made serviceable to the divine and does in reality serve for this purpose. Human agency is not impaired but is, rather, used as an instrument by God who gives it a special character. Being "qualified and claimed" by God for cooperation, it then cooperates in such a way "that the whole is still an action which is specifically divine."[46] There is an asymmetry here between divine and human agency where the divine agency has absolute primacy as the effective factor in conversion.[47] Human freedom, while not coerced, depends only on divine grace but "ordinary human capacities are strangely actuated" despite its inherent incapacity to respond to such grace.[48] Freedom to respond is given only as it is received in the actualization of revelation through the Spirit's presence and work.

The reconciliation of the all humanity with God in Christ is the objective revelation that stands regardless of whether one realizes it or not, and the Holy Spirit is the subjective revelation in the outworking of this reconciliation in a person that evokes concurrence with this truth.[49] In other words, what has taken place in Christ *de jure* for

---

[45]Ibid., 557.

[46]Ibid. Barth's position is quite consistent with the traditional Reformed doctrine concerning the effectual call of the sinner.

[47]Hunsinger, "Mediator of Communion," 167.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Barth, *CD* 1, pt. 2:238; Eberhard Busch, *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Darrell L Guder and Judith J. Guder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 224.

the world and, therefore, all persons becomes *de facto* a concrete realization for individuals awakened in the work of the Spirit.[50] Barth explains:

> "In Christ" means that in Him we are reconciled to God, in Him we are elect from eternity, in Him we are called, in Him we are justified and sanctified, in Him our sin is carried to the grave, in His resurrection our death is overcome, with Him our life is hid in God, in Him everything that has to be done for us, to us, and by us, has already been done, has previously been removed and put in its place, in Him we are children in the Father's house, just as He is by nature. . . . That is why the subjective reality of revelation as such can never be made an independent theme. It is enclosed in its objective reality. . . . And when the Holy Spirit draws and takes us right into the reality of revelation by doing what we cannot do, by opening our eyes and ears and hearts, He does not tell us anything except that we are in Christ by Christ.[51]

In the outpouring of the Holy Spirit it becomes possible for the human in his freedom to be encountered by God's revelation because in the encounter the Word of God becomes his "master." This freedom exists where "the Word of God or Jesus Christ is to man the Master, and unavoidably the Master. . . . But to stand under this Master is not only the normal thing, it is the only possible thing. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit exalts the Word of God to be the master over men, puts man unavoidably under His mastery. . . . In this event man is a participator in this divine possibility. Through God he is free for God."[52] Further, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit means that we are placed "under the Word, because it is God's Word," and this Word strikes at the center of our being and in the very midst of our disobedience commands our obedience.[53] Yet our command to participate in what the Word has done for us does not involve fear or anxiety

---

[50]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:511. He realizes there remain millions who have not *de facto* grasped and acknowledged their reconciliation with God in Christ.

[51]Ibid., *CD* 1, pt. 2:240.

[52]Ibid., 269-70. Barth acknowledges that humans may have many physical and material masters, teachers, leaders, and lords. All of them can be distinguished from the "Master," however, because they can be totally or partially avoided either altogether or at some point in time. The Holy Spirit works to make this withdrawal from Jesus Christ impossible at least in principle.

[53]Ibid., 271-73.

as to whether we can do what is required. Our participation does not depend on our fitness for the work. Only one thing is required of us—that being to receive what has been done for us in Christ and, thus, be adopted into Christ. When we are placed under the Word and under the command of the Word we are genuinely free.[54]

The Justification of the Sinner

The human being's conversion, justification, sanctification, transformation, and new determination for God in Barth's soteriology is grounded exclusively in his doctrine of election. On is surface, such a statement bears nothing unusual since this is a crucial affirmation found in the Reformed doctrine of predestination. Barth's concept of the doctrine, however, is historic since he reformulates the classical Augustinian and Calvinistic doctrine of "double predestination" whereby particular portion of humanity is made the object of divine election to salvation while the remaining portion is assigned to reprobation. Barth, rather, defines "election" to be in God's free decision to be gracious toward humanity in Jesus Christ. Election concerns God's self-decision and self-determination to be in fellowship with humanity rather than the election of particular persons for that fellowship. Jesus Christ is ordained to be both the object and subject of election. The universal election of humanity for salvation finds its ontic ground in him who is not only the electing God, but the elect human as well. When the aforementioned claim is grasped, as Bruce McCormack notes, then the material content of Barth's doctrine can be comprehended:

> The content of God's gracious election is the covenant of grace. The eternal act of establishing a covenant of grace is an act of Self-determination by means of which God determines to be God, from everlasting to everlasting, in a covenantal relationship with human beings and to be their God in no other way. This is not a

[54]Ibid., 275.

> decision for mere role-play; it is a decision which has ontological significance. . . . It is an act of Self-determination by means of which God chooses in Jesus Christ love and mercy for the human race and judgment (reprobation) for himself.[55]

The Christologically-centered doctrine of election is taken up as the central theme in Barth's *Dogmatics* since it is here that he unfolds God's dramatic offer of divine free grace to human beings. Concerning both the doctrines of election and reprobation, the dialectic in Barth's thought returns as he asserts that we cannot speak of God's "No" to sinful humans apart from God's "Yes" to the name of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who in his incarnation becomes the object of wrath and judgment that humanity has brought upon itself and takes the rejection that humanity deserves.[56] In the full content of divine judgment, in the "No" spoken over the evil of the world and sinful humanity, God elects for himself the consequences of that "No" in saying "Yes" to electing humanity. The "Yes" and "No" pronounced by God as one word is the full content of the election of grace.[57] Election, "the sum of the gospel," proclaims that each human is elect in Christ as the one who has born our deserved rejection. Even those who do not accept this election and seek to live as if they are rejected by God cannot in any way annul or void their

---

[55]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: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98. McCormack explains that Jesus Christ is the "subject" of election in that God determined in eternity prior to creation that his very being would be defined by what he reveals himself to be in Jesus Christ; i.e. a God of love and mercy toward the human race. Thus election precedes creation. Christ is the "object" of election in that the covenantal relation established by God's eternal act of Self-determination is one of relation with the man Jesus and with others only "in Him." The claim is that "true humanity" is the humanity realized in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. The election of Jesus, as the election of humanity which exists in union with the Logos, is an election to sharing in the judgment and wrath of God which God has appointed for himself for the sake of humanity's redemption. Predestination in Barth's theology is "double" because in choosing himself for sinful humans, God choose reprobation, perdition, and death for himself and mercy, grace, and life for humanity. See McCormack, "Grace and Being," 97-98, 105-08.

[56]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 2:164.

[57]Stephen R. Holmes, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Reprobation," in *Listening to the Past* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 132.

election.[58] There is a double aspect to the one decree made in Jesus Christ: on one hand there are those who hold to the promise that Christ has borne their rejection and, thus, they are elect in him; and on the other there are those who seek to live as if they are rejected and, yet, join themselves to him because he has borne their rejection also.[59] Both the elect and rejected person is found in Jesus Christ.

There are indeed "godless" persons in the generally accepted sense of the term. Their godlessness, however, while actual and powerful, cannot be but a negative force and cannot be taken as a reality. It is, rather, a non-reality since the reality of the human being is God's choice of him for salvation.[60] The human being is God's covenant partner and God, in his humanity, has chosen the creature from all eternity. This means that all humans are in an ontological relationship with God. There can be no absolute godlessness since God has united himself with the one who acts as if he is godless and there is no escape.[61] From the point of view of the human being's election and reconciliation which took place once and for all in Christ there can be no absolutely godless person. Godlessness is no longer a part of the human's true reality since it has been taken away by Jesus Christ in his life, death, resurrection, and reign.[62] There is in Barth's soteriology a heavy objectivistic "slant" toward spotlighting the final and

---

[58]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 2:321-22.

[59]Ibid., 353-54; Holmes, "Doctrine of Reprobation," 133.

[60]John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 104-05.

[61]Ibid., 105.

[62]Ibid.

decisive event of salvation for the world in the life and work of Jesus Christ, and no amount of human rebellion can negate the reality of divine reconciliation.[63]

When speaking of Barth's perspective on justification, only brief attention can be given here as it relates to what has been said previously concerning the Holy Spirit's subjective task. Stated briefly, justification and sanctification are not for Barth two separate divine actions but are two different aspects of the one event of salvation.[64] Just as with election, Barth's view departs slightly from the traditional Reformed position in that his view spurs from the question concerning the ontological nature of the doctrine and, thus, is also epistemological.[65] Justification for Barth is a movement from unrighteousness to righteousness, and it takes place in the history of God with man and, in particular, the history of Jesus Christ who is the God-man and the Judge judged in our place.[66] It is in the cross and resurrection of Christ that human beings as sinners are justified and pronounced innocent. The person is then able to be spiritually awakened and pronounced innocent and recipients of new life.[67] Justification is found always and at every moment in Christ, and remains alien to us but real in him. Justification, therefore, is now an ontological reality for all humanity.[68] Its reality impacts us and leads to faith but we do not share in what justifies as that is wholly and utterly an accomplished act by God in the history of Jesus Christ. This is also our sanctification in which we are

---

[63]Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor!* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 32-42.

[64]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:503.

[65]Bruce L. McCormack, "Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness," in *Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 186.

[66]Ibid., 188-89.

[67]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:554-56.

[68]McCormack, "Justitia aliena," 190-91.

involved and do share.[69] These two different aspects of the divine work must not be confused in any respect for each has its own integrity.[70]

Justification is the distinct aspect of reconciliation that in which God vindicates and exonerates creation of its sin, guilt, and disease. It is an eschatological activity which looks back to the old order, cancels it out, and establishes humanity as new creatures in covenant relationship.[71] This is a retrospective in that it is completed in the history of Jesus Christ and is God's work in the strictest sense and not ours. Sanctification, however, is oriented prospectively in that is does not look back but toward our eschatological future. In the salvation accomplished in Christ, it does not relate to what we have been saved *from*, but to that which we are saved *for*: fellowship with the Creator, genuine freedom, covenant existence, witness, etc.[72] God claims us for himself and moves us from sinfulness to holiness. It is the movement of humans toward God within reconciliation and is distinct from the logically prior movement of God toward humans in justification. In this respect, sanctification is "subjective" in that we share in it and are involved.[73] Yet both actions find their completion in the history of Jesus Christ, the God-man who in his humiliation justifies us and in his exaltation sanctifies us.[74]

The justification of the individual comes by faith and it is the purpose of the Holy Spirit's work to awaken us to the truth about who we are and what we are in Christ:

---

[69]Trevor Hart, "Christ and God's Justification of Creation," in *Regarding Karl Barth: Toward a Reading of His Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 70.

[70]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:504.

[71]Hart, "God's Justification of Creation," 70.

[72]Ibid., 71.

[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid.; Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:499.

justified sinners who are now free live in a way that corresponds to what we are in him.[75] Faith indeed may not be the cause of our justification but there can never be justification without it. Faith is never superfluous or without value. Justification in Barth's thought, however, is "actualistic" in its effect since it is never a completed action a human's earthly existence. It is an "ever-to-be-repeated" event that continues to break in upon us in spite of our continued unwillingness to live as people justified.[76] Justification is never our secure possession or a predicate of our existence because it is a completed action in Christ alone. In our human history it is something that must take place in each new moment and will continue to do so as long as we remain sinners in our lived existence.[77]

The Creation of Witnesses

The ongoing work of the Holy Spirit is also found in the gathering and building up of the community (the church). Barth's doctrine of reconciliation and the nature of church are necessarily interrelated, and a portion of his discussion of ecclesiology comes within his volumes devoted to the discussion of reconciliation. But the range and complexity of Barth's thought on the church is scattered throughout his *Dogmatics* and he does not identify the church in only one fashion. The church is the provisional form of what has already happened to and for human race in that she is a provisional form of reconciliation. The Holy Spirit creates in the church a community whose existence corresponds to the divine election of all in Jesus Christ and members, by the power of the Spirit, are able to share in the eternal obedience of the Son.[78] She has at

---

[75]McCormack, "Justitia aliena," 192.

[76]Ibid., 194.

[77]Ibid.

[78]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.2:760, cited in Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 91.

her Head Jesus Christ who is the reconciler of all persons but who is acknowledged only among the body of believers. Implicit in this acknowledgement call to reach out to all in mission and service to the Lord of all.[79] The elected human being is a covenant partner in Christ and lives by his grace and bears witness to that grace by their own free acts. The church is also to witness to this grace is *essentially* defined by its task of witness.[80] God wills from eternity that there will be a community (in the twofold form of Israel and the Church) that serves as a "sign" of the gospel to a portion of the world that does not yet acknowledge Christ.[81] The character of this sign is to be verbal but also well demonstrated in activity. Although ethics and ecclesiology are not identical, ecclesiology is "ethical" in the sense that Christ summons the church to bear public and embodied witness to the gospel through worship, teaching, care, and service to our neighbor.[82]

Barth sees three aspects of the church that correspond to the three aspects of reconciliation in the Son: his humbling himself to complete his priestly work, our being exalted through the Son to kingship, and the self-witness of the Son, the God-man, who is the light and truth of the world.[83] First, the church corresponds to the priestly work of Christ who humbled himself to death on the cross by being a continuous gathered community that is awakened in the event of revelation.[84] Second, the church corresponds

---

[79]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 89. Here Barth does not see sanctification as primarily individualistic in its effect but, rather, as fashioning a holy people who represent him to others.

[80]Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 143.

[81]Ibid., 144.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in Karl Barth*, 91-108. Each of the three aspects to be mentioned is discussed in Thompson's chapter on the church in Barth's theology.

[84]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 1:643-779.

to humanity's exaltation to fellowship with God by being built up and grown in Christ.[85] Third, the church corresponds to the prophetic self-witness of Christ who is light and life by being a community of faith sent into the world as a missionary agent to bear witness to Christ as Lord and light in the darkness.[86] It is the third aspect that will be touched upon mostly but given the extensive nature of Barth's reflection on the role of the Holy Spirit in creating "witness" in the elect community, only a mere sketch will be provided.

The church, having been elected by God to be a witness of his grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit, may be analyzed in historical, sociological, and cultural terms as a religious institution, but such disciplines can never give her identity as the *church*.[87] The church exists as both *visible* and *invisible*, and is never a static reality but dynamic. Her being is always in becoming. The church *is* when human beings in common receive the "verdict" of reconciliation that is pronounced on all humanity in Christ's resurrection.[88] The invisible church is the community of all past and present believers as well as those yet to come. The visible church is the number of those actually within the earthly body who profess genuine faith.[89] Yet her visibility is a concrete form of her secret hidden source in God the Holy Spirit. The church, like revelation, is a miraculous creation of the Spirit. The church, as a testament of the Word, cannot be more than a testament (its service cannot be equated with God's action) but she can never be less (there is no silent reception of God's action).[90]

---

[85]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 2:641-726.

[86]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 3.2:681-942.

[87]Mangina, *Theologian of Christian Witness*, 154.

[88]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 1:651.

[89]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in Karl Barth*, 154.

[90]Busch, *The Great Passion*, 236.

The church as a provisional representation of the sanctification of humanity is brought by the Spirit into actual and active communion with Lord and one another. Believers carry out the task of witness by first bearing witness to each other and edifying one another. They do this in love because the love that serves as a witness is demonstrated in their participation and integration into the common fellowship of the people of God.[91] The individual, however, is not to be integrated into the body so as to get lost in the collective fellowship. Believers, rather, are to serve each other's needs, admonish, forgive, forgive, provide hospitality, and share burdens.[92] The edification of the community is the church's "equipment for its mission to the world."[93] The church does not exist as end to itself. The church who exists in the world to which she belongs relates not to herself but fully to the world. Because God first and supremely exists for the world, the "community of Jesus Christ is the human creature whose existence as existence for God has the meaning and purpose of being, on behalf of God and in the service and discipleship of His existence, an existence for the world and men."[94]

The "sending" of the Christian community is participation in the *prophetic* activity of Jesus Christ as testimony to his accomplished work. The question of the church's purpose is in essence teleological as the Spirit's work in her effects a reaching out in grace to all. The community exists in the world even as it is not of the world. The community sent into the world does not succumb to the temptation to promote, commend, or conform herself to those who differ from her. The reverse is true:

---

[91]Barth, *CD* 4, pt: 2:812-13.

[92]Mangina, *Theologian of Christian Witness*, 157.

[93]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 2:832.

[94]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 3.2:762.

> It manifests a remarkable conformity to the world if concern for its purity and reputation forbid it to compromise itself with it. The world only too easily sees itself in a community which has no care but for its own life and rights and manner and which thus tries to separate itself from those around. The world constantly divides into individual cliques, interested groups, cultural movements, nations, religions, parties and sects of all kinds, each of which is sure of the goodness of its own cause and each is anxious within its limits to maintain and assert itself in the face of the rest.[95]

Yet, even as she is not like the world since by the Spirit her eyes have been opened to the light, she still must know and practice solidarity with the world without reserve.

> Solidarity with the world means full commitment to it, unreserved participation in its situation, in the promise given it by creation, in its responsibility for the arrogance, sloth and falsehood which reign within it, in its suffering under the resultant distress, but primarily and supremely in the free grace of God demonstrated and addressed to it in Jesus Christ, and therefore in its hope. . . . The community that knows the world is necessarily the community which is committed to it.[96]

The mission of the church is not an optional work that is preserved for just a few or for missionary societies but is the task of the church as whole. All believers are called to be witnesses in Christ no matter where they are placed. Mission should be carried out with the greatest respect for the practices of other religions but with a sincere lack of respect for them from the standpoint of the gospel.[97] The gospel truth must never be compromised but offered in the spirit and reality of love. The church, however, even as she carries out her prophetic activity knows that the life she lives under Christ's lordship is the hope promised to those who are not for Christ as he is for them. It is this promise that is given to non-Christians as well as Christians.[98] The community is sent out into the world by Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to confess him before

---

[95]Ibid., 775.

[96]Ibid., 773.

[97]Thompson, *Holy Spirit in Karl Barth*, 101.

[98]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:365.

all people and by its witness to call every person to knowledge of Christ, thereby making known to world that the covenant concluded in Christ between God and humanity is the original and ultimate meaning of history. It is the future revelation of that covenant at Christ's final coming that is the great hope of the world which is already here and now an effective living hope.[99]

Barth does not advocate a traditional strategy of evangelization as it relates to conversion of non-Christians. Such work is reserved to the Holy Spirit alone. The church is to "call them unassumingly and without reserve to the freedom of faith and obedience."[100] Barth exempts missions to the Jewish race because he sees them as standing in a special relationship to the gospel.[101] The community is pushed forward as a witness by the Spirit who is given to us as a promise. For those who already know Christ, the Spirit promises the Lord's coming as redeemer and perfecter along with a new cosmic form which is the future of the world and their future.[102] The Spirit is also promised to those who do not yet know Christ and are not yet recipients of the promise. They are not condemned to the unspiritual life in which they exist as non-Christians. Jesus Christ is their hope as well.[103]

---

[99]Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 146-47.

[100]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.2:829, 876.

[101]Waldron Scott, *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 25; David Gibson, "The Day of God's Mercy: Romans 9-11 in Barth's Doctrine of Election," in *Engaging with Barth*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008), 136-67. Barth sees the Christian witness as serving to make the Synagogue "jealous" by demonstrating the Church's own position in Christ.

[102]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:351.

[103]Ibid., 353-54.

Jesus Christ, the one *true* witness, is the one and only true light of life and being such he is the whole truth for truth is enclosed in him and beside him there can be and are no other truths.[104] But even as Christ is the one true Word, is it not a fact that true words can be spoken outside the Bible and the Church? Barth acknowledges this to be so even by those who have not yet received any effective witness of Jesus Christ and cannot be accounted with believers who attest to him, or by more or less admitted Christians who have not engaged in direct confession, or are not directly involved in the Christian community, but who are discharged in the functions of world society and its orders and tasks.[105] How might Jesus Christ as the one living Truth find relationship to these other truths without succumbing to the scandalous speculation found in natural theology? It is to that question in Barth's thought that we now turn.

---

[104]Ibid., 99-103.

[105]Ibid., 110.

CHAPTER 6

PARABLES OF TRUTH: BARTH'S NUANCED DOCTRINE OF GENERAL REVELATION

Within his massive and magisterial account of divine reconciliation, Karl Barth emphasizes that "Jesus is *the* light of life. To underline the "the" is to say that He is the one and only light of life."[1] Because Christ is the one light, his glorious work as the mediator of reconciliation of creation means that there are words in the "creaturely realms" that, as such, have their own lights and truths. For those familiar with Barth's distain for any effort to construct a Christian "natural" theology, this may appear on the surface to be astounding affirmation as it pertains to the created world. But because Barth is clear that Jesus Christ is the "light," the Truth, the one true Witness, the one Word of God, that all other supposed sources of knowledge of God are automatically impossible, unnecessary, and must be excluded.[2] In Barth's thought no version of natural theology can be tolerated. So to what "creaturely" lights and truths is Barth making reference?

---

[1]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, pt. 3.1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961), 86.

[2]John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 111. Barth begins §69 "Jesus Christ, The True Witness" with the opening sentence from the Barmen Declaration, "Jesus Christ . . . is the one Word of God whom we must hear and whom we must trust and obey in life and in death." See Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:3.

The reference is solely Christological in origin and enclosed in the all-encompassing nature of reconciliation. In his completed act of reconciliation, Jesus Christ as *true God* and *true man*, fulfills not only the kingly and priestly offices in such a work but fulfills that of the prophetic as well. Jesus Christ is not only reconciliation but also simultaneously revelation and exercises a prophetic office and ministry.[3] Reconciliation, therefore, "expresses, discloses, mediates and reveals itself, not as a truth but as *the* truth, in which all truths, the truth of God particularly and the truth of man, are enclosed, not as truths in themselves, but as rays or facets of its truth. . . . Reconciliation is not a dark and dumb event, but a perspicuous and vocal. It is not closed in upon itself, but moves out and communicates itself."[4] George Hunsinger notes that for Barth the "occurrence of *reconciliation* is a matter of event, history, and life of Jesus Christ, while the occurrence of *revelation* is a matter of word, attestation, and light."[5] The two occurrences are one in Christ and he himself is the agent of each occurrence. Concerning the reality of this dual occurrence, Barth says:

> As Jesus Christ lives, God and man live in this conjunction. . . . God is the God of man and man the man of God. This is the epitome of the whole order of creation. This order, too, has its dignity, validity, power and persistence in the fact that Jesus Christ lives. . . . Yet as the order of reconciliation it is also the conformation and restoration of the order of creation. The eternal meaning and content of the order of creation are worked out in the one order of God in the fact that this is also that order of creation.[6]

Jesus Christ does not live in an abstract sense of the term such as "He has lived" or that

---

[3]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 110.

[4]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:8.

[5]George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 235.

[6]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:43.

"He will live." We can be certain that he has lived but in his resurrection from the dead, the life he has lived according to this witness, he still lives and will live according to the same witness.[7] Everything that must be said concerning the "glory of the "Mediator" and about the light of life, can be summed up in the statement: "Jesus Christ speaks for Himself, that He is His own authentic Witness, that of Himself He grounds and summons and creates knowledge of Himself and His life, making it actual and therefore possible."[8] It is the concept of reconciliation as also revelation that presupposes the relationship Jesus Christ to eternity. It is against this backdrop that discussion of "secular parables" of truth is to be comprehended.[9]

Jesus Christ the One and Only Light

The claim that Jesus Christ is *the* light of life is unquestionably exclusive and is made with two qualifications. Positively, it means he is the light of life in all it fullness

---

[7]Ibid., 44.

[8]Ibid., 46.

[9]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 236-43. Hunsinger's analysis is both intricate and complex, but very insightful. The idea of reconciliation as having the same character as revelation is rooted in Barth's dialectical concept of time and eternity or, better said, the mystery of Christ's person in conjunction with the mystery of eternity. This concept also has a direct correlation to the Trinitarian doctrine of revelation that was espoused in chapter three of this work. Jesus Christ, Hunsinger explains, lives as a person *with a particular history*. Without this history Christ would not and could not be the Reconciler. Christ also *lives* as a person with a particular history. Without his being alive in this way, he could not be the Revealer. His history, conceived as the occurrence of reconciliation can also be revelation because he is uniquely the one who lives. This hinges on the ability to define what it means to say that *Jesus Christ lives*. It is the mystery of the divine and human in a single subject that sets the terms within which all else is to be explained or understood. Nothing is to be conceived as existing except as together with Christ. Therefore, everything in the created world exists together with this eternal One who exists as a human being. Christ is the great "Mediator" who in his concrete and unique particularity makes certain that there is an inviolable and indissoluble co-existence and conjunction between God and world, although it must be affirmed that neither is one and same. See Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:39-40. This might best be described as the "metaphysics of the particular." Yet neither God's reality nor the world's is to be conceived as existing apart from its mediation in the concrete particular person of Jesus Christ. The universal relatedness of Jesus Christ is a matter of his living activity. If Jesus Christ lives then his life is always an *eternal* life lived in indissoluble connection with a particular history. The doctrine of *perichoresis* (explicated in the doctrine of the Trinity) is the paradigm for the pattern of dialectical coinherence where eternity is conceived in perichoretic fashion not only in itself, but also in its reception of history.

and perfect adequacy; and negatively it means that there is no other light of life outside or alongside the light which he is.[10] Because of Christ's fullness, perfection, and all-sufficiency as the light of life, other possible or actual lights may exist. But these other, different lights must occur within the one great light (Christ) and must be fully subordinate to him.[11] If Jesus Christ were regarded as one light among others, even if he were the clearest and most important light, then the claim that he is the one and only truth would be eliminated.[12] Such an argument would likely be championed and warmly received. But the claim of Christ as the one true light is supremely exclusive and will indeed be objectionable to the world and even to those who confess it. The objection does not come only from without Christianity but also from within as has been demonstrated during certain periods in the history of the church.[13] If we as Christians are prepared to accept and proclaim this truth, then we will certainly be the subjects of reproach outwardly and even our "inner voice" will argue with us to either to suppress the statement or render it so innocuous that it no longer says what it purports to say.[14] Yet believers have no option in the matter since genuine Christian freedom is really "the freedom of the confession of Jesus Christ as the one and only Prophet, light of life, and

---

[10]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:86.

[11]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 243.

[12]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:87. Barth clearly does not accept the concept of "pluralistic" forms of truth.

[13]Ibid., 88. Barth here refers to the Church's attempts to secure her existence in the world by a comprehensive combination of the truth of Jesus Christ with other comparatively independent truths, such as those concerning Mary (in Roman Catholicism), tradition and the teaching office in the Church, the truths of nature and reason, and various political truths. He is well aware that this exclusive claim of Christ as the one light will be seen as intellectually obscurantist, morally arrogant, politically intolerant, and disruptive in pluralistic culture.

[14]Ibid., 90.

Word of God. It stands or falls by whether it is freedom for this confession."[15]

The exclusive claim of Jesus Christ as the one word of God leaves no room for the self-glorification of Christian in relation to the non-Christian since it is a strictly Christological statement. In fact, the statement brings both the Christian and non-Christian into solidarity since each are confronted by the one truth superior to both of them. The exclusiveness of the statement "affects, limits and relativises the prophecy of Christians and the Church no less than the many other prophecies, lights and words relativised and replaced by it."[16] The church does not make this claim on her own authority but only by being faithful and steadfast to the testimony of Holy Scripture. The statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God does not mean that in the Bible, the church, and in the world there are not other words that are notable, other lights that are clear, and other revelations that are real. It does not mean that every word spoken outside the sphere of the Bible and the church is false, valueless, empty, and corrupt, and that all lights outside this sphere are misleading and every revelation untrue. If this were so, then such words would be outside the realm of the lordship of Jesus Christ and he could not exercise authority in the outer as well as the inner sphere. There are words in both spheres that can be good, illuminating, and helpful to the degree that God commissions them to be used in his service.[17] The statement simply affirms that Jesus Christ as the one and only Word of God alone is the light of God and revelation of God. All other words, lights, revelations, and prophecies, whether in the Bible, church, or the world, are delimited by what is declared in and with the existence of Christ.

---

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid., 97.

Jesus as the one Word of God means that he is the total and complete declaration of God concerning himself and humanity who he address in his Word. The one Word does not need to be completed by others.[18] Even as the one Word of God does not tolerate external completion, competition, or a combination of words, prophecies, or truths that seek to stand alongside him, this same Jesus Christ who cannot be subjected to human control is himself free to bring his truth "into the closet conjunction" with other words.[19] He can create human witnesses and transform their words in such a way that to hear them is to her him. Nothing can prevent him from entering into such a union with humanity, but this union can be "legitimate and fruitful" only through his act, his work as a form his free revelation of grace.[20] The truth of Jesus Christ can never be transcended by any other claims to truth whether in content, depth, or goodness. He tells us all that is necessary and good for us to know concerning God, humanity, and the world, and embraces, establishes, and crowns all that is genuinely worth knowing. "It is the self-transcendence of Jesus Christ as the one Word of God in respect of the universality and direct and definitive clarity of the knowledge which Christianity and the world do not yet have in time between His resurrection and ascension," but which will revealed in completeness at Christ's return to earth when all times and all histories will be fulfilled.[21] This eschatological element as it relates to creation and reconciliation does not imply any restriction to the Word but is the final expansion and deepening of it.

---

[18]Ibid., 99.

[19]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 250.

[20]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:101.

[21]Ibid., 103.

The concrete content of this Word is Jesus Christ who is incomparably unique in his existence as both divine and human. In this life of Jesus Christ who is the light of life:

> It is the life of the God who wholly humbles Himself, and of the man who is wholly exalted to God by His humbling. It is the life in which God justifies man before Him and man is thus sanctified for God. It is the life in which God, for the sake of the justification of man to be accomplished by Himself alone, takes to Himself and thus removes the transgression of man and his ensuing punishment and need. And it is the life in which man, that he many become and be a saint of God, is called and elevated to the side of God, and given his rights there, to reign with Him over all things. It is the life in which God gives Himself up to death and man is made conqueror of death. It is the life of the Lord who becomes and is a Servant, and the Servant who becomes and is Himself the Lord. It is the life of reconciliation. It is the life of Jesus Christ.[22]

As he declares his life and himself for the world, he is the Prophet Jesus Christ. In both religious and secular language there may be words that speak of majesty, goodness, severity, and mystery of God, or of the misery and greatness of humanity, or its destiny and failure, or the glory and terror of the universe. They may say things that are illuminating and helpful. But none of them says what the life of Jesus Christ says. They may "wittingly or unwittingly say things which are borrowed from the Word spoken in Jesus Christ but they lose the meaning which they have in their proper context."[23] Being set in a different context, they become distorted or at least different from what is said to us in Jesus Christ. We may hear what is said in the past history of religion, poetry, mythology, and philosophy, and we can certainly find many things said which might be claimed as elements of the Word spoken by Jesus Christ. But they remain "a mass of rudiments and fragments which in their isolation and absoluteness" say something very

---

[22]Ibid., 106.

[23]Ibid., 107.

different from the Word.[24] The statement that Jesus Christ is the one Word of God can have no other basis than the one it provides for itself. The statement is singular in content and unique. The only conclusive argument for the statement is the Holy Spirit, the subjective possibility of the revelation of truth.

Parables of Truth and "Other" Lights

Barth's affirmation of "good" words spoken *extra muros ecclesiae* should not be considered necessarily a late development in his doctrines of revelation and reconciliation. Early on in his first attempt at systematizing his thought, Barth suggests cautiously that it is possible for pagan or non-Christian voices to meet the test bearing witness to the Truth. This might be defined from Barth's perspective as "indirect communication" of the hidden God who is as such the revealed God.[25] While Barth does not rule out the possibility of witness to the Word coming from outside the church, these words of witness must be judged by the direct revelation found in the incarnation who is Jesus Christ. There is a definite "scandal of particularity of revelation" that serves as the criterion by which to judge all potential claims.[26] It is clear even in Barth's theology prior to the *Church Dogmatics* that the scandalous particularity of the incarnation "rules out" the possibility of access to revelation from an innate human capacity for it. All accessibility depends on the Word's divine condescension in the event of revelation.[27]

---

[24]Ibid., 108.

[25]Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Instruction in the Christian Religion*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 150.

[26]Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular Through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 122. Metzger's fine book follows up and expands another work dedicated to showing how Christology in Barth's thought informs the relationship between revelation and culture. See Robert J. Palma, *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1983).

[27]Metzger, *The Word of Christ*, 122.

Paul Metzger states that for Barth, "the *logos ensarkos*, the Word in all his scandalous particularity, is the *lux mundi* to whom lesser lights, including *extra muros ecclesiae*, bear witness."[28] God in a very real sense seizes and commandeers secular words in order that they may become "parables" of the kingdom.[29] How is it then that these words which are distinct from Word himself true?

First, such words "must be in closest material and substantial conformity and agreement" with the one Word of God.[30] The words themselves are true only as the one Word of God indwells them confirms their truth. The formal character of these words, however, must still be distinguished themselves from the one true Word by conceding and accepting the fact that the Word alone is truth. Apart from sharing in the content and truth given by the Word, these words declare nothing of their own creation. Those who speak these secular words, if they are to correspond to the truth, must in some way be commissioned, moved, or empowered to attest to the truth if their witness is to be genuine, authentic, credible, and serviceable.[31] Jesus Christ must encounter these words and give himself to be seen, heard, perceived, and known by them. Second, "parables" are to be defined as "secondary" forms of the one Word of God and their function is simply to accompany and attest to the truth. Further, they are not witnesses to something old in a specific new form. They are, rather, witnesses of something that is new to human ears and to be apprehended by us as if for the first time.[32] Christ, as he related parables

---

[28]Ibid., 125.

[29]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:112.

[30]Ibid., 111.

[31]Ibid.

[32]Ibid., 113.

during his earthly ministry, placed them under his hand where "everyday happenings became what they were not before, and what they cannot be in and of themselves. . . . the material everywhere is transformed, and there is an equation of the kingdom with them, and of them with the kingdom, in which the being, words and activities" of ordinary people become real testimony to the real presence of God and, therefore, to the events of his real presence.[33]

Even as parables serve as "secondary forms" of the Word, so can the same be ascribed to the words of the Bible and of the church, and to the proclamation of Scripture as well.[34] Can this same status be ascribed to words spoken outside the sphere of the Bible and church? Barth admits this is a complicated question but he also states that the community must be willing to accept the fact that such words are possible and be willing to hear them as well, although she must never forget she is commissioned and empowered to proclaim the one Word. The secular parables spoken outside the church must be in material agreement with Scripture and illumine and accentuate the biblical witness. These words must also "lead the community more truly and profoundly than ever before to Scripture."[35] These secular words will strengthen the community even as it does not diminish in any way the mission to preach the one Word of God. These are words that gladden and encourage the community in the execution of her task which is sometimes discouraging. The Lord who has entrusted the community with the cause of

---

[33]Ibid.

[34]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 254. Barth sees the prophets of the Old Testament and the apostles of the New Testament evidencing this "secondary form" of witness since they participated in the history of Israel and the history of Christ, respectively, but were directly formed and guided by the one Word of God. Barth's view of the place of Scripture in revelation received brief attention in chapter three of this work. Proclamation must be continually tested, awakened, directed, and corrected by the biblical word. The biblical witnesses and all witnesses of the Christian community, in Barth's view, are "promised and given to be parables of the kingdom." See Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:113-14.

[35]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:115.

proclaiming the gospel will not leave her to her own resources in doing so, but he will raise up secular parables that affirm her message.

Words in the secular can become true for one specific reason. It is found in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, attested in Holy Scripture, which serves as the revelation of cosmic reconciliation.[36] All powers and forces in the whole cosmos are now subjected to Christ who has made peace between God and humanity. The entire world is now under the dominion of the Word and, as a result, the reconciled universe is now used for his purposes.[37] The reality of this truth is declared and known in the biblical testimony that is proclaimed in and through the church. Yet the church also recognizes "*de iure* all men and all creation derive from His cross, from the reconciliation accomplished in Him, and are ordained to be the theatre of His glory and therefore the recipients and bearers of His word."[38] The fact that creation now bears witness to the Word does not mean for Barth an appeal to the "sorry hypothesis" of a so-called natural theology or provide any basis for it.[39] Natural theology cannot speak in a concrete fashion of the triune God, but only in a false and abstract way concerning a "Supreme Being" or "Providence" and some supposed human accountability toward it.[40]

---

[36]Ibid., 116.

[37]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 115.

[38]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:117. Barth's use of *theatrum gloriae Dei* echoes the words of John Calvin. Barth considered himself a Reformed theologian and was a life-long student of Calvin's thought. The primary difference between Calvin and Barth is how creation itself genuinely reveals God's truth and presence. For Calvin sin so distorts the natural knowledge of God that it leaves the human being broken, inexcusable, and incomplete in his attempt to comprehend God's truth and reality. Barth assumes creation itself can only be "read" with the lens of Christ's Lordship which is found in the event of revelation and reconciliation of the human being. For Calvin the question of how true knowledge of God is attained is one that starts with epistemology while for Barth it is Christological from the beginning. Peter Wyatt, *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1996) offers a through study of Calvin's thought in this area.

[39]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:117.

[40]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 256.

If there are true words of God spoken, then all are miraculous whether they occur in the Bible, the church, or the secular realm. In every case it is "the capacity of Jesus Christ to raise up of the stones children to Abraham, i.e., to take into His service, to empower for this service, to cause to speak in it, men who are quite without any capacity of their own."[41] The "thesis is simply that the capacity of Jesus Christ to create these human witnesses is not restricted to His working on and in prophets and apostles and what is thus made possible and actual in His community. His capacity transcends the limits of this sphere."[42] From this "wider sphere," Barth distinguishes two types of secularism: one that is a "pure and absolute" form and another that is "mixed and relative."[43]

The secularism which is pure and absolute stands furthest from the Bible and the Church and includes not only unreached peoples to whom the gospel has not been presented or specific atheistic cultures, but is found inside the Christian churches as well (for there are many "Christians" sociologically but are not attached to the church in either faith or practice).[44] These are persons who stand in full isolation from the gospel in its biblical and churchly form and are likely to be hostile to the good news when it does reach them regardless of proximity or geographical location. Yet such a response does not limit the sovereignty of Jesus Christ and the power of his prophecy so that no true words could be expected from this sphere. It must be remembered that while human beings may deny God, the act of reconciliation means God does not deny them. No

---

[41]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:118.

[42]Ibid.

[43]Ibid.

[44]Ibid., 118-19.

matter the level or range of their hostility and resistance, the gospel remains open, not hostile, to them.[45] No supposed amount of rebellious autonomy can negate the human's relationship to Christ.

> But this means that in the world reconciled by God in Jesus Christ there is no secular sphere abandoned by Him or withdrawn from His control, even where from the human standpoint it seems to approximate most dangerously to the pure and absolute form of utter godlessness. . . . But if we refrain from this inflexible attitude, we will certainly be prepared at any time for true words even from what seem to be the darkest places.[46]

The secularism of mixed and relative form is a sphere of persons who have been reached in some way by the gospel in its biblical or churchly form, and have, to varying degrees, been influenced and determined by it in some measure. They have a deeper, albeit superficial, acquaintance with it and either sincerely accept it or do not blatantly deny it. Yet it is a sphere that has no clear connection to the gospel and rests upon its own "laws and tendencies." In short, it is a sphere where allegiance to the gospel is nominal, apparent, and external.[47] It would be more readily expected that in this sphere which is closer to the Bible and the church that there will be words which attest to one Word of God and thus regarded as "parables." Such words can always be explained as a positive answer to the speech of Jesus Christ as proclaimed by the Christian community. Yet this type of secularism might contain an even greater resistance to the gospel because:

> (i)t is used to being confronted by and having to come to terms with it, and is thus able the more strongly to consolidate itself against it, making certain concessions and accommodations no doubt, parading in large measure as a world of Christian culture, but closing its ears the more firmly against it, and under the sign of horrified

---

[45]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 257.

[46]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:119.

[47]Ibid., 120; Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 258.

> rejections of theoretical atheism cherishing the more radically and shamelessly a true atheism of practice.[48]

If true words are to be uttered and heard from this sphere, no less a miracle is needed than where there appears to exist a militant godliness. These fears not withstanding, it does not result in a lack of confidence in the power of the message no matter how badly it is delivered. For Christ "neither the militant godliness of the outer periphery of the community, nor the intricate heathenism of the inner" is an insurmountable barrier.[49] Christ can commandeer theses words just as he does those of Scripture and church proclamation. What unites the forms of witness that emerge within these two secular spheres is there inclusion in Christ by his grace. They are only distinguished by their relative proximity to the Word "coupled with the awareness and unawareness of each."[50]

Barth states that until the second coming of Christ, i.e., until the direct, universal, and definitive revelation of his glory in the flesh, all true words will be no more than signs of his lordship or attestations of his prophecy, whether it be in Scripture, the confession of the church, or in those that pierce the secular spheres of the world. The relationship between the truth of the one Word called Jesus Christ and "parables" of the kingdom is one of center and periphery. Jesus Christ is identified as the center and human words are assigned to the periphery. The truth of the one Word of God, however, is not only to be identified with the center of the circle but also with the whole periphery that is constituted by it.[51] A single truth manifests itself at the center and at the same time at the periphery. Both the center and the periphery are regarded as two forms of a single

---

[48]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3:1:120.

[49]Ibid., 121.

[50]Metzger, *The Word of Christ*, 127.

[51]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:122; Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 261.

truth. Of these two forms, the center is primary and the periphery is secondary.[52] Barth's description of this relationship is dialectical in nature and complex. The secondary form is distinguished eschatologically into two different aspect—one that is provisional, veiled, and parabolic, and the one that is ultimate, manifest, and transparent.[53] The truth of the Word at the center, therefore, assumes secondary form in the truth of the words at the periphery. The unity of the whole is indissoluble. The center cannot be had without the periphery and vice versa. Nor can a part be had without the whole and vice versa. Nor can any "segment" of the periphery be had without periphery in its entirety.[54] There is a mutual entailment of everything by everything else. While the segments are not the whole of the periphery and they are not the center of the circle which constitutes the periphery, nevertheless:

> They are true words, genuine witnesses and attestations of the one true Word, real parables of the kingdom of heaven, if and to the extent that, unlike segments of other circles with other [centers], as true segments of the periphery of this circle they point to the whole of the periphery and therefore to the [center], or rather to the extent that the [center] and therefore the whole of the periphery, i.e., Jesus Christ Himself, declares Himself in them. Hence they do not express partial truths, for the one truth of Jesus Christ is indivisible. Yet they express the one and total truth from a particular angle, and to that extent only implicitly and not explicitly in its unity and totality. As happens even in the different elements of the biblical witness, and as may happen in any act of Christian proclamation and instruction, they manifest the one light of the one truth with what is from one standpoint a particular refraction which is as such is still a faithful reflection of it as the one light.[55]

---

[52]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 261. I rely heavily on Hunsinger's description of Barth's explanation of this concept.

[53]Ibid.

[54]Ibid. Barth here employs the Chalcedonian pattern for explaining the relationship of the center and the periphery. The connection between the two is "without separation and division" and yet retains a distinctive identity that is "without confusion or change." And since one is primary and formative while the other is secondary and derivative so that is "distinctive ordering."

[55]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:122-23.

It is the sovereign freedom of the Word that makes possible its ability to declare itself unwitting witnesses in the secular sphere. George Hunsinger explains that as the one Word declares itself in the form of secular parables, it is clear that despite some ambiguity, the contextual whole in which the words participate is in reality Christocentric.[56] In secular contexts, these words in their dialectical interconnections of center and periphery, eliminate the possibility of the progression from the secular to the Word, but the freedom of the Word, given its ability to posit a periphery that extends beyond the Bible and the community, opens up the possibility of the progression of the Word to secular words. It is in the actualization of this possibility that secular parables occur.[57]

The task of speaking true words is given to the Christian community but it will be open to listening for the possible expression of secular truths. Even as the church is prepared to hear these secular occurrences, she must be ready to test the validity of these words by the one true Word she proclaims. There must a balance of suspicion and openness, and self-affirmation and self-criticism. Even as the community should maintain a healthy skepticism, it will maintain confidence that in the secular sphere the one true Word can indeed speak. As it preserves and maintains integrity and faithfulness to proclaim the one true Word of the gospel, the community does well to allow itself to be corrected and disciplined by secular parables of truth.[58] Holy Scripture is always the decisive norm by which secular words are tested for possible expressions of theological truth. Positively, secular words are true and beneficial when they harmonize with the

---

[56]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 265.

[57]Ibid.

[58]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:124.

biblical message determined centrally by Jesus Christ. Negatively, these secular words can never contradict, usurp, suppress, or disrupt the true of the biblical message.[59] This is the Christian community's material criterion for judging the validity of secular words. There is also a "practical" criterion in that such words are assessed by looking at the fruits they bear in the secular world where they arise. It may not be easy to distinguish the good from the bad, but it is possible to distinguish "less good fruits" from "better" fruits.[60] Put differently, these words must be discerned as to whether they build up or tear down, gather or scatter, or create freedom or bondage. The final criterion many be called "ecclesiastical" in the sense that such secular words will "show themselves to be true by virtue of their offering the community no criticism without affirmation and no affirmation with criticism."[61] They will summon the church to faith and also with a call to repentance in that their criticism, challenge, and confrontation will always affirm the gospel. The genuine truth of secular words will never involve a one-sided engagement with the community but will always carry this twofold message.

Barth concludes his discussion of the topic by giving no specific examples of secular parables. While on the surface this may appear perplexing, he states that to have done so would have detracted from the real purpose of the discussion. This is not because Christian theology or the theologian cannot point out that there is person, event, enterprise, or book that is outside the sphere of the Bible or church, and draw attention to what is genuinely true in it.[62] A Christian preacher, teacher, or writer should also be

---

[59]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 267.

[60]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:128.

[61]Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 269.

[62]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:135.

permitted to do so. Barth's concern, however, is the basic question of whether and how Christ's church might understand true words of this kind in theory and practice. Any further investigation for concrete examples for Barth distracts from the subject matter itself. What cannot be contested is that the prophecy and power of Jesus Christ can bring forth such true words from the secular spheres.

The Lights of Creation as Reflections of the One True Light

The prophetic Word who is Jesus Christ speaks to particular spheres and locations via a creation that is reconciled to him. Just as all words outside the Bible and the church are not useless or without profit, neither can the fallen, sinful world outside Scripture and the community be shrouded in complete darkness. For Barth the world and its created order have a positive function to perform as God uses it to serve the purposes of reconciliation.[63] The eternal election of Jesus Christ, in itself the beginning of all things, has made creation to be the theater, setting, location, and background of the ordinary and extraordinary mediation of his work and life.[64] The *theatrum gloriae Dei* is the external basis of the covenant which is in turn its internal basis.[65] As long as the significance of divine election is understood, Barth is willing to accept nature as the theater of God's handiwork. Creation, the creaturely world, is the setting for Christ's being, activity, and speech, and therefore specific events that comprise a narrative history or drama. Creation persists as the sphere and place of sin, but also the sphere and place

---

[63]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 120.

[64]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:137.

[65]Ibid., *CD* 3, pt. 1:42-329. Barth adopts a *supralapsarian* position as it relates to election and redemption. Barth sees God electing and reconciling all humanity in Jesus Christ prior to the creation of the world. Therefore creation itself is the external working out of God's reconciliation of the world to himself.

of reconciliation accomplished in Jesus Christ.[66] What God does as the Reconciler he does simultaneously with what he does as the Creator. The point is that since Jesus Christ is the one light of life, "the creaturely world, the cosmos, the nature given to man in his sphere and the nature of his sphere, has as such its own lights and truths and therefore its own words and speech."[67]

There belongs to creation a distinctiveness that is not merely *in re* but also *in intellectu*. This means that creation is structured in such a fashion that it can be known, comprehended, and apprehended by the human senses and the human intellect. The world created by God does not merely exist but also speaks to its human creatures and gives itself to be perceived by them.[68] Yet Barth is firm to uphold his opposition to natural theology by making certain that the created lights of the cosmos are not confused with God's self-revelation. There is a "luminosity of the creaturely world" but these lights, words, and truths do not shine of their own volition. They receive them from its Creator and, in receiving this luminosity, are made capable of shining as such. This helps Barth redefine "dangerous modern expressions" such as "revelation of creation" or "primal revelation" so that these might be accepted in a clear and unequivocal sense of the idea.[69] These lights, words, and truths do not light the world with the same brightness as God does with his Word but they do bring illumination. They are not divine disclosures nor are they eternal truths, but since they are words actually spoken and heard

---

[66]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 3.1: 138.

[67]Ibid., 139.

[68]Ibid., 141.

[69]Ibid., 140. Barth clearly understands that the "lights" or revelation of creation is given its light and power as creaturely phenomena by the one true light of life, Jesus Christ. See Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 186.

the world is not left "deaf and dumb."[70] Barth states that they cannot be ignored nor should they be despised but, rather, should be accepted with gratitude.

These lights of creation, however, in and of themselves have nothing directly to do with the Word of reconciliation. Even as we speak of being illuminated by these "lights," we must refrain from identifying them as "revelation" since no faith is needed to grasp them, but only an obvious skill of perception or a limited gift of "common sense."[71] They do not declare of the covenant between God and humanity nor can they even be regarded as a parable of the peace of the kingdom of God, since the world can produce no such parables. These lights merely demonstrate an "immanent peace" to the world that is found in its created stability in spite of prevalent contradiction and conflict.[72] They are never to be accorded a greater status alongside or with the one true Word.

Barth, in defining the lights of creation, consistently returns to his main thesis that Jesus Christ is the light of life. "It speaks of the *theatrum gloriae Dei*, and therefore of the creaturely world as the setting or background, the sphere or location, of the event and revelation of reconciliation as the triumph of his glory. It draws attention to the lights or words or truths which also and already shine in God's creation as such . . .

---

[70]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:141.

[71]Ibid., 143.

[72]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 186. Thompson in the notes to his excellent chapter on Christ as the true Witness presents Barth as providing six general features common to the "lights" of cosmos. These features are (1) The existence of the cosmos that makes itself known for the cosmos which knows and *vice versa*. (2) A rhythm in creation that expresses itself and in which an essential coexistence and inter-relationship takes place—a rhythm which is dynamic and multiform and which is repeated consistently. (3) The cosmos exists in a series of inner contraries, polarities, or antitheses, e.g., light and darkness, etc. (4) It exists in the context of natural and spiritual laws which conform to its consistency. (5) It provides a "summons and invitation to the active ordering and shaping of things, and therefore to a step in to freedom." (6) Finally, there is the unfathomable mystery that runs through all creation, the question of its ultimate meaning, goal, and truth. See Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:142-50.

established and overruled by God."[73] The meaning of the being and existence of the world is to be the sphere and setting of the great acts in which God expresses and declares himself. That declaration is centered in his love for humanity in establishing, maintaining, executing, and fulfilling his covenant for us. Nevertheless, "as the light rises and shines, it is reflected in the being and existence of the cosmos which is not created accidentally, but with a view to this action and therefore to this revelation."[74] The measure of the force, value, and validity of the lights in creation depends on the measure to which they are taken into the service by God and prove usable in that service. The truth of God challenges and makes relative the truth of the human and yet also in the same way in institutes and integrates the truth positively into the light of God's self-attestation in Jesus Christ. They are integrated and taken up and invested with a limited power of creaturely self-witness by the eternal Word of God.[75]

Barth closes out his thoughts on the subject by considering three ways that the truth of God is distinguished from the truths of creation. The truth of God is distinguished (1) by the fact that it is completely binding, (2) by its unity and totality, and (3) by its irrevocable finality.[76] It is the Word's character that illumines creation and the lights of creation. The lights of creation, however, have no binding authority and in and of themselves, simply point into the void and unknown.[77] If we do not know the one true light of life, "we cannot concede that we have discovered it in one of these lights, or that

---

[73]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:151.

[74]Ibid., 153.

[75]Paul S. Chung, *Karl Barth: God's Word in Action* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), 336.

[76]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:154-65.

[77]Ibid., 156.

we expect the day to come when it will be seen as the one great light in all of them."[78] In other words, these words do not testify to the truth of Jesus Christ and of themselves give no knowledge of God. The lights and words of creation are "provisional, problematic and relative" in character and all lack final validity in respect to the definitive Word of God.[79]

If words and lights outside the church can be used in service to the one true Word, Jesus Christ, and indeed point to the genuine revelation of God, then can any value be placed on the words, signs, lights, and revelations in the world of non-Christian religions? Do such religions have any valid role in testifying to the one light of life? J. A. Veitch notes that while Barth does not explicitly imply a relationship between "parables" or "lights" and revelations in other religions, it is possible that such a relationship could be discovered by appeal to the reconciliation of creation in Christ.[80] If the cosmos is the *theatrum gloriae Dei* and the created world reflects the light of the one true light no matter how fallen or damaged creation may be, then religions might witness to the reality of God the Creator despite their false and misguided practices.[81] Barth, in speaking of the "promise" and power of the Holy Spirit, notes that Jesus Christ is "present and active" for non-Christians who as yet do not realize that he has died for them and accomplished the work of reconciliation.[82] Since Christ died for all and has fulfilled the covenant of redemption for all, non-Christians are recipients of reconciliation

---

[78]Ibid., 159.

[79]Ibid., 163.

[80]J. A. Veitch, "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (February 1971):18.

[81]Ibid.

[82]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:354.

just as are Christians. No amount of "aversion, revolt, resistance or outrage on the part of the non-Christian can alter the fact" that he stands elected and reconciled to God.[83] The promise and the ultimate and penultimate pledge of the Holy Spirit's presence is given to unbelievers as well as Christians. If the promise of the Spirit already applies to non-Christians, then:

> Jesus Christ has risen for him, His power and that of the Holy Spirit are already on the way to him and on the point of reaching him, of indwelling him, of giving him the promise, of causing him to participate in its lights and powers and gifts, of radically refashioning and continually refashioning his existence. Nothing of what the Spirit does, effects and accomplishes among and with and in Christians is not ready like a harnessed stream to be effective among and with and in non-Christians.[84]

It does not appear that Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit as it relates to the impartation of divine revelation allows for non-Christians to exercise some type of "implicit" faith in Christ or to be considered "anonymous" Christians in some fashion. However, it would also seem that given the universal dimension found in his doctrine of reconciliation, it is possible some elements or standards found in non-Christian religions might still serve to bear witness or "light" to the one who is the light of the world, although those who practice these religions still retain "closed or blind eyes" to the light of life.[85] Still, Barth does not explicitly include the beliefs and practices of other religions among the words and lights encountered in the world by the church.[86] What

---

[83]Ibid., 355.

[84]Ibid.

[85]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 3.2:487. It could be concluded that such lights are present through Barth's critical appropriation of the so-called *Extra-Calvinisticum* where the Word in its particularity who is Jesus Christ is identified with no other creature than the Word who dwells in human flesh and yet indwells all creaturely reality. Some theologians see Barth's refinement of the *Extra-Calvinisticum* in terms of *enhypostasis* and *anhypostasis* as moving toward an inclusive and universal Christology. See Metzger, *The Word of Christ*, 172-73.

[86]Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 312.

seems problematic in his doctrine of "lights," however, is the claim, as previously mentioned, that divine reconciliation assures non-Christians the promised "presence" of the Holy Spirit even in their state of unbelief. Such an assertion does leave Barth vulnerable to the charge by those who embrace an inclusivist or accessibilist view of soteriology that he has covertly imported the idea that non-Christians may acquire an "implicit" saving faith even where Christ's name is not known. It must be admitted that it can be difficult to find a consistency or coherence in some of Barth's theological doctrines, and his approach to the "lights" of creation is no exception.

It appears Barth is shielded partially from the claim that he promotes an implicit form of salvation (at least as it has been interpreted traditionally) in his conviction that the Holy Spirit's roll in redemption, as detailed in chapters 3 and 5 of this work, is to direct and integrate human beings into the objective revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the Holy Spirit alone who bears witness to the Son and his sole effect on the person is to make Christ objectively known. Since all genuine revelation for Barth is centered in Jesus Christ, it is the task of the Holy Spirit to guarantee not only the person's acceptance of the Word in Christ but also make personal participation in revelation a reality. Such participation in revelation can only be objective in its act and is by no means subjective. Further, Barth rejects the idea of a general revelation of God in creation or universal prevenient grace that inclusivists and accessibilists affirm as necessary for the development of implicit saving faith among non-Christians. Barth does not expound on the full implications of his claim that non-Christians experience Jesus Christ as "present and active" for them, except to assert that all humanity has been reconciled in the finished work of Christ. It appears, however, that Barth insists that this reconciliation can only be comprehended and accepted by non-Christians as the Holy Spirit imparts faith through

the witness of the written and proclaimed Word, since humans have no inherent ability to receive the Word apart from the Spirit's work.

Barth, as was noted earlier, does not equate the "lights" of truth found in creation with revelation itself, and the lights receive their validity only because Christ reigns over and judges the wider realm of claims to truth in the world, including truth claims found in other religions.[87] While these claims may lend aid or service in preparation for hearing the one true Word, they in themselves do not testify of Jesus Christ and apart from the written or proclaimed Word, provide no direct knowledge of God. Genuine revelation for Barth means that the Holy Spirit makes Christ objectively known to the sinner who becomes the recipient of justification and sanctification in the divine act of salvation.

Perhaps Barth's reference to the promise of Holy Spirit in non-Christian cultures and practices means that Christ, who because of his reconciling work is the first "Light" in all order of truth, is sovereign presence in defining what is true and good in creation no matter where such "lights" may be found. If this is Barth's intention, his claim contains some of the basic tenets found in the Reformed doctrine of common grace, a doctrine he apparently did not acknowledge but would have been of great assistance to him in defining how these "lights" should be understood. It can be argued with some legitimacy that Barth is not an "exclusivist" or "restrictivist" in the purest sense of the terms (at least as Evangelicals have traditionally understood these labels) because of the method by which he constructs the doctrine of reconciliation.

---

[87]George R. Sumner, *The First and the Last: The Claims of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 73.

This study began by looking in-depth at Barth's doctrine of the Trinity as it relates to revelation and the knowledge of God that reaches its highest expression in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. It was seen how revelation actually serves to judge religion and then elevate and justify it by the revelation of Jesus Christ to create true religion. This happens by the miracle of divine grace and God's direct act of revelation, and allows for no synthesis of nature and grace. Barth's theology of revelation gives unconditional priority to specific over general knowledge of God. Because revelation is specific and concentrated in the Word revealed to us, Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is Christ-centered in every respect as the subjective work of the Spirit guides and integrates human beings into the objective revelation of Christ. The Spirit provides no special revelation alongside that of Son, but reveals the Son alone. The Spirit brings persons into the fellowship of the Christian community and prepares the community to serve as active witnesses to the world with the message that God has reconciled himself to it in Jesus Christ. The present chapter has demonstrated, however, that the reconciliation of all creation in Christ creates the possibility of secular "parables" of truth outside Scripture and the church whose truth must be judged in relation to the one Truth.

In the final chapter of this work, the potential contribution of Barth's thought to Evangelical attempts to structure a theology of religions will be assessed and evaluated. There are particular features found in Barth's doctrine of revelation, his view of religion, and pneumatology that could prove beneficial in this endeavor. There are other aspects of Barth's thought, his views of divine reconciliation in particular, that will cause most Evangelicals to be cautious or reticent in their efforts to appropriate portions of his thought into a theological model of engagement with non-Christian faiths.

CHAPTER 7

EVALUATING BARTH'S CONTRIBUTION

Evangelical theology's response to the historic and influential work of Karl Barth remains a complex and complicated affair. Barth's thought for many decades has proven to be a theological "hot potato" for those who stand in the Evangelical tradition.[1] There can be little argument, however, that after many years of leading intellects in Evangelical circles giving a basic dismissal to the Basel master's work as a pure "neo-orthodox" creation, there is a current renaissance of Barth studies in the American Evangelical context. A recent work highlights Barth's influence on the "new" North American Evangelical structure although the theologians presented for study are those who are appreciative generally of Barth's theology.[2] Barth also remains a major figure of interest in the Evangelical realm of the United Kingdom where his work is no recent phenomenon.[3] Many of the most strident Evangelical voices of protest against Barth's thought appear to be fading, although most Evangelicals avoid an infatuation with his

---

[1]Sung Wook Chung, "Preface," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), ixx.

[2]John P. Lewis, *Karl Barth in North America: The Influence of Karl Barth in the Making of the New North American Evangelicalism* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2009). Lewis' contribution also profiles Geoffrey W. Bromiley who was born and educated in Britain but taught at Fuller Theological Seminary for most of his career. The other theologians surveyed are Bernard Ramm, James Daane, David Mueller, Donald G. Bloesch, Ray Anderson, and Donald Dayton.

[3]*Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008).

theology and still retain a fair number of reservations on particular aspects of it. Still there is a cadre of "post-conservative" or "postevangelical" theologians who find Barth's theological insights to be beneficial in doing theology in a modern cultural context that is operates from a nonfoundational epistemology.[4]

An evaluation of Barth's theology from an Evangelical perspective must remain both critical and appreciative as it relates to his cumulative contribution to the Christian doctrine and thought. Of course, the same courtesy should be afforded to any significant theologian in the Church's history, particularly to one who likely made the most significant impact on Protestant theology in the twentieth century. Indeed, Sung Wook Chung finds Barth's theology, with some caveats, to be not only Reformed but embodying numerous aspects of Evangelical theological ideals.[5]

It has been the intent of this work to demonstrate that particular aspects of Barth's theology can be useful to Evangelicals who wish to construct a theology of religions that seeks to avoid inclusivist or accessibilist dimensions found in several creative proposals. Barth's work is one of many sources that should be utilized as a corrective to the experiential models of Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen. Evangelicals who seek to affirm that genuine and certain knowledge of God for humanity comes only through the exclusive revelation of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit will find much to commend in Barth. There are hints throughout this work

---

[4]John R. Franke, *The Character of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) is one such example. Paul Helm, "No Easy Task: John R. Franke and the Character of Theology," in *Reforming and Conforming: Post-Conservative and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 93-111, offers a sustained critical response to Franke's method.

[5]Sung Wook Chung, "Karl Barth's Evangelical Principles: Reformation Legacy in His Theology," in *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 212.

how Barth's doctrine of the Trinity, his critique of religion, and Christ-focused pneumatology can offer assistance to Evangelicals looking for an alternative to the models proposed by Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen. If Barth's work is briefly brought back into dialogue with the three Evangelical models presented earlier in the work, then it will show, hopefully, the importance of this much-needed correction.

Preserving Divine Ontology and Freedom

There are insights from Karl Rahner's doctrine of the Trinity that parallel, ironically, with Pinnock's and Yong's view on God's relationship to creation. Both are in essential agreement with Rahner that God's immanent being cannot be distinguished from his economic self-revelation in human history. Both theologians embrace a social trinitarian model whereby the communion of the three persons in the triune Godhead is one of pure relationality both to each other and toward creation. Yong goes even further than Pinnock in affirming "Rahner's Rule" since he believes any talk of the immanent Trinity can be retained only if we affirm a trinitarian distinction between the economy of the Word and the Spirit. The absorption of the immanent Trinity into the economic self-manifestation by both theologians opens the way for affirming a universal salvific presence of the Spirit in creation, and allows for the economies of the Son and Spirit to serve as in the "two hands of God" in the work of redemption. It is for this reason that both Pinnock and Yong reject the Western church's traditional adoption of the *filioque*.

Neither Yong, Pinnock, or Tiessen deny that salvation is rooted particularly in the person and work of the Son, but the Spirit's redemptive presence cannot be confined geographically to where Son is known in a specific sense. In a real sense, the Spirit's universal presence insures God's salvific work can be found in both Christian and non-

Christian cultural settings. Both Pinnock and Yong believe Evangelical theology's traditional subordination of the Spirit's mission to that of the Son to be misguided and limiting in its view of God's redemptive presence. There is no place in the world where God's grace is present that does not also serve as a forum for divine salvific grace. Although Tiessen does not appear to embrace social trinitarianism nor, as a Reformed theologian, accept belief in a universal "prevenient" grace that is potentially salvific for all persons, his concept of a "universally sufficient enabling grace" must lead him to acknowledge along with Pinnock and Yong "that pneumatology is the key to overcoming the dualism of Christological particularity and the cosmic Christ."[6]

Barth certainly does not permit a separation between God's self-revelation and what can be known of him in his eternal being, for to do so means that a different God encounters humans in revelation than the one true God. This division means we may not speak of the same God who is the Father of Jesus Christ in whom God is genuinely revealed. In this sense the immanent Trinity can be understood in the economy of salvation. Knowledge of the immanent Trinity for Barth, however, cannot be exhausted in God's historical divine self-disclosure, for in doing so God's eternal, independent existence from creation is denied and his freedom compromised. This results in confusion between the God and his creation for God is ontologically free from creation. God, while identical with the act of revelation, cannot be reduced to that act. God is full and complete in his being without relating to creation but in his grace and love chooses to enter into relationship with us. God's freedom means that he alone initiates the relationship with the world and that there is nothing external that determines such a

---

[6]Stephen J. Wellum, "Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit?," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 149.

relationship. When God's immanent being is collapsed into his economic self-revelation, then understanding of God rests solely in the perceived human experience of the divine.

For Barth humans have no capacity in themselves to enter into fellowship with God. In his revelation, God not only reveals himself as Lord but in that revelation confirms that Jesus Christ is the center, beginning, and end of all God's ways with the world. Any other forms of revelation outside the person and work of Jesus Christ never give genuine knowledge of God and results in persons creating distorted notions of the divine. Jesus Christ is the objective aspect of revelation while the Holy Spirit makes the subjective aspect possible by identifying the Son and making human personal participation in the act of redemption possible. Because revelation is a singular triune event, the work of the Holy Spirit can never be separated from the person of Jesus Christ who is God's revelation in totality. It is the failure to maintain a proper distinction between the immanent Trinity and God's economic self-manifestation that leads Pinnock, Yong, and, to some degree, Tiessen to affirm a universal revelation and grace that is emptied of Christological particularity. Such a move also serves ultimately to make the human spirit and human experience the locus of divine revelation apart from God's gracious initiative to bring such revelation. Barth's Trinitarian doctrine of revelation serves as welcome corrective to both inclusivist and accessibilist constructs pertaining to the Holy Spirit's redemptive presence.

The Ambiguity of Religious Practices

The models of Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen are constructed with the assumption that Holy Spirit's presence can be discovered in the practices of non-Christian religions. Since for Pinnock the Spirit is at work everywhere in the world,

salvation is into possible apart from explicit faith in Jesus Christ. There is no disjunction for Pinnock between nature and grace and, therefore, all general revelation is potentially salvific revelation. This means the Holy Spirit's salvific grace may work in and through other religions even if non-Christian religions are not vehicles for such grace. Religions, as responses to general revelation, are used by the Spirit to drawn persons toward redemption. Even if non-Christian religions are mixed with truth and error, God may look favorably upon some who practice them. In other words, in the absence of a Christian witness for Christ, the Spirit can use religions as a valid means to impart salvation.

Yong not only affirms a divine presence and activity in other religions but seeks to establish a method for discerning Spirit's presence in non-Christian practices. He proposes a pneumatological starting point for a theology of religions that will provide the necessary resources locating the Spirit's work. A detailed discussion of Yong's model was provided earlier and will not be rehearsed here. He joins Pinnock, however, in establishing an ethical rather than Christological criterion for discerning the Spirit's work in other faiths. A particular religion's practice and faith must reflect signs of work associated with the kingdom of God (brotherly love, self-sacrifice, and caring for the needy are among some examples). A demonstration of these "fruits" of the Spirit by a non-Christian may indicate the presence of God's salvific grace in their life.

Tiessen does not accept the idea of "anonymous" Christians nor does he find general revelation as a rule to mediate salvation. He finds religions to be "ambiguous" enterprises that testify to God's universal revelation. This general revelation is first revealed in human conscience. Tiessen believes, however, that the Spirit may still be present in the religious practices of the unevangelized. He believes there a type of

revelation that cannot be classified as "special" or "general" in the traditional sense. Instead he proposes a Reformed version of "universally sufficient enabling" grace that gives every person sufficient grace to enable them to come to faith in Christ but is effective only for the elect, including those elect who do not have explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ. This regenerative grace may be given to unevangelized persons apart from gospel proclamation. Tiessen acknowledges that salvation can occur within the context of a religion even as the religion is never an instrument for mediating salvation. If the Holy Spirit guides persons into truth within the context of non-Christian practices, then these persons can come to exercise implicit faith without explicitly hearing the gospel of Christ. Tiessen, like Pinnock and Yong, establishes an ethical criterion for determining how such faith might be present but, ultimately, it is right belief that justifies the unevangelized person.

Barth finds religion to be essentially an institution established by humanity to achieve self-righteousness and justification apart from God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. In this respect, Barth sees religion as the highest level of human achievement. He does not deny that religion produces moral and dogmatic practices that appear to indicate relationship to God. Since the entrance of sin into the world now denies us intimate fellowship with God, humanity creates religion in an attempt reestablish this intimacy with the Creator. But religion, however, actually serves as the "occasion" of sin since it is not really worship of God but an independent action that takes the place a relationship with God. Tiessen appears to follow Barth's lead in terming religion as an "ambiguous" affair but, contrary to Tiessen, Barth finds religion to exist not because of God's revelation but because humanity lacks this revelation.

Religion is the one great godless concern of humanity because for Barth it is "faithlessness" in its actual resistance to revelation.

Even if Evangelicals do not follow Barth's comprehensive condemnation of religion, one is reminded that the practice of religious rituals, even those that are pure, good, and beneficial from a human viewpoint, is no indication of God's favored presence in those acts. The problem that arises, notes Barth, is when particular religious practices serve as the norm for determining God's presence. Rather, it is God's revelation in Jesus Christ and through his written word that determines what might be said any religion, including Christianity. Barth does indeed reserve his strongest criticism for Christianity when it comes to evaluating the concept of "religion." Persons of every religious persuasion, including those who identify with the practice of Christianity, stand in need of redemption. Christians live in the knowledge that they are persons whose relationship to God are that of justified sinners who are recipients of God's grace through Christ's redeeming work. If religion, despite Barth's protest, is an act of worship, then the question becomes to whom is such worship directed? If worship is to be directed toward the one true God, namely the God revealed in Jesus Christ, then does not such worship, if it is not to be idolatrous, necessitate explicit knowledge of the Lord we worship?

Barth does not dismiss the human value of that which is "good and beautiful" in religious practices since such elements can be found in almost all religions. Genuine revelation in Jesus Christ, however, encounters and transforms persons who prior to such an encounter attempted through a particular religion to attain redemption and justification on their own terms. The validity of any truth claim in religion must be interpreted through the exclusive knowledge and confession of Jesus Christ as God's revelation of the one who alone is worthy of worship. Mere moral and ethical acts on the part of non-

Christians, while commendable, is no indication that they have recipients of redemptive truth. If humans are to be delivered from the futile attempt to achieve self-righteous whether such attempts come through religion or any other practice, then they must encounter the one who embodies all truth (John 14:6, 18:38). This truth can only be known explicitly, not learned implicitly. It is in the explicit knowledge and confession of Jesus Christ as Lord that God's presence is not discerned but acknowledged rightly.

An Uncompromised Unity of the Son and the Spirit

Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit is unquestionably Christological. In Barth's trintarian doctrine of revelation, the Holy Spirit is the "mediator of communion" who directs and integrates the creature into the objective revelation who is Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the subjective possibility of revelation of the objective reality and assures that redemptive knowledge of God is given to the human. Since God by his sovereign determination is free in revealing himself to humans, so humans must be made free for revelation. Humans, however, are never partners or cooperative agents in this process. There is no place in Barth's thought for a universal prevenient grace that enables such cooperation. Redemptive revelation is initiated by God and from beginning to end remains God's work. Barth rejects any form of Spirit-oriented Christology where the Spirit is the focus of the Son's work. Although Barth never encountered the tenets of pneumatological inclusivism, he clearly sees Spirit-oriented Christologies as affirming that evidence for salvation is derived from human religious experience or renewed dispositions toward God and others. The primary task of the Holy Spirit is to bear witness to the Son in the economy of salvation.

It is, in fact, through the incarnation that the Holy Spirit guarantees the

redemptive operations of the Word and Spirit are never separated. The Spirit equipped Christ to accomplish salvation through his redemptive work that included his death and resurrection. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that the Holy Spirit acts as the mediator of communion and knowledge between Christ and those to whom faith is given. The impartation of saving faith is from beginning to end the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith, while a human activity, is never a human possibility since its source is Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is never something humans can summon from within themselves. The Holy Spirit provides power to spiritually awaken the sinner and to hear Christ's summons to redemption. This redemption means that the recipient of salvation will acknowledge and confess Christ as Lord.

A viable "Evangelical" theology of religions must resist all attempts to separate the redemptive mission of the Spirit from that of the Son. Barth clearly stands with those who affirm the necessity of explicit knowledge of redemption in Christ and refuses to permit the Spirit to have any mission that does not bring such explicit knowledge to those who would experience salvation. For Barth the Holy Spirit's primary task is to effect human knowledge of Christ and his promise of redemption. It is this severing of the work of the Spirit and the Son that Pinnock and Yong not only propose but trumpet in their models as the answer to how the gospel is made universally accessible. Indeed, Christ commanded that the gospel be universally preached to all persons but there is never any suggestion by Jesus that "apart from the proclamation of the gospel, people will know about God's free offer of salvation as the Spirit brings God's saving truth and grace into the cultures and religions of the peoples of the world

independent of the knowledge of Christ and the need to believe in Christ to be saved.[7] Furthermore, there is simply no biblical warrant for affirming that the Spirit ever works in a redemptive fashion apart from the gospel or apart from bringing glory to Christ (John 16:12-15).

The models of Pinnock, Yong, and, in some degree, of Tiessen espouse an experiential redemptive presence of God among followers of other religions that does not necessitate explicit knowledge of the one God who is the Father of Jesus Christ. This experiential redemption comes without an explicit understanding of who Jesus Christ is and what he has done for us. The Holy Spirit, independent of the Son, effects salvation for those who respond to God's revelation of himself in nature and in non-Christian religious practices. It is precisely this view of the Spirit's work that Barth opposed in vigorous fashion. For Barth there is such a spirit but it is most certainly not the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Evangelicals who desire to avoid the troublesome aspects of soteriological inclusivism in constructing a theology of religions will find several insights in Barth's pneumatology to be helpful.

Where Barth's thought proves problematic to confessing Evangelicals, however, then the negative dimensions need attention. Barth's theology presents several doctrinal elements which Evangelicals, historically, have been reluctant to affirm. Given the perimeters of this work, only three will be presented here. These three areas of contention will be essential issues to be addressed in any Evangelical theological endeavor to understand the existence of other faith traditions. Those problem areas include: (1) Barth's epistemological approach to the knowledge of God, (2) his emphasis

---

[7]Bruce A. Ware, "How Shall We Think About the Trinity?," in *God under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 262.

on the universal totality of divine reconciliation, and (3) and his systematic rejection not only of natural theology, but the doctrines of general revelation and common grace as well. Despite these areas of concern, Barth's theological presence in Evangelical thought should be welcomed to a selective degree rather than rebuffed.

Barth's Neo-Kantian Epistemology

It is fitting to accord Barth the distinction of being the great opponent of theological liberalism in the early twentieth century. When the dynamic break with his liberal past occurred, Barth was forced to reexamine his theological convictions from beginning to end. The impact of Immanuel Kant's post-Enlightenment philosophy offered one of the more stringent challenges to the reality of divine revelation. Barth sought to reestablish the theoretical validity of human knowledge of God. He was convinced that the theological experiment after Kant served to transform theology into anthropology. Barth's new epistemological starting-point can to be best described as a *critical realism*.[8] The description of Barth's realism as *critical* carries with it a distinctly modern element. Bruce L. McCormack explains:

> In no way did his realism represent a return to a somewhat naïve, metaphysically grounded realism of classical (medieval and post-Reformational) theology. Thomistic theology (just to give one prominent example) took its starting-point in the (uncritical) assumption of the existence of an "objectively real" empirical world which presents itself to the human knower to be known. . . . Against such a procedure, Barth everywhere presupposed: 1. the validity of Kant's epistemology (where it touched upon knowledge of empirical reality), and 2. the success of Kant's critique of metaphysics. The "real" for Barth was not the world known empirically. The truly "real" is the wholly otherness of the *Self*-revealing God in comparison with whom the empirical world is a mere shadow and appearance. Moreover, there is no epistemological way which leads from the empirical world to its divine source.

---

[8]Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: It's Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 129. Italics mine.

> The metaphysical way taken by classic realism would remain for ever closed to Barth.[9]

Many Evangelicals are troubled by Barth's view as to how human knowledge of God is attained since, first, he believes there is a great chasm between faith and reason (apologetics are of little importance to him) and, second, that Scripture itself does not contain a system of revealed propositions.[10] God is Lord over the wording of his Word, yet he is not bound to it but it to him. God is free and is not bound to a particular media as it pertains to revelation. The one particular media to which Christians are bound, however, is the humanity of God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.[11] In apprehending the man Jesus, one does not lay hold of God but beholds the humanity of God that serves as a created veil for divinity that may, at God's pleasure, become revelation to the individual.[12]

It is important to remember, however, that Barth's consistent stress on the "divine freedom" means that God's being can never be objectified in any worldly substance or event. A person's relationship with God is an event, "not possessed once and for all, but continually established anew by the ongoing activity of grace."[13] If God is free, then his revelatory action must be free as well, and he is indeed free in his initiative to make himself known. Even in the incarnational form that God assumes in his self-revelation, God is free to remain hidden and revealed. God is free to take on form, but even so, God must still act to reveal himself even in

---

[9]Ibid., 130.

[10]Gregory Alan Thornberry, "Prolegomena: Introduction to the Task of Theology," in *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 41-42.

[11]Trevor Hart, "Revelation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 46.

[12]Ibid., 51-52.

[13]George Hunsinger, *How to Read Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 31.

that form. The form does *not* take God's place. Barth believes that any alternative form of God's revelation serves to deny God's freedom since God's Word would be universally present and ascertainable to man and, therefore, serve as a mere object of human inquiry. For Barth the idea of natural theology threatens the freedom of God.

It appears that Barth's rejection of revelation in nature is directly tied to his doctrine of God. The hidden and revealed nature of God means he can never be the object of human speculation. It is also appears that a neo-Kantian epistemology consistently shapes Barth's theology proper.[14] Although Barth resisted any attempt to build a foundation for theology in anything external to revelation, he worked with a philosophy that was distinctly Kantian and, therefore, served as a subjective form of foundationalism.[15] In fact, Barth's Christology that stresses the revealedness and hiddenness of God contains Kantian phenomenal-noumenal distinctions. This same distinction is included in Barth's doctrine of Scripture. As mentioned earlier, Scripture plays a major role in Barth's idea of revelation but not as a storehouse of timeless propositions and truths. Just as Christ became the Word so the Bible *is* "the Word of God" in that the Word of God that has spoken once for all continues to address humanity in the testimony of the biblical writers.[16] In the Word made flesh, God continues to speak with persons, but the Bible attests and mediates this event rather than being "the Word of God" of itself and in abstraction from the Word.[17] For Barth to say that God is free means that God does not place his words on paper since such written identification could lead one to think that God can be

---

[14]McCormack, *Dialectical Theology*, 49-68. Barth, according to McCormack, never divests himself of the neo-Kantian thought he absorbed under the teaching of Wilhelm Herrmann.

[15]Bruce L. McCormack, "Revelation and History in Transfoundational Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002), 32.

[16]Francis Watson, "The Bible," in *Cambridge Companion to Barth*, 61.

[17]Ibid.

controlled. If God inspired the words of Scripture in such a fashion it would compromise his freedom and sovereignty since he could not abrogate such words once he has spoken them.

Evangelicalism has genuine cause to be reluctant to embrace Barth's epistemological approach to divine revelation. Elements of his neo-Kantian epistemology should be shunned even as other elements of Barth's thought are appropriated. Barth's emphasis on God's "objective" revelation in Jesus Christ should certainly be affirmed by Evangelicals but the difficulty with his exclusive Christological focus is that it rules any secondary source of revelation out of consideration. This is a primary criticism given by Carl F. H. Henry who saw Barth as wrongly defining the sense and scope of divine revelation to the extent that the "Christ Event" is divorced from the universal Logos. Such a move causes direct revelation to be incapable of happening in history or void of any consistent propositional definition.[18] Henry finds this "irrationalist" quality to Barth's epistemology to carry "anti-intellectual" presuppositions handed down from Wilhelm Herrmann's dialectical-existential theology. Such convictions mean that God only reveals himself and not information and propositions. Even the revelation of unalterable and certain truths is questioned. All revelation is a matter of "event" for nothing is fixed and certain.[19]

Kevin J. Vanhoozer notes that Evangelicals are correct to affirm Barth's concern to preserve God's freedom in revelation even as they uphold the conviction that

---

[18]Phillip R. Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His reception and Influence in North American Evangelical Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995), 60. Thorne references Henry's most prolific work. See Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco, TX: Word Publishing, 1976-83).

[19]Thorne, *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth*, 61.

the Bible itself is divine discourse.[20] "What may be known about God in Christ is there, in the plain sense of the biblical text plainly as seen, yet readers need the Spirit's illumination before they can acknowledge the plain sense for what it is and follow its illocutions and perlocutions where they lead."[21] This does justice to Evangelical concerns to preserve the status of Scripture as the written word of God. In his divine freedom, God has tied himself to the biblical texts so that his word is true, certain, trustworthy, and reliable even if it is not acknowledged by the reader as such.

The Problematic Nature of Universal Restoration

Barth's treatment of the doctrines of election and reconciliation remain unparalleled in the sense how that one informs the other and neither can be contemplated apart from the other. This is because both doctrines find their substance and reality in his divine relational ontology, and involve such an innovative pattern of thought that it likely has no precedent in the history of Christian doctrine.[22] This innovation, however, produces some disturbing implications from an Evangelical perspective. The positive affirmations that Barth provides for Evangelicals concerning the exclusivity of revelation and saving faith in Jesus Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit making salvation, justification, and sanctification real to the believer, and deceptive nature of man-made religion are significantly undermined as it relates to the question of whether Barth is committed ultimately an *apokatastasis* or universal salvation of mankind. Given the

---

[20]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, 57.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Sung Wook Chung, "A Bold Innovator: Barth on God and Election," in *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, 70.

sovereignty and universal scope of God's election, reconciliation, and love, it is difficult to see how such a conclusion can be avoided.

Barth himself clearly opposes the doctrine of an inevitable universal restoration of all things since this would tie God's grace to a law or principle and, thus, compromise his sovereign freedom.[23] Even as all humanity is elected in Christ, Barth realizes there remains strong creaturely resistance to the reconciliation that has been accomplished. Barth does not rule out that the defiance of a person can have eternal consequences. "Where the opposition does not break down in faith in the Son given," he states, "even the love of God must itself be destructive. To an opposing world the election must of the force and necessity become non-election, or rejection."[24] Barth, nevertheless, follows up this assertion by claiming that human creature, even as they descend into the abyss of divine non-election, cannot escape God. Yet Barth is also aware that Scripture never affirms every person will be reconciled into God's eternal kingdom. "Nowhere does the New Testament say that the world is saved, nor can we say that it is without doing violence to the New Testament. We can say only that the election of Jesus Christ has taken place on behalf of the world, i.e., in order that there may be this event in and to the world through him."[25]

There are those who attempt to defend Barth from the charge of incipient universalism. These theologians maintain that Barth's doctrines of election and reconciliation *appear* to affirm universalism but, in fact, do not make it a necessity.

---

[23]Donald G. Bloesch, *Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 62.

[24]Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. W. Bromiley et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 27.

[25]Ibid., 423.

Joseph Bettis argues that for Barth reprobation is not the outworking of God's justice but is itself the outworking of God's love. The possibility of reprobation is not excluded by God's consistent love for human beings but is actually a manifestation of love in which God permits disobedience to be a reality, despite it being ontologically an "impossible possibility."[26] John Colwell, in carefully defining the difference in Barth's theology between ontological election of human beings in Christ and our actual election, states:

> Barth can avoid the charge of universalism without logical contradiction because he understands the decision of election in dynamic rather than static terms; as a truly Trinitarian event rather than as a binitarian or unitarian event; as an event of God's eternity which includes human history rather than as a timeless abstraction or an event of the infinite past which would invalidate the authentic futurity of God's eternity. . . . His primal decision never becomes his prison because it is not a decision of the infinite past, binding him in the present and the future, but a decision which is authentically temporal in which past, present and future are simultaneously comprehended and included.[27]

Colwell notes that this does not imply that a non-Christian who lacks the Holy Spirit and does not respond to the gospel is not of the elect because their apparent rejection is an ontological impossibility. They may continue to live under a real threat of condemnation but no one can presume upon their ultimate finality (limiting God's grace) than presume upon their final salvation (limiting God's freedom).[28]

Barth is firm that God's freedom prevents any affirmation of an *apokatastasis*. Yet despite his rejection of universalism, he, nevertheless, remains hopeful and ambiguous concerning the fate of non-believers. God's hands cannot be tied but neither

---

[26]Joseph D. Bettis, "Is Karl Barth a Universalist?," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967): 423-36.

[27]John Colwell, "The Contemporaneity of Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of 'Universalism,'" in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 1992), 159. Colwell's work is expansive, thorough, and carefully presented. His arguments in the end, however, may be unconvincing to many.

[28]Ibid., 157.

can we speculate as to the final destiny of those who continue to reject the gospel message.

> It is His concern what is to be the final extent of the circle. If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it must and will finally be coincident with the world of man as such (as in the doctrine of the so-called apokatastasis). No such right or necessity can legitimately be deduced. Just as the gracious God does not need to elect or call any single man, so He does not need to elect or call all mankind. . . . But, again, in grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the opposite statement that there cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling.[29]

Hints of this possibility can be seen in Barth's discussion of the presence of "other" lights by virtue of Christ's universal reconciliation of creation. Still human rejection of the truth remains a mystery. We may even allow ourselves to be open to the possibility that in the reality of God and the person of Jesus Christ there may be more contained as it relates to final deliverance of all persons than we might have expected.

> To be more explicit, there is no good reason why we should not be open to this possibility. If for the moment we accept the unfalsified truth of the reality which even now so forcefully limits the perverted human situation, does it not point plainly in the direction of the work of a truly eternal divine patience and deliverance and therefore of an *apokatastasis* or universal reconciliation?[30]

David Fergusson suggests that the difficulty for Barth in avoiding universalism arises "not from any defect in its account of divine freedom but in the absence of an adequate account of the role of human freedom in unbelief."[31] He suspects this is because Barth could not contemplate an act of human freedom that was not in concert with divine sovereignty. Barth cannot avoid the inevitability of universalism, Oliver

---

[29]Barth, *CD* 2, pt. 2:418.

[30]Ibid., *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:478.

[31]David Fergusson, "Will the Love of God Finally Triumph?," in *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 194.

Crisp claims, because if all humanity is derivatively elected and efficaciously atoned for by Christ, then their soteriological status cannot be in doubt despite appeals to God's freedom.[32]

Evangelicals cannot accept the basic tenets of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation if to do so results even in a form of soteriological and eschatological agnosticism toward the destiny of the unsaved and unevangelized. It is unfortunate that Barth's rejection of "implicit" saving faith is weakened when he, via his doctrine of reconciliation, leaves open the possibility that those who have rejected the gospel or never heard it might be included in God's circle of the redeemed. It also weakens his strong arguments concerning the necessity the Holy Spirit to make Jesus Christ objectively real and redemptive to those in need of salvation. The idea that Jesus Christ is the subject of divine reprobation rather than humanity simply does not align with the testimony of Scripture. Moreover, neither does the remote possibility of a universal salvation of all creatures agree with the biblical witness that is explicit in the claim that there will be a significant portion of humanity that will be unredeemed and separated for eternity from Christ and his Church.

The Eclipse of Common Grace

It has already been well noted throughout this work that Barth clearly rejects any theological variant of natural theology. Some have inferred, however, that Barth's provision for "little lights" in creation actually serves to provide an informal theology of *nature* where the witness or lights of creation are kindled and sustained by the one great light. In other words, the heavens do declare the glory of God but only by the power of

---

[32]Oliver Crisp, "On Barth's Denial of Universalism," *Themelios* 29 (Autumn 2003): 29.

reconciliation.[33] It is suggested that Barth reverses natural theology so that he does not devalue nature. Rather, the light of the Creator uses nature to give it place as a real "creature," as a part of God's good creation, in order that it may glorify God.[34] Barth does indeed affirm that the "self-witness and lights" of God's ontological relationship with humanity is given "irrespective" of whether the human to whom it is given knows it or ignores it.[35] It is even suggested that this ontological relationship to God experienced in human nature means for Barth that there is an objective knowledge of God that makes every person accountable.[36] Whether Barth would have accepted the premise that his work had a "theology of nature" cannot be determined. He still maintained consistently that God's truths in nature were never self-evident and must be united with and subordinated to the truth revealed in Jesus Christ.

Because Barth rejects natural theology it appears that he also disputes any idea of a "general revelation" of God in the natural world. Barth is clear that all genuine revelation is redemptive in its effect so, therefore, natural theology and general revelation are inseparably united.[37] There is also little evidence in Barth's work that he gave attention to the Reformed doctrine of "common grace" that acknowledges a non-salvific revelation of God through the moral and scientific order of creation. If Barth had given

---

[33]John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 123; Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 147. Torrance claims Barth does not deny God's presence in nature, only that there can be no *independent* natural theology. The divine presence in nature is brought into clear light within the theology of revelation.

[34]Thompson, *Christ in Perspective*, 124.

[35]Barth, *CD* 4, pt. 3.1:139.

[36]Ray S. Anderson, "Barth and New Direction for Natural Theology," in *Theology Beyond Christendom*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 246-47.

[37]G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 33.

such attention the subject, it might have assisted Barth in being more specific in defining these "lights" in a substantive way. Further, it might have stemmed attacks from Barth's critics who see in his work an incipient universalism because he ties the existence of such lights to Christ's reconciliation of all creation.

It is interesting to examine briefly Barth's assertions concerning the "lights" in creation against those of Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck as it relates to Bavinck's approach to the interpretation of divine revelation in nature. In bringing Barth's thought into conversation with that of Bavinck, there is no intent to jettison Barth's contribution to the theology of religions debate. It does show, rather, that Barth's nuanced theology of nature can actually be both complimented and expanded using Bavinck's insights, particularly as it accounts for existence of universal truths and human religious expression. It is important to remember, however, that Barth did not accept every claim made by Bavinck as it pertains to God's self-revelation. Bavinck, in contrast to Barth, does not make a phenomenal-noumenal distinction concerning human knowledge of God. Bavinck agrees with Barth, however, that knowledge of God can only have its origin in divine revelation.[38] Nevertheless, a comparison of these two thinkers is pertinent to the subject under discussion. This comparison is addressed as a part of the concluding portion of this work.

---

[38]Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. and ed. William Hendrickson (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 41.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Bavinck and Common Grace

Bavinck, like Barth, is convinced that the liberal theological experiment served to transform theology into anthropology. Bavinck, like Barth, is a Reformed theologian who affirms that genuine divine revelation occurs solely as an act of God rather than in some aspect of the human subject's religious experience. Both men see no value in the traditional arguments used to support natural theology. Unlike the early Reformation theologians, Bavinck wrote in a post-Enlightenment era in which Immanuel Kant's philosophy reigned supreme in theological reflection.

Bavinck acknowledges that Christian dogmatics is confronted in the beginning with the incomprehensibility of God. All human speech about God is, in some sense, a "mystery" since "the truth which God has revealed concerning himself in nature and in Scripture far surpasses human conception and comprehension."[1] How then is it possible for one to gain knowledge of the infinite, incomprehensible God? While all human efforts to gain an adequate knowledge of God fail, according to Bavinck, it is nevertheless a fact that God has chosen to reveal himself. The Bible makes no attempt to prove the existence of God and presupposes that all humans have an "ineradicable" knowledge of his existence, a knowledge not gained through human research but is,

[1]Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. and ed. William Hendricksen (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 13.

rather, the result of God manifesting himself in nature, in history, and in other extraordinary events.[2] Bavinck is convinced that "[r]eligion and the knowledge of God can have their origin only in revelation."[3] There is, however, a limited character to divine revelation in itself that is confirmed by the establishment of various non-Christian religions and philosophies. If religion exists, however, then God must to some extent be knowable. In fact, revelation and religion stand or fall together.[4] Concerning the reality of divine revelation in human religious practices, Bavinck states:

> All religion is supernaturalistic in the sense that it is based on the belief in a divine power that is distinct from and elevated above the world and nevertheless somehow descends into it and has communion with it.[5]

Revelation is always a free, intentional, and active act of God. Revelation, in fact, is clear evidence of divine grace because it is God's free choice to reveal himself to humanity. Bavinck believes that Scripture does not distinguish between "natural" and "supernatural" revelation. God's revelation in creation is indeed supernatural in that the Creator is at work providentially guiding, sustaining, and governing "a single mighty ongoing revelation."[6] Creation is the first revelation of God, "the beginning and foundation of all subsequent revelation."[7] Bavinck believes all human beings possess a

---

[2]Ibid., 14; Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999).

[3]Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 41.

[4]Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 283.

[5]Ibid., 286. Bavinck appears to echo Barth's assertion that "religion" is an unavoidable human phenomenon. Unlike Barth, however, Bavinck finds this phenomenon to be evidence for God's self-revelation in the world. Barth sees religion as evidence of humanity's lost relationship with God.

[6]Ibid., 301.

[7]Ibid., 307.

religious nature because each person is created in God's image and, by means of religion, stand in relationship to the Creator. There can be only practical and relative atheism since the denial of God's existence is grounded in the assumption that a human being can fashion for himself a different type of god.[8] Although some persons may claim to possess a naturalistic view of the created order, Bavinck maintains that they remain supernaturalists in the psychological and emotional dimensions of their being. In speaking of the intricate relationship between revelation and religion, Bavinck states:

> This fact is of extraordinary significance; however far man may wander from God, he remains bound to heaven; in the depths of his soul he is linked to a world of unseen and supernatural things; in his heart he is a supernatural being; his reason and conscience, his thinking and willing, his needs and affections have their ground in that which is eternal. And religion is the irrefutable proof of this. It is not thrust upon him by force or foisted upon him by deceit, but it rises spontaneously from within his own nature, although it is nourished from without. The religion of man in the fallen state is no doubt always arbitrary, but at the same time also voluntary, service.[9]

Human reason, according to Bavinck, is the embodiment of revelation.[10] In other words, reason has been formed by revelation and revelation, therefore, is embodied in reason. It is important to note, however, that Bavinck does not view this as "emanated" reason, which would contain elements of Gnostic thought.[11] Since human reason is a part of creation, all human knowledge of God is bound to the creation.

---

[8]Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 43.

[9]Bavinck, *Philosophy of Revelation*, 142-43.

[10]Eugene Paul Heideman, *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1959), 137. Bavinck means that reason is a natural part of creation and, therefore, partakes in the in the same revelation that is found in the created order. Reason was created *ex nihilo* just as the world was created. Bavinck does not mean, however, that reason itself is independent and occupies a position that is different from the world and, therefore, can know the Creator and the world via its own efforts.

[11]Ibid., 138.

Furthermore, Bavinck is clear that he, along with the historic Christian church, rejects the theory of innate ideas.[12] The doctrine of innate ideas presupposes that universal and necessary truths originate within the human mind, and that these truths are proved by *universal consent.*[13] If humans were endowed at birth with a definite knowledge of ideas, God, or being itself, then there would be no need for divine revelation.

Bavinck asserts, however, that rejecting of the traditional doctrine of natural theology does not mean that God has not revealed himself in the created order of the world. This is precisely why he argues that all revelation can be considered supernatural. Bavinck believes that a "seed of religion" resides in the human instinct. Scripture affirms that humans, as created in God's image, possess in their "mind" the ability to see God's works and have the work of the law written within their heart (Gen 1:27; Acts 17:28; Rom 1:19, 20; 2:15).[14] General revelation is the external principle (*principium externum*) for acquiring a natural, albeit perverted, knowledge of the divine. This explains the existence of paganism. If all evidence of God's presence in creation is denied, it is difficult to explain the phenomenon of religion or piety.[15] While supernatural revelation remains mediated revelation, God still uses signs and symbols, creatures, deeds, speech and language to reveal himself.[16] Bavinck views the traditional arguments for the existence of God (cosmological, theleological, ontological, moral, etc.) as weak in

---

[12]Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 48-49.

[13]Ibid., 47.

[14]Ibid., 57.

[15]Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 318.

[16]Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 150.

providing "proofs" for divine presence.[17] These arguments, rather, are "testimonies" to one's faith in the certainty of God's existence. The person who experiences regenerated heart and mind through saving faith in Christ will see these arguments as *products* rather than *sources* of faith since he now sees the whole universe as a manifestation of God's work and presence.[18]

Bavinck makes a clear distinction between general revelation and special revelation. Although general revelation is available to all persons, knowledge of God apart from spiritual regeneration is distorted and corrupt. The fulfillment and meaning of all revelation—general and special—is found as God makes himself known as the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[19] It is in Scripture that this revelation of God is known in full. Even a believer could not understand the revelation of God in nature if it were not for the fact that God has recorded in Scripture "how and what He has revealed concerning Himself in the world."[20] Special revelation is a revelation of salvific grace. God's goal, along with the redemption of humanity, is "to wrest heaven and earth, in a word, the whole world in its organic interconnectedness, from the power of sin and again cause the glory of God to shine forth from every creature."[21]

This brief but detailed foray into Bavinck's view of general revelation sets the stage for his assertions concerning God's common grace. He sees grace not as

---

[17]Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 78.

[18]Ibid., 79.

[19]Ibid., 324.

[20]Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 189.

[21]Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 346.

undoing nature or even perfecting it, but as restoring it. Grace is not the opposite of nature, but of sin.[22] If grace renews nature, then the revelation in Christ that leads to salvation serves to renew human reason.[23] Revelation through Scripture provides the spectacles for reason. Bavinck believes revelation existed before and after the fall. Prior to the fall, creation provided a rich revelation of God and was the foundation of all subsequent revelation. The fall did indeed bring change but God did not cease to reveal himself. Revelation changes in character and receives a different content. Here Bavinck ties the doctrine of "common grace" to the reality of God's general revelation.[24] The differentiation between general and special revelation parallels with that which distinguishes common and special grace.[25]

Barth, even in his opposition to natural theology, does not wish to deny an ontological relationship between God and the human being. It was noted earlier that Barth, in his debate with Brunner, does not deny that there exists a presence of God in creation apart from revelation. He simply resists the idea such a revelation of God can be comprehended by sinful humans apart from the knowledge of God found in Jesus Christ. There is indeed a natural knowledge of God that remains within creation but it always

---

[22]Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 191.

[23]Ibid., 196.

[24]Bavinck accepts the Reformed doctrine of common grace that was articulated by John Calvin. The doctrine itself, for the most part, had lain dormant until it was rehabilited in Dutch Neo-Calvinist thought. Bavinck gives close study to Calvin's thought on the doctrine. See Herman Bavinck, "Calvin and Common Grace," in *Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. William Park Armstrong (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 99-130.

[25]Herman Bavinck, 'Common Grace," trans. Raymond Van Leeuwen, *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (April 1989): 40. It is Bavinck's predecessor at Free University of Amsterdam, Abraham Kuyper, who is most noted for reviving in Dutch Neo-Calvinisism the doctrine of common grace. Bavinck does absorb much of Kuyper's thought on the doctrine into his own theology, although he does not give extended attention to the subject as did Kuyper.

stands in opposition to the Word of God. There is indeed an "openness" of humans to God but there exists no "readiness" for knowledge of God apart from revelation in Christ.[26] Furthermore, Barth is willing to affirm a form of "preserving grace" that God graciously bestows which prevents the total disruption of the orders of creation.[27] Because Jesus Christ is the one, true "light" in his role as the mediator of reconciliation of all creation, Barth is able to affirm that there exists a revelation of truth and light in the world that is not resisted solely to those persons who have experienced the saving work of Christ. It would appear that Barth, albeit in a very subtle fashion, affirms the presence of divine common grace that sustains and holds together the structure of creation. It is Jesus Christ alone, however, in his lordship over the created order who serves as the criterion for understanding this grace.

Barth appears to affirm along with Bavinck that in spite of human rebellion, God continues to reach out to humanity in compassion and mercy. This mercy means that God acts to stem the effects of sin although creation remains under a curse. This grace, according to Bavinck, works from without and within human beings to curb the effects of sin in order that history and culture are possible.[28] All human beings, because of common grace, possess natural gifts and virtues. For Bavinck, these common grace gifts allow light to continue to shine in the darkness of fallen creation. Barth sounds a similar note when affirms, as was shown earlier, that Jesus Christ as reconciler assures

---

[26]Anderson, "Barth and New Direction for Natural Theology," 245.

[27]Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 83.

[28]Heideman, *Revelation and Reason*, 177-78. Barth would say history and culture exist as realities only because Christ has reconciled creation to himself.

that the fallen world outside the Church is not shrouded in complete darkness. Although Barth is careful not to equate these "lights" in creation with God's self-revelation, he is finds that creation serves as the "theater" of God's handiwork and glory due to the reconciliation of creation in Christ. Barth remains hesitant, however, to give any direct identity or shape to these "lights" in creation. The reason for this aversion is referenced earlier in that validity and value of these lights depends on their being taken into service by God and used for his service.

Bavinck is far more direct in identifying how common grace brings richness to nature and culture that proves good and beneficial even it serves to make humans accountable to God for their unbelief. The difference between Barth and Bavinck is in how nature itself is viewed. Bavinck follows John Calvin in viewing the world as the self-testimony of God. For Barth nature offers a more negative reflection of God's presence. The "lights" for Barth are a self-testimony of creation since it remains speechless apart from Christ who gives it the power of speech.[29] Bavinck's positive approach to God's self-attestation in the world order could have given full expression to the 'parables" and "lights" alluded to by Barth without slipping into the moorings of natural theology that Barth most feared.

Bavinck finds these common grace gifts to entail the good and pleasant things found in the arts, sciences, and music.[30] Humans still have the ability to grasp truth and discern between right and wrong. There is a natural love within human hearts that brings

---

[29]James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 189. Barr references the insights of Hendrik Berkhof who says that Barth 's views on revelation in nature prevented from saying more than he would have perhaps have liked to have said.

[30]Bavinck, "Common Grace," 51.

nourishment and joy and serves to bind together families, races, and cultures.[31] God has interposed a covenant of grace between sin and the world so as to insure that the good gifts of life will not be destroyed. Bavinck is clear, however, that common grace does not revive a divine spark that exists in the human spirit or provide for a person's inward renewal. Genuine renewal comes through special revelation as one accepts the "gospel of the Cross, the good news of God's grace in Christ, *that* is the mystery which is beyond the grasp of the natural man and comprehended only by the spiritual man."[32] There can be no "natural theology" in the sense that humans can acquire genuine knowledge of God (the Trinity, incarnation, God's oneness, his being, his attributes) through "pure and unadultered" reason.[33] Special grace points to the right knowledge of God that is concentrated in Jesus Christ of whom the Scriptures testify. The whole of revelation, summed up in Scripture, is a special revelation that comes in the person of Christ.[34]

Barth would perhaps have appreciated Bavinck's effort to affirm the reality of the grace, truth, and mercy of God in human affairs without succumbing to belief that such a presence implies an intimate or saving knowledge of God. Bavinck, using the doctrine of common grace, avoids many epistemological pitfalls associated with natural theology. It is an approach that could have enriched Barth's comprehensive and Christological doctrine of revelation. Bavinck and theologians before and after him who affirm the reality of God's common grace in the world order assist us in understanding

---

[31]Ibid., 60.

[32]Ibid., 57.

[33]Ibid., 58.

[34]Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 321.

how vestiges of goodness and truth non-Christian religious practices exist without compromising the exclusivity of the supreme revelation of God that is found in the person of Jesus Christ. Barth appears to have accepted the basic tenets of the common grace doctrine but never incorporated those tenets fully into his theological edifice.

Resisting the Spirit's Eclipse of the Son

It may appear to strange to the reader as this study reaches its climax that attention has been given to a theologian whose career involved little interaction or dialogue with persons of non-Christian faiths. Karl Barth did not see himself as an ecumenical theologian or as a defender of the faith against those who were hostile to the exclusive claims of Christianity. His sole focus was to present an argument to an unbelieving and skeptical world that God exists and can be known definitively in the person and presence of Jesus Christ. There are those who see "ecumenical" promise in Barth's work as it pertains to the Church's continued call to faithfulness in proclaiming the Word, Jesus Christ, who became flesh, as well as a renewed devotion to Scripture.[35] The focus of this work, however, has not been ecumenical in nature but to see how Barth's theology might be utilized in some respect in Evangelical circles to help the in on-going task of formulating a theology of religions. Given the recent drift by some in the Evangelical academy toward an appropriation of synergistic inclusivist or accessibilist approaches to saving faith among the unevangelized, it is hoped that an appreciation Barth's triune doctrine of revelation serves to assist in changing the current theological winds.

---

[35]Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 190-91.

In light of the recent drift by some in the Evangelical academy toward an appropriation of synergistic inclusivist or accessibilist model of saving faith for those who remain unevangelized, it is hoped a renewed appreciation for Barth's triune doctrine of divine revelation can serve to shift the current theological winds. What can be seen from this exploration is that sundering the work of the Holy Spirit from the person of the risen Jesus Christ does not, as Barth contends, bring genuine revelation and salvation but, rather, leads to a perceived and false knowledge of God rooted solely in human experience. Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen are theologians who have adopted in some degree models that bifurcates the soteriological roll of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Each of these forms of experiential pneumatology serves to make explicit knowledge of God in Jesus Christ a non-essential element in the salvation process although the work of Christ is the sole source of salvation. In this sense, the possibility for salvation among the unevangelized is ontological in nature rather than epistemological. Pinnock adopts the concept of a universal "prevenient" grace that is not located strictly within the context of soteriology but grounded in the doctrine of creation itself.[36] Pinnock's theological ontology is revealed in his adoption of a social doctrine of Trinity where the immanent, personal triune relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit determines the divine relationship with creation, and is understood in the economy of salvation. The Holy Spirit mediates the presence of God throughout creation and calls persons to open themselves to the Spirit's call to salvation, even if that openness to the divine comes through the human conscience and ethical actions rather than a direct

---

[36]Stephen J. Wellum, "Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit," in *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 152.

proclamation of the gospel. For Pinnock, general revelation always provides potentially salvific revelation through the twin missions of the Son and the Spirit that can produce some "anonymous" Christians who, nevertheless, continue to practice alternative religions.

Yong follows Pinnock's lead in refusing to subordinate the Spirit's mission to that of the Son. He goes a step further, however, in his belief that pneumatology rather than Christology should serve as the foundation for a theology of religions. Yong, like Pinnock, affirms a Trinitarian distinction between the economies of the Son and the Spirit in the task of redemption. Non-Christian religious practices, therefore, can still indicate the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit. Religions are "neither accidents of history nor encroachments on divine providence but are, in various ways, instruments of the Holy Spirit working out the divine purposes in the world and that the unevangelized, if saved at all, are saved through the work of Christ by the Spirit" even if mediated through other religious beliefs and practices.[37] In acknowledging the possibility Spirit's speaking through other faith practices, Christians are to be open to learning from other religions and even being corrected when necessary. Yong seeks to establish criteria for discernment grounded in affirming various aspects in religions that demonstrate "signs of the kingdom."[38] Religious experience itself, as mentioned earlier, serves as an important role as it relates to the multidimensional aspects (intellectual, moral, sociological) that inform religious conversion. The church must adopt a correspondence model of truth in

---

[37]Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 236.

[38]Ibid., 250.

her engagement with other religions and exercise a "pneumatological imagination" that presupposes the Spirit's universal work in different faith traditions. While the exercise of such discernment is complex and difficult, Yong follows Pinnock, in finding a strong ethical component to be part of marking the Spirit's presence as Christians seek to discover "fruits" of the Spirit in other religions as well as demonic resistance to the aims of God's kingdom. Such a model of discernment, however, must remain open to revision and reevaluation since the apparent absence of the Spirit presently in some particular non-Christian faith practice may, in time, be transformed by some phenomenon that leads the church to determine the Spirit is now working within the same aforementioned religious practice. The Spirit's work, in this sense, is eschatological in nature as it seeks to move non-Christian faith practices toward purification in anticipation of the coming kingdom.

Terrance Tiessen offers an "accessibilist" perspective that asserts the doctrine of general revelation and the innate human consciousness of God. Although claiming to stand in the Reformed tradition, Tiessen embraces the idea of a universally sufficient grace that permits all individuals accessibility to salvation whether or not they have been direct recipients of the gospel message. In this sense, Tiessen appears to align himself with Arminian or Wesleyan theologians such as Pinnock and Yong by affirming the existence of such grace. Tiessen, in working from a supposed Reformed perspective, sees such grace as working to bring the elect to salvation while condemning the non-elect for their unbelief.

Tiessen, unlike Pinnock or Yong, believes non-Christian religions are misplaced, ambiguous responses to general revelation. Non-Christian faiths as well as

Christianity are all susceptible to various forms of idolatry. Yet Tiessen affirms with the three other aforementioned theologians that the Holy Spirit may actually in some cases be at work even in non-Christian religious practices. Indeed, he finds reason to affirm the existence of revelation in non-Christian faiths that is neither general nor exclusive in form, but serves rather to elicit a "faith response" in the individual that will eventually serve as ground for their justification before God, even if they do not encounter the risen Christ until the moment of death. For Tiessen, the individual's salvation occurs within the context of non-Christians religions and not through them. While he accepts the Reformed doctrine of common grace, Tiessen does not, however, wish to make a strong distinction between common and salvific grace. There may be persons who have not explicitly rejected the gospel who may exist currently in a saving relationship with Christ despite not having a complete knowledge of the gospel. Like Pinnock and Yong, an ethical criterion (moral practices that agree with the teachings of scripture) is adopted by Tiessen as part of a framework for determining how some unevangelized persons might already be living in salvific relationship with God. Tiessen maintains that it is right belief rather full knowledge of specific Christian doctrines that serve ultimately to bring a person to proper faith in Christ.

Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen each offer models that provide a unique understanding of how the Holy Spirit may be present in non-Christian faith claims. Yet each model affirms that there is a universal presence of the Spirit who creates a form of grace that via general revelation draws some persons to salvation in Christ apart from a direct understanding of the gospel. God may indeed use the practices and experiences of the unevangelized to elicit a faith response that is salvific even if they lack specific

knowledge of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The salvation of non-Christians, in this sense, is eschatological in nature rather than an epistemological reality. Each of the three aforementioned theologians establish an ethical or moral criterion as providing evidence for how some of the unevangelized may have already entered the kingdom of God. These criteria include the moral demands of the human conscience or practicing the Christian virtues of love, mercy, or other "fruits" of the Spirit. Yet Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen manage to divide the work of the Spirit from that of the Son as it relates to the necessity of redemptive knowledge concerning the finished work of Christ.

It is this "undefined," non-Christ-centered pneumatology that continues to plague many Evangelical soteriological models that is properly taken to task through Barth's emphasis that the Holy Spirit must be understood in no other way than as the Spirit of the Father and the Son. The treatment of all doctrines for Barth must have Christ as their center. Genuine knowledge of God must a come from a "convergence and integration" of the Trinity, Christology, and pneumatology.[39] Barth's trinitarian doctrine of revelation is both complex and simple in its assertions. Yet he is the theologian who is responsible primarily for renewing interest in this important doctrine in the twentieth century.

The Christ-Centered Approach

Kevin J. Vanhoozer notes that the idea which appears to unite most contemporary trinitarian theologies of religion is that the Holy Spirit is a great

---

[39]John Thompson, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 3.

"universalizer."[40] In other words, the question pressing in these models is to the extent is the Spirit referenced actually the Spirit of Jesus Christ? It has been shown that revelation for Barth, above all, is a triune event in which the Holy Spirit can never be separated from the person of Jesus Christ, for this confuses the presence of the divine Spirit for the personal experience of the human spirit. Barth saw this practice as prevalent in neo-Protestant theology following the Enlightenment and it would appear that the same errors are arising in many neo-Evangelical theological methodologies.[41] When this happens, in many cases, mere ethical and religious practices of non-Christians are given as evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit. Evangelical theologians who wish to remain faithful to the biblical witness must seek to formulate a theology of religions in which the person and work of Jesus Christ remains the central focus in Christian engagement other religious practices and traditions.

Barth does affirm that in the triune act of revelation, God's being *ad extra* does correspond to His being *ad intra* since Go does affirm that a primary key to understanding the immanent Trinity is discovered in the economy of salvation. Contra Karl Rahner and those who espouse social trinitarian models, however, Barth refuses to collapse God's immanent being into God's historical self-disclosure. God for Barth can be identified in the act of revelation but can never be reduced to that act. God's being is complete and perfect apart from any relationship to creation. It is God alone who initiates His relationship with the world because if proper distinction is not made between

---

[40]Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Heremeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 63.

[41]Beside the models of Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen that have been cited here, the same pneumatological method is found in Molly T. Marshall, *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003).

the Creator and creature, it then follows that the human spirit itself is deified. Yet, God in His freedom and grace chooses freely to enter into fellowship with human beings and determines in revelation how He will define Himself. For Barth the essence of the doctrine of the Trinity is that God graciously determines to become our God and make humanity the object of redemption.

Barth maintains that God is veiled (primary objectivity) even as He unveils (secondary objectivity) Himself in revelation to the creature. This revelation is not one of difference but degree. This knowledge of God comes to humans by His gracious act but is not self-evident, for divine revelation can never be grasped or controlled. Humans have no capacity in and of themselves to enter into relationship with God. It is evident that Barth has an "actualistic" understanding of divine revelation whereby knowledge of God is an event or occurrence that must be mediated again and again via creaturely objects (Scripture, church proclamation, the sacraments) to humans if such knowledge if to be attained. Yet none of these objects in and of themselves have a capacity for revelation. Revelation, rather, is a miracle as the divine self-unveiling takes creaturely form and imparts knowledge of God. But it is never the form, but God who through the form speaks and reveals Himself.[42]

Barth wisely rejects any attempt to find evidence for the Trinity in creation (*vestigium Trinitatis*). Such an effort follows the path of natural theology and creates a second root for the doctrine that is ground in cosmology or anthropology. Although Barth's use of "mode of being" to describe the unity and distinction of persons within the

---

[42]What is important for Evangelicals to garner from Barth's thought is the acknowledgement that all divine revelation is miraculous and that no capacity for such revelation is found within human nature. One need not accept the neo-Kantian dimension in Barth's "actualism" to embrace this truth.

one Godhead has proven controversial, he stands clearly within the orthodox Christian tradition when he affirms that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are without inequality of essence or dignity, but are dissimilar in origin of relationship to one another. God's triunity, however, is revealed to humanity only in God's work as Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer. Barth would not have recognized nor accepted Pinnock's and Yong's reasons for rejecting the *Filioque*. Both Pinnock and Yong believe the *Filioque* ties the work of the Spirit too closely to the work of the Son and, thus, limit the Spirit's universal presence.[43] The doctrine for Barth, however, has direct implications for the role the Holy Spirit plays in making the revelation of God in Jesus Christ a possibility and reality. The Holy Spirit serves as the communion of the Father and the Son while remaining distinct in His function. In the economy of salvation, the Holy Spirit as the bond of union between God and humanity in Christ and between Christ and humanity, and reflects a genuine correspondence between God's being and action *ad intra* and what He does for human being *ad extra*. Therefore, there is an intricate, necessary relationship as it relates to the work of the Spirit in making the identity and salvific work of the Son known in the act of revelation.

Jesus Christ for Barth is central in God's revelation to humanity. Because revelation has a trinitarian structure, it is through the incarnate Word that we come to know the nature of God as triune. Jesus Christ is the revelation of God both revealed and concealed in human flesh. The revelation of the Word is concealed because sin prevents humanity from acknowledging and accepting the Word. Human faith must be created by the Holy Spirit in order for the Word to be acknowledged and accepted. Yet God always

---

[43]Wellum, "Saving Faith," 153.

remains the Subject of revelation and never the object since genuine revelation always remains His act. Jesus Christ as the objective aspect of revelation makes true knowledge of God possible in that we come to know who God is and for what purpose the world and humanity were created. The Holy Spirit is the subjective reality who makes our personal participation in this revelation possible and readies us to receive the truth. The work of the Holy Spirit in revelation can never be a separate entity because the work of the Spirit is "enclosed" in the objective reality who is Christ. Because humans in their sinful being are never free to receive revelation, the Holy Spirit completes the epistemic dimension in revelation by ensuring that what is ontic in Jesus Christ becomes noetic. Barth excludes any second forms of revelation (general, partial) outside the person and work of Jesus Christ because this assumes humans have an innate readiness for revelation. It is, however, in God's act alone by the power of the Holy Spirit that humans receive such readiness. It is Christology rather than anthropology that develops human readiness for revelation. For Barth Jesus Christ serves as the beginning point for every dogmatic proposition, particularly as it relates to revelation and redemption.

Evangelicals would be well served to learn much from Barth's trinitarian-oriented doctrine of revelation in constructing a theology of religions framework, as well giving attention to his evaluation of the concept of "religion." Barth is correct to remind Christians that the presence of religion alone no certain indication of the presence of God. In the pluralistic and postmodern social context in which we reside, we are instructed that God is whatever we conceive him to be or wherever we find him. While Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen each see non-Christian religions in some respect as possible venues for presence and activity of the Holy Spirit, finds the practice of religion directs one toward

devotion to secular idols as well as those deemed spiritual. Rather than deny the institution of religion, Barth sees it as an unavoidable human phenomenon and the final frontier of human effort to reach God whose relationship with us is severed due to sin. We through religion develop moral and dogmatic practices we believe witness to their relationship with God, but reality, remind us of our lost relationship with the Creator. Following the move away from his liberal theological heritage, Barth comes to see religion as an ambiguous affair that is steeped in error, confusion, and vain striving after that which is holy. It the human attempt to acquire a righteousness possessed only by God. For Barth Christianity among all religions is most guilty of this attempt at self-righteousness.

Despite his eventual tempering of his harsh attack on religion and his appeal to the "wholly otherness" of God in the *Romans* commentary, Barth remained convinced that religion could only be redeemed, justified, and sanctified through a genuine encounter with God's revelation in the person of Jesus Christ. Religion remains the one great act of unbelief, the one great concern of "godless" humanity. Revelation is never a fulfillment of religion but, rather, shows religious activity to be resistance to revelation. If we can speak in any way of "truth" in religion, Barth sees Christianity as the religion that exists in the knowledge of God's grace, in the knowledge of the justification of the ungodly. It is the reality of grace alone that denotes Christianity as true religion. Revelation marks out the Church as the *locus* of true religion but this is only because she lives as the faith elected and justified in Christ. Because it lives in the light of truth, Christianity is commissioned to be a missionary faith that lives and proclaims this truth to the world. Evangelicalism as a movement has not yet acquiesced to the pluralistic

worldview but must be reminded that symbols and rituals of religion, including Christianity, are without meaning or validity apart from the presence of Jesus Christ who alone is worthy of worship.

Natural theology in many respects, as Barth exhaustively reminds us, has often served as an enemy of the Christian faith. Any positive or negative effort to formulate a system to interpret divine revelation whose subject is not bound to the revelation revealed in Jesus Christ and Scripture proves to be speculative at best, and disastrous at its worst. The tenets underlying most innovative Evangelical soteriological models find their basis in natural theology and seek to develop anthropological standards for determining what constitutes divine revelation. The Holy Spirit as the mediator of Christ, as Barth notes, actually eliminates any need to depend on the vestiges associated with natural theology. The gospel is the "point of contact" for genuine knowledge of God. Evangelicals need not adopt Barth's complete aversion to general revelation in order to appreciate his emphasis on the specific revelation of God in the person of Jesus Christ.[44]

Barth finds the Church to be the place where the Holy Spirit turns persons into recipients of revelation because her existence originates in Jesus Christ. It is within this community that the term *ecclesiam nulla salus* is found to be valid and true. The unity of Christ and the human being is the purpose of the work of the Holy Spirit in forming the

---

[44]Archibald J. Spencer, "The Pluralist and Inclusivist Appeal to General Revelation as a Basis for Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Systematic Theological Investigation," in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003), 319-20. Spencer notes that although Barth may have overstated the case concerning the dangers of general revelation and the *sensus divinitatis*, Barth was correct in warning that the tendency to elevate reason over revelation can, over a period of time, give increasingly more weight to a universal sense of the divine. Spencer points out that it is this over-emphasis on the universal presence of God's Spirit and the loss of revelation's primary subject, Jesus Christ, that permeates modern Evangelical theology of religions models espoused by theologians such as Pinnock.

Church. Barth shows correctly that Spirit-oriented Christologies are prone to define salvation as consisting primarily in effecting something with the human being, whether it be religious experiences, new modes of being, or renewed dispositions. It is not Christ who bears witness to the Spirit but, rather, the genuine significance of the Spirit is to impart and bear witness to the Son. For Barth faith and the ability of humans to freely know God is from beginning to end the work of the Holy Spirit. Faith, however, is never something humans can originate or summon from their own being. The Holy Spirit is the power of Jesus Christ which makes us genuinely free for faith and to accept what Christ has accomplished for us. This freedom to respond in faith is given only as it is received in the actualization of revelation through the Spirit's presence and work. Again this faith, contra Pinnock, Yong, and Tiessen, is realized within the context of the believing community. Even as the Holy Spirit gathers and builds up the Church, she is elected to be a witness of his grace empowered by the Spirit. The church's mission, along with serving others' needs and sharing others' burdens, is sent to proclaim the testimony of Christ's accomplished work. While the Church is to respect the practices of other religions she is never to affirm non-Christian doctrines that compromise the truth of the gospel. The promise of the gospel, however, is given to Christians and non-Christians alike.

Barth's affirmation of "parables of truth" offers an interesting insight into how he understands the reality and existence of truth in every dimension of human life. It proves even more interesting in its presentation given that he was among the chief opponents of natural theology and secondary forms of revelation. Because Jesus Christ is the one true witness and one and only "light" of life, his work in the reconciliation of

creation means there are words and objects in the "creaturely realms" that possess their own lights and truths. The claim that Jesus Christ is *the* light of light is supremely exclusive. In a positive sense it means his light is full and adequate and, negatively, it means there is no other light of life outside or alongside the light Christ is. All other actual and different lights occur within and are subordinate the great light which is Christ. The declaration that Jesus Christ is the one light and one Word of God does means that words outside the sphere of Scripture and the Church are false, corrupt, or without value, or that there are revelations lacking truth. Because the realm of Christ's lordship includes all of creation, all powers and forces are subject to him. These secular words, therefore, can be commandeered and used by God for his glory and in his service. In this way, such words can be good, positive, and illuminating. These words that witness to truth, however, can only be judged to so as they correspond to the truth spoken and revealed in Jesus Christ, the one Word of God. The Word of God must indwell these words and give himself to be seen, heard, and perceived in them. If spoken outside the Church, they must be in accord with testimony of Scripture and illumine the biblical witness.

The relationship between the truth that is the Word of God and the "parables" of the kingdom is one of center and periphery. Jesus Christ is the center and all human words sacred and secular are part of the periphery. They are distinguished only by their relative proximity to the Word but all forms of witness in the two spheres are under Christ's lordship. The Church is charged with the task of speaking true words but she should remain open to listening for all possible expressions of secular truth even tests their validity by the one Word of God. These secular words, however, may never

contradict or override the truth of Scripture which is the decisive norm for testing such words for theological validity.

The reconciliation of all creation achieved in the person and work of Christ means that world does indeed serve as the as setting or "theater" of God's activity and speech. God's creation is structured in such a way as it can be known and comprehended by the human intellect and human senses through its own "lights" and truths (words and speech). In order to avoid any hint that he is conceding any ground to natural theology, however, Barth states that these lights in the cosmos must not be confused with God's self-revelation for they do not shine of their own volition. While they receive their luminosity from the God, they do not provide the same light as does the Word of God. They are not to be identified with genuine revelation since no human faith is needed in order to grasp them. The measure of the value and force of the lights of creation depends on the measure in which they are taken into service by God and prove usable. Humans, however, cannot discover the one true light who is Jesus Christ in the lights of creation. Because Barth's theology of revelation gives unconditional priority to the specific versus general knowledge of God, words and lights outside the Church are of use only if they point to the genuine revelation of God in Jesus Christ. There are specific insights from Barth in his explanation of truth "parables" that Evangelicals would have little difficulty in affirming, particularly as it relates to the lordship of Christ in creation and human cultures. Evangelicals need not adopt Barth's concept of universal election and reconciliation in order to understand that it is in the light of Christ's revelation and redemptive work that nature itself finds clarity of purpose. It should also be noted that for Barth Jesus Christ does not merely stand in relation to culture through the witness of

the Church but, rather, culture stands in direct relation to Jesus Christ, who is the basis for truth in culture and the basis for the relationship between the Church and culture itself.[45]

Evangelicals as a whole, as is noted previously, should be reluctant to accept all aspects of Barth's unique doctrines of election, justification, and reconciliation of the human sinner. The neo-Kantian epistemological element in Barth's thought also proves problematic as it relates to humans attaining true knowledge of God since revelation is always an "event" rather than a fixed and certain proposition. Evangelicals are justified in expressing reservation toward Barth's approach even as they seek to correctly preserve God's freedom in the act of revelation. Finally, Barth's aversion to natural theology and general revelation should not deter Evangelicals from developing a fully-orbed "theology of nature" in their attempt to formulate a theological and biblical model for engaging non-Christian religions. Scripture (Romans 1 and 2 in particular) appears to affirm a general revelation of God in nature that is nevertheless perverted in its message by the reality of human sin. The Reformed doctrine of common grace, as presented in the work of theologians such as Herman Bavinck, offers one possible avenue for affirming evidence of God's hand in nature and human culture without falling prey to the rationalistic and experiential elements associated with much that is found in natural theology.

This work's intent, however, has been, hopefully, to demonstrate that Barth's trinitarian doctrine of revelation and Christ-centered pneumatology is helpful in aiding

---

[45]Paul Louis Metzger, *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 230.

Evangelicals in the formulation of a theology of religions and, in many respects, is worthy of appropriation. Given the emphasis in several Evangelical soteriological models on implicit faith and a universal work of the Holy Spirit that does not necessitate conscious knowledge of Jesus Christ, Barth's work provides an avenue for correction. His insights on the phenomenon of religion in the world and human efforts to find fellowship with God prove also be a great resource for Evangelical interaction with other faith traditions. Barth's emphasis on humanity's "relationship" with Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit is crucial to countering many experiential models that interpret mere religious practices or ethical activities as a definitive sign of God's presence. His exploration into the existence of "parables" of truth and other "lights" that are illuminated by the one true Light helps Evangelicals to affirm God's established truth is, indeed, genuine truth no matter where it is to be found. Yet Barth also reminds believers that "lights" of truth can only be judged by the truth revealed in Jesus Christ who is attested to in Scripture and Church proclamation.

The Unfinished Task

Since this work has been devoted to affirming the importance of creating an Evangelical theology of religions construct that is Christological in focus, then further work should be devoted to how such an enterprise might be conducted. Several of the issues touched on in this work offer opportunity for further exploration. What is presented here from Barth's theology is broad in scope and merely offers a contribution to the ongoing task of Evangelical theological formulation. What follows are some suggested areas for further study and research in developing an Evangelical model which remains faithful to the witness of Scripture, even if such a model appropriates only select

insights from Barth's theology. The suggestions given by means exhaust the multiple directions and possibilities available to those who wish to contribute to the Evangelical theology of religions task.

Some theologians have expressed concern that the use of the Trinity in contemporary theology of religions models and the ends for which doctrine's use is espoused is producing a "deleterious" effort.[46] Keith Johnson notes that the doctrine is used in these proposals as an attempt to draw a straight line from a speculative construal of the immanent Trinity to some perceived good (in this instance the salvation of the unevangelized) that bypasses or, in some cases, even undermines the economy of salvation revealed in Scripture.[47] It has already been shown that when the immanent Trinity is reduced or collapsed into God's economic self-disclosure, then it is impossible to maintain an ontological distinction between God and creation. When this happens God's being *ad intra* becomes merely a projection of humanity's social, cultural, soteriological or political concerns.[48] In other words, everything we know of God is defined within the arena of human experience.

The question that remains, however, is whether a viable trinitarian-oriented theology of religions can be constructed by Evangelicals that maintains a much-needed distinction in immanent and economic triune being of God. Little previous work appears

---

[46]Keith E. Johnson, "Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions? An Evaluation of Three Recent Proposals," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 38.

[47]Ibid., 39. Johnson draws this conclusion after examining how the doctrine if utilized in the work of Amos Yong, Mark Heim, and Jacques Dupuis.

[48]Mark Husbands, "The Trinity Is *Not* Our Social Program: Volf, Gregory of Nyssa and Barth," in *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Trier and David Lauber (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 121. Husbands sees this as being one the chief features of social trinitarian doctrine.

to have been done in this area? Barth demonstrates that revelation itself is a trinitarian event in that God is genuinely known in his self-disclosure as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It seems possible for the Christian to think in trinitarian terms when it comes to the subjects of missiology, ecclesiology and church proclamation.[49] But can a trinitarian model of engagement with other faiths be established that does not fall into the pluralist or inclusivist trap? It is evident that any Evangelical theology of religions that does not wish to blur the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity must not compromise the Spirit's mission in glorifying the Son. What has been presented in this study by using Barth's trinitarian model of revelation has sought merely to refute the inclusivists' unfortunate practice of separating the missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit. How can the ontological integrity of the immanent and economic Trinity be upheld in a non-inclusivist theology of religions model? Such questions beg for additional attention.

Barth's critique human religion also presents avenues for Evangelicals to explore as it relates to the concept of "religion" itself. It is never Barth's intention to abolish the concept of religion since he believes it is an unavoidable human phenomenon arising from a person's search to know God, but also marks the consummation of a vain attempt to reach the divine. He believes a choice must be made for either revelation or religion. Barth reserves his harshest criticism for those who would claim Christianity to be the "superior" religion among all religions because, in his view, Christianity in its organized form is as capable of being idolatrous in practice as any other religion.

---

[49]Johnson, "Doctrine of the Trinity," 38.

Christianity, in fact, is the epitome of idolatry when it fails to live by the grace of revelation given in Jesus Christ. It is the grace given to Christianity in God's self-revelation in Christ that alone makes it the religion of the "justified sinner" and, thus, the faith that is made true through its acceptance of the judgment and grace of God.

How then should Evangelicals reflect theologically on the phenomenon of religion, particularly as it relates to the quest for revelation and redemption? Should Evangelicals formulate a theology of religions that subjects Christianity to the most strident of critiques as it measures its in relationship to other "godless" exercises in human self-justification, whether those exercising such attempts are found in religious or secular spheres?[50] Is the existence of religion itself evidence of God's judgment on fallen humans, who now lacking intimate knowledge and relationship with the Creator proceed to fashion a false knowledge of the divine in order to fill the void? Or would a biblically-faithful theology of religions from an Evangelical perspective find a purpose for the existence religion in Christ's redemption plan? Perhaps Christianity should seek to divest itself of the status of "religion" since those who claim to follow its precepts humbly acknowledge they live as people of "relationship" to Jesus Christ and worship him who has transformed, redeemed and justified them apart from their feeble efforts to achieve

---

[50]James M. Hamilton Jr., "Who Can Be Saved? A Review Article," *Trinity Journal* 28, n.s., no. 1 (2007): 89-112. Hamilton is wise to alert readers that a separation should be maintained between those who are genuine followers of Christ and supposed Christians who are actually "faithless" in their claim to live by the biblical commands. In other words, Christianity has persons who may be call themselves Christians but fail to live according to the Bible's commands. He makes this observation in light of Terrance Tiessen's statements that (echoing Barth) Christianity is also "ambiguous" religion along with all other religions and is guilty of some of the same idolatry and evil other religions have committed. Hamilton points out that while other religions may incorporate cultic evil practices in a system of worship. Biblical Christianity never commanded its followers to practice slavery or carry on military crusades, although some Christians have certainly participated in such evils. Hamilton points to the critique of Israel's worship by the prophets. The prophets were not condemning the practices Moses commanded but the corrupt way such practices were being conducted.

salvation. These are but a few of the questions that merit further consideration.

The Evangelical encounter with other religions will need to account for those elements found in other non-Christian faiths that, in accord with the testimony of Christian scripture, appears to be good, true, positive, and beneficial for humanity as a whole. Evangelical inclusivists and accessibilists find demonstrations of these positive elements in other religions to be evidence of the presence of God's Spirit working in a redemptive fashion through non-Christian practices. It has been shown, however, that there is no evidence in Scripture of the Holy Sprit working in any other way than to bring to persons the specific revelation of Jesus Christ in whom all absolute truth and goodness is found. That does not, of course, mean that God's gracious presence cannot be found to exist in every culture and community. Barth affirms that such a presence can be discerned in the lights of truth spread throughout creation. Bavinck credits this divine presence to a common grace which God has shed upon all creation. Could the doctrine of common grace be valuable tool in an Evangelical theology of religions model that seeks to avoid the some of the conclusions garnered from pneumatological inclusivism?[51] How might such a doctrine be formulated into Christian engagement with persons of other faiths? This study has focused on Barth's potential contribution to the Evangelical project. What might a detailed study of Bavinck's thought yield to the theology of religions discussion? Given the renewed interest in Bavinck's theology within Evangelical circles, such a study could yield some interesting insights.

---

[51]Believers who are of the Arminian and Wesleyan persuasion will not likely care for the use of common grace to explain the existence of that which is universally good and true. Even if one holds to a prevenient grace position, however, this need not result in one accepting the implicit faith claims made by inclusivists or even accessibilists for that matter.

It is this study's intent to argue that Karl Barth's thought remains a resource for theological reflection and conversation in the twenty-first century. An Evangelical theology of religions that is guided by biblical revelation rather than human experience will find many of Barth's insights provide assistance in the formulation and construction of such a model. This in no way suggests that every tenet of Barth's theology need be or even should be affirmed. Still, legitimate Evangelical theological conversation will involve listening and responding to voices that have played a significant role in shaping Christian doctrine in the present age. Barth is one of those voices. Not only does his voice continue to resonate within various present-day theological circles, but it is now being heard more clearly by Evangelicals. While it is the voice of Lord speaking in the person of Jesus Christ and through his word who we must obey and hear over all other voices, Evangelicals simply cannot dismiss Barth's voice, for to do so is to miss a very rich message in many respects. It is a message that merits hearing in the contemporary Evangelical theology of religions discussion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

Anderson, Norman. *Christianity and World Religions: The Challenge of Pluralism.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984.

Bacote, Vincent E. *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Badcock, Gary D. *Light of Truth, Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation.* Translated by Edward I. Oakes. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992.

Barr, James. *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1993.

Barth, Karl. *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*. London: SCM Press, 1960.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Pt. 1. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Pt. 2. Translated by G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, Pt. 1. Translated by T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 2, *The Doctrine of God*, Pt. 2. Translated by G. W. Bromiley, J.C. Campbell, Iain Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, Harold Knight, and R.A. Stewart. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 3, *The Doctrine of Creation*, Pt. 1. Translated by J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and H. Knight. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Pt. 1. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*, Pt. 2. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Pt. 3.1. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961.

_____. *Church Dogmatics*. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Vol. 4, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Pt. 3.2. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1961.

_____. *Der Römerbrief 1919*. Edited by Hermann Schmidt. Zurich: TVZ, 1985.

_____. *Dogmatics in Outline*. Translated by G. T. Thomson. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959.

_____. *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*. Translated by Grover Foley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963.

_____. *On Religion*. Translated by Garrett Green. London: T & T Clark, 2006.

_____. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1973.

_____. *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics, Lecture Fragments*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981.

_____. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by Edwyn C. Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1933.

_____. *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Instruction in the Christian Religion*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *The Humanity of God*. Translated by Thomas Wieser. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960.

_____. *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God*. Translated by J. L. M. Haire and Ian Henderson. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938.

_____. *The Theology of Schleiermacher*. Edited by Dietrich Ritschl. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

_____. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Translated by Douglas Horton. London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928.

_____. *Theology and the Church: Shorter Writings 1920-1928*. Translated by Louise Pettibone Smith. London: SCM Press, 1962.

Bavinck, Herman. *The Doctrine of God*. Edited and translated by William Hendriksen. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977.

_____. *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999.

_____. *The Philosophy of Revelation*. Translated by Geerhardus Vos, Nicholas M. Steffens, and Henry E. Dosker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.

_____. *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*. Edited by John Bolt. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

Berkhof, Hendrikus. *Two Hundred Years of Theology: Report of a Personal Journey*. Translated by John Vriend. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Berkouwer, G. C. *General Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955.

_____. *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. London: Paternoster Press, 1956.

Bloesch, Donald G. *Jesus Is Victor! Karl Barth's Doctrine of Salvation*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976.

Bockmuehl, Klaus. *The Unreal God of Modern Theology*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1988.

Bolich, Gregory G. *Karl Barth and Evangelicalism*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980.

Boulton, Matthew Myer. *God against Religion: Rethinking Christian Theology through Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008.

Braaten, Carl E. *No Other Gospel! Christianity Among the World's Religions*. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000.

Bromiley, Geoffrey W. *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1979.

Brown, Colin. *Karl Barth and the Christian Message*. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998.

Brunner, Emil. *Reason and Revelation.* Translated by Olive Wyon. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946.

Brunner, Emil and Karl Barth. *Natural Theology.* Translated by Peter Fraenkel. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.

Busch, Eberhard. *The Great Passion: An Introduction to Karl Barth's Theology.* Edited and annotated by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

_____. *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

_____. *Karl Barth and the Pietists: The Young Karl Barth's Critique of Pietism and Its Response.* Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Callen, Barry L. *Clark H. Pinnock: Journey Toward Renewal.* Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 2000.

Calvin, John. *Institutes of the Christian Religion.* Edited by John T. McNeill. Translated by Ford Lewis Battles. Library of Christian Classics, vols. 20-21. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960.

Chia, Roland. *Revelation and Theology: The Knowledge of God in Balthasar and Barth.* New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

Chung, Paul S. *Karl Barth: God's Word in Action.* Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008.

Chung, Sung Wook. *Admiration and Challenge: Karl Barth's Theological Relationship with John Calvin.* New York: Peter Lang, 2002.

Colwell, John. *Actuality and Provisionality: Eternity and Election in the Theology of Karl Barth.* Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1989.

Cross, Terry L. *Dialectic in Karl Barth's Doctrine of God.* New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

D'Costa, Gavin. *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.

_____, ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions.*

DiNoia, Joseph. *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective.* Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press, 1992.

Dorrien, Gary. *The Barthian Revolt in Modern Theology.* Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000.

Dowey, Jr. Edward A. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994.

Dulles, Avery. *Models of Revelation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Erickson, Millard J. *How Shall They Be Saved?* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996.

Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Holy Spirit*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Franke, John R. *The Character of Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005.

Gelpi, Donald L. *The Divine Mother: A Trinitarian Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.

Gibson, David and Daniel Strange, eds. *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*. Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008.

Gorringe, Timothy. *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Greene, Colin J. D. *Christology in Cultural Persepctive: Marking Out the Horizons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Grenz, Stanley J. *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

Gunton, Colin E. *Becoming and Being: The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*. London: SCM Press Ltd., 2001.

_____. *A Brief Theology of Revelation*. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.

Hart, John. *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formulation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916-1936*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Hart, Trevor. *Regarding Karl Barth: Toward a Reading of His Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999.

Hartwell, Herbert. *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction*. London: Gerald Duckworth and Company, 1964.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology*. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2001.

Heideman, Eugene Paul. *The Relation of Revelation and Reason in E. Brunner and H. Bavinck*. Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1959.

Heim, S. Mark. *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Henry, Carl F. H. *God, Revelation and Authority*. 6 vols. Waco: Word Publishing, 1976-83. Reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999.

Hick, John. *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995.

_____. *God Has Many Names*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980.

Hill, William J. *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation*. Washington, DC: CUA Press, 1982.

Holmes, Stephen R. *Listening to the Past*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

Hunsinger, George. *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

_____. *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Jenson, Robert W. *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002.

_____. *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth*. Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1969.

Jüngel, Eberhard. *God's Being Is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Translated by John Webster. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *Christology: A Global Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003

_____. *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspective*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.

_____. *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions*. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004.

Knitter, Paul F. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

_____. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Kraemer, Hendrik. *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*. London: The Edinburgh House Press, 1938.

_____. *Religion and the Christian Faith*. London: Lutterworth Press, 1956.

Kuiper, Herman. *Calvin on Common Grace*. Grand Rapids: Smitter Book Company, 1928.

Küng, Hans. *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*. Translated by Thomas Collins. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964.

LaCugna, Catherine Mowry. *God for Us: The Trinity and the Christian Life*. San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991.

Letham, Robert. *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2004.

Lewis, John P. *Karl Barth in North America: The Influence of Karl Barth in the Making of the New North American Evangelicalism*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2009.

Livingston, James C. *Modern Christian Thought: The Enlightenment and The Nineteenth Century*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006.

Macken, John. *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and His Critics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Mangina, Joseph L. *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004.

_____. *Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God*. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

Marshall, Bruce. *Christology in Conflict: The Identity of a Saviour in Rahner and Barth*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Marshall, Molly T. *Joining the Dance: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003.

Masselink, William. *General Revelation and Common Grace: A Defense of the Historic Reformed Faith*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953.

McCormack, Bruce L. *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.

_____. *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008.

McDermott, Gerald R. *Can Evangelicals Learn From World Religions? Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000.

McGrath, Alister E. *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification.* 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

_____. *The Open Secret: A New Vision for Natural Theology.* Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

McKim, Donald K., ed. *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986.

Metzger, Paul Louis. *The Word of Christ and the World of Culture: Sacred and Secular through the Theology of Karl Barth.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003.

Migliore, Daniel L. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology.* 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Molnar, Paul D. *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology.* London: T. & T. Clark, 2002.

_____. *Karl Barth and the Theology of the Lord's Supper: A Systematic Investigation.* New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

Morgan, Christopher W., and Robert A. Peterson, eds. *Faith Comes by Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Mouw, Richard J. *He Shines in All That's Fair: Culture and Common Grace.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Mueller, David L. *Karl Barth.* Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1972.

Netland, Harold. *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

_____. *Encountering Religious Pluralism: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission.* Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001.

Newbigin, Lesslie. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989.

Palma, Robert J. *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture: The Freedom of Culture for the Praise of God.* Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1983.

Pangritz, Andreas. *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.* Translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.

Panikkar, Raimundo. *The Trinity and Religious Experience of Man.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973.

Parker, T. H. L. *Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970.

Pinnock, Clark H. *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

_____. *The Scripture Principle*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984.

_____. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992.

Powell, Samuel M. *The Trinity in German Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Pugh, Jeffrey C. *The Anselmic Shift: Christology and Method in Karl Barth's Theology*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by William V. Dych. New York: The Seabury Press, 1978.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 6, *Concerning Vatican Council II*. Translated by Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1969.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 12, *Confrontations 2*. Translated by David Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1974.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 14, *Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, The Church in the World*. Translated by David Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 16, *Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*. Translated by David Morland. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 18, *God and Revelation*. Translated by Edward Quinn. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 1, *God, Christ, Mary and Grace*. Translated by Cornelius Ernst. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1961.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, *Later Writings*. Translated by Karl-H. Kruger. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 4, *More Recent Writings*. Translated by Kevin Smyth. Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966.

_____. *Theological Investigations*, vol. 13, *Theology, Anthropology, Christology*. Translated by David Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975.

_____. *The Trinity*. Translated by Joseph Donceel. Reprint, New York: Crossroad Herder, 2002.

Richardson, Don. *Eternity in Their Hearts*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1984.

Richardson, Kurt Anders. *Reading Karl Barth: New Directions for North American Theology*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.

Rodin, R. Scott. *Evil and Theodicy in the Theology of Karl Barth*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.

Rosato, Philip J. *The Spirit as Lord: The Pneumatology of Karl Barth*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981.

Sanders, Fred. *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

Sanders, John. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*. Translated by H. R. Macintosh and J. S. Stewart. Reprint, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.

_____. *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*. Translated by John Oman. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994.

Scott, Waldron. *Karl Barth's Theology of Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978.

Stackhouse, John G., Jr., ed. *No Other Gods before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001.

Sumner, George R. *The First and the Last: The Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Tiessen, Terrance. *Irenaeus and the Salvation of the Unevangelized*. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1993.

_____. *Who Can Be Saved? Reassessing Salvation in Christ and World Religions*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

Thompson, John. *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

_____. *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991.

_____. *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Thorne, Phillip R. *Evangelicalism and Karl Barth: His Reception and Influence in North American Theology*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1995.

Torrance, Thomas F. *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000.

_____. *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1990.

Van der Kooi, Cornelis. *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: A Diptych*. Translated by Donald Mader. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2005.

Van Til, Cornelius. *Christianity and Barthianism*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1962.

_____. *The New Modernism: An Appraisal of the Theology of Barth and Brunner*. Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1946.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.

Veenhof, Jan. *Nature and Grace in Herman Bavinck*. Translated by Albert M. Wolters. Sioux City, IA: Dordt Press, 2006.

Waldrop, Charles T. *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character*. New York: Mouton, 1984.

Ware, Bruce A. *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005.

Webster, John. *Barth*. London: Continuum, 2000.

_____. *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

_____. *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

Wiebie, Phillip H. *Visions of Jesus: Direct Encounters From the New Testament to Today*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Williams, Rowan. *On Christian Theology*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Wisnefske, Ned. *Our Natural Knowledge of God: A Prospect for Natural Theology after Kant and Barth*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990.

Wyatt, Peter. *Jesus Christ and Creation in the Theology of John Calvin*. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1996.

Yocum, John. *Ecclesial Mediation in Karl Barth.* Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004.

Yong, Amos. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions.* Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.

_____. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology.* Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2005.

Articles and Essays

Anderson, Ray S. "Barth and New Direction for Natural Theology." In *Theology beyond Christendom*, ed. John Thompson, 241-66. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986.

Avis, Paul. "Karl Barth: The Reluctant Virtuoso." *Theology* 86 (May 1983): 164-71.

Badcock, Gary. "Karl Rahner, the Trinity, and Religious Pluralism." In *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 143-54. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Ballor, Jordan J. "The Aryan Clause, the Confessing Church, and the Ecumenical Movement: Barth and Bonhoeffer on Natural Theology, 1933-1935." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59, no. 3 (2006): 263-80.

Barth, Karl. "The Barmen Declaration." In *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green, 148-51. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

_____. "Jesus Christ and the Social Movement." In *Karl Barth and Radical Politics*, ed. George Hunsinger, 19-37. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976.

Bavinck, Herman. "Calvin and Common Grace." In *Calvin and the Reformation*, ed. William Park Armstrong, 99-130. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.

_____. "Common Grace." Translated by Raymond Van Leeuwen. *Calvin Theological Journal* 24, no. 1 (1989): 35-65.

Benner, Drayton C. "Augustine and Karl Rahner on the Relationship between the Immanent and Economic Trinity." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 1 (2007): 24-38.

Bettis, Joseph D. "Is Karl Barth a Universalist?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (1967): 422-36.

_____. "Theology in the Public Debate: Barth's rejection of Natural Theology and the Hermeneutical Problem." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (December 1969): 385-403.

Blocher, Henri. "Karl Barth's Christocentric Method." In *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange, 21-54. Nottingham, UK: Apollos Press, 2008.

Bromiley, Geoffrey W. "Karl Barth." In *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, 27-62. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966.

Brown, Robert F. "On God's Ontic and Noetic Absoluteness: A Critique of Barth." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33, no. 6 (1980): 533-49.

Brunner, Emil. "The New Barth: Observations on Karl Barth's Doctrine of Man." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 4, no. 2 (1951): 123-35.

Chung, Paul. "Karl Barth and Inter-Religious Dialogue: An Attempt to Bring Karl Barth to Dialogue with Religious Pluralism." *Asia Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (2001): 232-46.

Chung, Sung Wook. "A Bold Innovator: Barth on God and Election." In *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung, 60-76. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

_____. "Karl Barth's Evangelical Principles: Reformation Legacy." In *Alister E. McGrath and Evangelical Theology: A Dynamic Engagement*, ed. Sung Wook Chung, 195-212. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. "Preface." In *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung, ixx-xx. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Colwell, John. "The Contemporaneity of the Divine Decision: Reflections on Barth's Denial of 'Universalism.'" In *Univeralism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, 139-60. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992.

Crawford, Robert G. "Theological Method of Karl Barth." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 25 (August 1972): 320-36.

Crisp, Oliver. "On Barth's Denial of Universalism." *Themelios* 29, no. 1 (2003): 18-29.

DiNoia, Joseph A. "Implicit Faith, General Revelation and the State of Non-Christians." *The Thomist* 47 (1983): 115-34.

_____. "Religion and the Religions." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, 243-57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Fergusson, David. "Will the Love of God Finally Triumph?" In *Nothing Greater, Nothing Better: Theological Essays on the Love of God*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 186-202. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001.

Fiorenza, Francis Schüssler. "Schleiermacher's Understanding of God as Triune." In *The Cambridge Companion to Friedrich Schleiermacher*, ed. Jacqueline Marina, 171-88. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Fletcher, Jeannine Hill. "Rahner and Religious Diversity." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*, ed. Declan Marmion and Mary E. Hines, 235-48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Gaffin, Richard B. "Old Amsterdam and Inerrancy." *Westminster Theological Journal* 45, no. 2 (1983): 219-72.

Gibson, David. "The Day of God's Mercy: Romans 9-11 in Barth's Doctrine of Election." In *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange, 136-67. Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2008.

Gorringe, Timothy. "Culture and Barbarism: Barth amongst the Students of Culture." In *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John C. McDowell and Mike Higton, 40-52. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004.

Green, Garrett. "Challenging the Religious Studies Canon: Karl Barth's Theory of Religion." *The Journal of Religion* 75, no. 4 (1995): 473-86.

Gunton, Colin. "The Trinity, Natural Theology, and a Theology of Nature." In *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 88-103. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

Hamilton, James M., Jr. "Who Can Be Saved? A Review Article." *Trinity Journal* 28, n.s., no. 1 (2007): 89-112.

Harrison, Peter. "Karl Barth and the Nonchristian Religions." *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 23, no. 2 (1986): 207-24

Hart, John W. "The Barth-Brunner Correspondence." In *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, ed. George Hunsinger, 19-43. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004.

Hart, Trevor. "Revelation." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, 37-56. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Helm, Paul. "No Easy Task: John R. Franke and the Character of Theology." In *Reforming and Conforming: Post-Conservative and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, 93-111. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008.

Heron, Alasdair I. C. "The Theme of Salvation in Karl Barth's Doctrine of Reconciliation." *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989): 107-22.

Holder, Rodney. "Karl Barth and the Legitimacy of Natural Theology." *Themelios* 26, no. 3 (2001): 22-37.

Husbands, Mark. "The Trinity Is *Not* Our Social Program: Volf, Gregory of Nyssa and Barth." In *Trinitarian Theology for the Church: Scripture, Community, Worship*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and David Lauber, 120-41. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Jenson, Robert W. "Religious Pluralism, Christology, and Barth." *Dialog* 20 (Winter 1981): 31-38.

_____. "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went." *Pro Ecclesia* 28 (1993): 296-304

Jersild, Paul. "Natural Theology and the Doctrine of God in Albrecht Ritschl and Karl Barth." *Lutheran Quarterly* 14 (August 1962): 239-57.

Johnson, Keith E. "Divine Transcendence, Religious Pluralism and Barth's Doctrine of God." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 2 (2003): 200-24.

_____. "Does the Doctrine of the Trinity Hold the Key to a Christian Theology of Religions? An Evaluation of Three Recent Proposals." *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 1 (2006): 24-47.

Jowers, Dennis W. "The Reproach of Modalism: A Difficulty for Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 56, no. 2 (2003): 231-46.

Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. "Karl Barth and the Theology of Religions." In *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology: Convergences and Divergences*, ed. Sung Wook Chung, 236-57. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Lai, Pan-chiu. "Barth's Theology of Religion and the Asian Context of Religious Pluralism." *Asia Journal of Theology* 15, no. 2 (2001): 247-67.

Louth, Andrew. "Barth and the Problem of Natural Theology." *Downside Review* 87 (July 1969): 268-77.

McCormack, Bruce L. "The Being of Holy Scripture is in Becoming: Karl Barth in Conversation with American Evangelical Criticism." In *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez and Dennis L. Okholm, 55-75. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

_____. "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, 92-110. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

_____. "Justitia aliena: Karl Barth in Conversation with the Evangelical Doctrine of Imputed Righteousness." In *Justification in Perspective*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack, 177-96. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

_____. "Revelation and History in Transfoundational Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition." *Journal of Religion* 78, no. 1 (January 1998): 18-37.

_____. "The Sum of the Gospel: The Doctrine of Election in the Theologies of Alexander Schweizer and Karl Barth." In *Toward the Future of Reformed Theology: Tasks, Topics, Traditions*, ed. David Willis and Michael Welker, 470-93. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

_____. "What has Basel to do with Berlin? Continuties in the Theologies of Barth and Schleiermacher." *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 146-73.

McDermott, Gerald R. "What If Paul Had Been from China? Reflections on the Possibility of Revelation in the Non-Christian Religions." In *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., 17-35. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

McGrath, Alister E. "Justification: Barth, Trent, and Küng." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 6 (1981): 517-29.

Merrick, James R. A. "The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong's Pneumatological Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends." *Trinity Journal* 29, n.s., no. 1 (2008): 107-25.

Morrison, John D. "Thomas Torrance's Reformulation of Karl Barth's Christological Rejection of Natural Theology." *Evangelical Quarterly* 73, no. 1 (2001): 59-75.

Molnar, Paul D. "The Function of the Immanent Trinity in the Theology of Karl Barth: Implications for Today." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 42 (1989): 367-99.

_____. "Is God Essentially Different From His Creatures? Rahner's Explanation From Revelation." *The Thomist* 51, no. 4 (1987): 575-631.

_____. "Love of God and Love of Neighbor in the Theology of Karl Rahner and Karl Barth." *Modern Theology* 20, no. 4 (2004): 567-99.

_____. "Some Dogmatic Consequences of Paul F. Knitter's Unitarian Theocentrism." *The Thomist* 55, no. 3 (1991): 449-95.

_____. "The Theology of Justification in Dogmatic Context." In *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. Mark Husbands and Daniel J. Treier, 225-48. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004.

_____. "Toward a Contemporary Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: Karl Barth and the Present Discussion." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 49 (1996): 311-57.

Muller, Richard A. "Barth's *Göttingen Dogmatics (1924-26)*: A Review and Assessment of Volume One." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 56, no. 1 (1994): 115-32.

_____. "Karl Barth and the Path of Theology into the Twentieth Century: Historical Observations." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 51, no. 1 (1989): 25-50.

_____. "The Place and Importance of Karl Barth in the Twentieth Century: A Review Essay." *The Westminster Theological Journal* 50, no. 1 (1988): 127-56.

Netland, Harold. "Natural Theology and Religious Diversity." *Faith and Philosophy* 2, no. 4 (2004): 503-18.

_____. "Religious Exclusivism." In *Philosophy of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Issues*, ed, Paul Copan and Chad Meister, 67-80. Oxford: Blackwell, 2008.

_____. "Theology of Religions, Missiology, and Evangelicals." *Missiology: An International Review* 33, no. 3 (2005): 141-58.

Nichols, Aidan. "Barth's Theology of Revelation." *Downside Review* 113 (January 1995): 20-30.

O'Donovan, Joan E. "Man in the Image of God: The Disagreement Between Barth and Brunner Reconsidered." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986): 433-59.

Parker, T. H. L. "Barth on Revelation." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 13 (December 1960): 366-82.

Partridge, Christopher. "A Hermeneutic of Hopefulness: A Christian Personalist Response to Clark Pinnock's Inclusivism." In *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson, 186-219. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.

Pinnock, Clark H. "The Conditional View." In *Four Views on Hell*, ed. William V. Crockett, 135-66. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

_____. "From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology." In *The Grace of God and the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock, 15-29. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1989.

_____. "God Limits His Knowledge." In *Predestination and Free Will: Four Views of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom*, ed. David Basinger and Randall Basinger, 141-62. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986.

_____. "An Inclusivist View." In *Four Views of Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, 93-123. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.

_____. "The Role of the Spirit in Redemption." *Asbury Theological Journal* 52 (1997): 47-54.

_____. "Systematic Theology." In *The Openness of God*, Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, 101-25. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.

_____. "Toward an Evangelical Theology of Religions." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (1990): 359-68.

Postema, Gerald J. "Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (November 1971): 423-34.

Rogers, Eugene F. "The Eclipse of the Spirit in Karl Barth." In *Conversing with Barth*, ed. John McDowell and Michael Higton, 173-90. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2002.

Sinkinson, Christopher. "In Defence of the Faith: Clark Pinnock and the World Religions." In *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson, 155-83. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.

Smail, Thomas A. "The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit." In *Theology beyond Christendom*, ed. John Thompson, 87-110. Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1986.

Spencer, Archibald J. "The Pluralist and Inclusivist Appeal to General Revelation as a Basis for Inter-Religious Dialogue: A Systematic Theological Investigation." In *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross, 299-321. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003.

Stahl, Steven P. "The Concept of Revelation in the Theology of Karl Barth." *Saint Luke's Journal of Theology* 23 (March 1980): 116-32.

Strange, Daniel. "Presence, Prevenience, Providence?: Deciphering the Conundrum of Pinnock's Pneumatological Inclusivism." In *Reconstructing Theology: A Critical Assessment of the Theology of Clark Pinnock*, ed. Tony Gray and Christopher Sinkinson, 220-58. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.

Taylor, Iain. "In Defence of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity." *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 5, no. 1 (2003): 33-46.

Thiselton, Anthony C. "Barr on Barth and Natural Theology: A Plea for Hermeneutics in Historical Theology." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 47, no. 4 (1994): 519-28.

Thomas, John Newton. "The Place of Natural Theology in the Thought of John Calvin." In *The Organizational Structure of Calvin's Theology*, 147-76. Vol. 7 of *Articles on Calvin and Calvinism: A Fourteen-Volume Anthology of Scholarly Articles*. Edited by Richard C. Gamble. New York: Garland, 1992.

Thomas, Owen Clark. "Barth on the Non-Christian Knowledge of God." *Anglican Theological Review* 46 (July 1964): 261-85.

Thompson, Geoffrey. "Christianity and World Religions: The Judgement of Karl Barth." *Pacifica* 7 (June 1994): 185-206.

Thompson, John. "Barth and Balthasar: An Ecumenical Dialogue." In *The Beauty of Christ: A Introduction to the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*, ed. Bede McGregor and Thomas Norris, 171-92. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994.

Thornberry, Gregory Alan. "Prolegomena: Introduction to the Task of Theology." In *A Theology for the Church*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, 2-70. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007.

Torrance, Alan. "The Trinity." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, 72-91. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God." In *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, 41-71. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.

_____. "A Person of the Book? Barth on Biblical Authority and Interpretation." In *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology*, ed. Sung Wook Chung, 26-59. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006.

Van Til, Cornelius. "Common Grace: Second Article." *Westminster Theological Journal* 8, no. 2 (1946): 166-200.

_____. "Has Karl Barth Become Orthodox?" *Westminster Theological Journal* 16, no. 2 (1954): 135-81.

Veitch, J. A. "Revelation and Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 24 (February 1971): 1-22.

Ware, Bruce A. "How Shall We Think about the Trinity?" In *God under Fire*, ed. Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson, 254-77. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.

Watson, Francis. "The Bible." In *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster, 57-71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Wellum, Stephen J. "Saving Faith: Implicit or Explicit?" In *Faith Comes By Hearing: A Response to Inclusivism*, ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, 142-83. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008.

Williams, Rowan. "Barth on the Triune God." In *Karl Barth: Studies of His Theological Method*, ed. Stephen Sykes, 147-93. Oxford: Clarendon, 1979.

Yong, Amos. "Discerning the Spirit(s) in the World Religions: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions." In *No Other Gods Before Me? Evangelicals and the Challenge of World Religions*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., 37-61. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

_____. "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) 'after' Buddhism." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2004): 191-207.

_____. "A P(new)matological Paradigm for Christian Mission in a Religiously Plural World." *Missiology* 33, no. 2 (2005): 171-91.

_____. "The Spirit Bears Witness: Pneumatology, Truth, and the Religions," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 57, no. 1 (2004): 32-38.

_____. "Whither Theological Inclusivism? The Development and Critique of an Evangelical Theology of Religions." *The Evangelical Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (1999): 327-48.

Dissertations

Anderson, Brian David. "The Locus and Effect of Divine Revelation among Non-Christian Religions: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Winfred Cantwell Smith." Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991.

Cannon, Osgood Darby, III. "The Concept of Religion in the Theology of Karl Barth." Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1975.

Loy, Allan Wesley. "The Theological Interpretation of the Relation of Christianity to Other Religions." Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1963.

Mohler, Richard Albert, Jr. "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models of Response." Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989.

ABSTRACT

THE CONTRIBUTION OF KARL BARTH TOWARD
THE FORMULATION OF AN EVANGELICAL
THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

William Terrell Chandler III, Ph.D.
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010
Chairperson: Dr. Bruce A. Ware

The dissertation focuses on Karl Barth's theology as it relates to present issue in Evangelical thought. Chapter 1 states that an Evangelical theology of religions can affirm and apply particular aspects of Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit that will serve to redefine some present Evangelical approaches to the content of divine revelation.

Chapter 2 surveys the theology of religions models constructed by Karl Rahner, Clark Pinnock, Amos Yong, and Terrance Tiessen. These scholars affirm in some respect that non-Christians need not have explicit knowledge of Jesus Christ and His work in order to appropriate the benefits of redemption.

Chapter 3 examines Barth's trinitarian-oriented doctrine of revelation. For Barth, the doctrine of the Trinity provides the key to genuine divine revelation because revelation's content cannot be separated from its form in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 4 addresses Barth's evaluation of the phenomenon of religion and natural theology. His attack on both concepts as human attempts to fashion God in their own image will be discussed.

Chapter 5 will discuss and analyze the Christ-centered nature of Barth's doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The discussion shows how for Barth the Holy Spirit is the sole mediator of Christ's presence who guides persons into objective knowledge of Christ and equips them for Christian service.

Chapter 6 details Barth's use of secular "parables" of truth in the world in relation to the one Truth—Jesus Christ. The focus is how these "lights" of truth in creation never exist apart from Christ's reconciling work.

Chapter 7 evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of Barth's thought as it relates to thesis of the work. Particular attention is given to Barth's rejection of general revelation and the doctrine of common grace as juxtaposed with the work of Herman Bavinck, whose thought is utilized as a useful alternative to Barth's thought in this area.

Chapter 8 will conclude by briefly addressing Bavinck's position in contrast to Barth. Finally, the work seeks to reaffirm the thesis that use of selective aspects of Barth's thought can serve as an aid to on-going Evangelical efforts to formulate a viable theology of religions.

VITA

William Terrell Chandler III

PERSONAL

Born: November 19, 1960, Campbellsville, Kentucky
Parents: William T., Jr., and Ruthann Chandler

EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Jesse Stuart High School, Louisville, Kentucky, 1978
B.A., Western Kentucky University, 1983
M.Div., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998
Th.M., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000

MINISTERIAL

Minister of Education, Valley Station Baptist Church, Louisville, Kentucky, 1995-2005
Pastor, Rock Haven Baptist Church, Brandenburg, Kentucky, 2005-

ACADEMIC

Research Assistant to the Dean of the School of Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1998-2003
Garrett Fellow, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2000-2005

ORGANIZATIONAL

Evangelical Theological Society
American Academy of Religion
Society for Biblical Literature
Karl Barth Society of North America