

**Université catholique de Louvain**

Faculté de théologie



**KARL BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGY:  
THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ANGLO-SAXON SCHOLARS  
TOWARD ITS RE-DISCOVERY**

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My grandmother **Veronica**, who died on 13 December 2006  
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A popular jingle in CNN has it that, “Going beyond borders can be scary but will be rewarding”. This TV ad can really be adequately applied to the non EU (especially African) students studying in most European universities. Traversing the whole of Africa to come to Europe for studies presents a lot of challenges to the African students. Learning the language, the culture, the food, and the politics of the place are all schools of their own. To combine all these with the rigorous academic life could really be difficult, but at the same time very alerting. I thank God for bringing me to this stage thus far and pray that he will see me through the rest of my programme.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The reception of the theology of Karl Barth in the Anglo-Saxon world was a slow but steady process. No thanks to the accusation of neo-orthodoxy impugned on him, the critical and liberal English audience could not just bring themselves to investigating this stolid and uninspiring German theologian. Richard H. Roberts has articulated the ‘problem’ of the reception of Barth’s theology in the Anglo-Saxon world where he elucidated the origins of that reception by examining its history in Britain and North America. On the basis of that history, he examined the theological assimilation of Barth in the period after the Second World War using a ‘typology’ to represent the range and diversity of the manifestation of Barth’s influence<sup>1</sup>. We shall therefore not border to reinvestigate what has been investigated. We are writing at a period when Barth studies have already been deeply entrenched in the Anglo-Saxon world. The problem confronting us at this period is not therefore that of the acceptance of Barth but rather the interpretation of Barth. Even at that, we cannot claim in a little work such as this, to delve into the problem of the interpretation of the whole of Barth’s theology. Anyone faintly familiar with Barth would know that Barth left behind massive contrapuntal elephantine volumes of works that are just too overwhelming to delve into all at once. We therefore chose to limit ourselves to his Christology.

In choosing his Christology, we are also very conscious that this involves a wide range of topics. Because of this we decided to precisely look into the contributions of the Anglo-Saxon authors towards the re-discovery of Karl Barth’s Christology. Of course this topic elicits immediately some curiosity. The first question that comes to the mind of anyone reading this topic is this: was Karl Barth’s Christology lost? Perhaps it was lost somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic or Pacific Ocean and it needed the ingenuity of the Anglo-Saxon “explorers” to go there and re-discover it. Well, one can say that to some extent this analogy is true if we consider the trend in Barth’s research which Benoît Bourguine says “tends to favour the *Römerbrief* period, undoubtedly because it is the period which has had the greatest historical impact”<sup>2</sup>. With its “Wholly Other” God theology that places God in a diastatic relationship with the world, the *Römerbrief* period poses a serious problem to the study of Christology as it makes the very idea

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<sup>1</sup> For more on this, cf. Richard H. ROBERTS, *The Reception of the Theology of Karl Barth in the Anglo-Saxon World: History, Typology and Prospect*, in Stephen SYKES (ed.), *Karl Barth: Centenary Essays*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 115-171.

<sup>2</sup> Benoît BOURGUINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, in Stuart George HALL (ed.), *Jesus Christ Today. Studies of Christology in Various Contexts. Proceedings of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses, Oxford 25-29 August 2006 and Princeton 25-30 August 2007*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, p. 179-208, p. 180.

of incarnation almost untenable. One can now see that if the trend in Barth's study tends to favour the *Römerbrief* period, then it automatically tends to disfavour the study of Christology. From this perspective, one can see how indeed Barth's Christology was "lost". But it does not mean that it was the Anglo-Saxons alone that helped to "re-discover" it. There are so many other non-Anglo-Saxons whose works have helped shift attention back to Barth's Christology<sup>3</sup>. But we are only concerned here with the contributions of the Anglo-Saxon authors.

Notable Anglo-Saxon authors have devoted a lot of energy to the study of Barth's Christology. Colm O'Grady set off in 1968 to investigate Karl Barth's doctrine of the Church by seeing it in relation to and in dependence on his doctrine on God's eternal Election, on Jesus Christ, and on Justification. Here he traced Barth's ecclesiological doctrine from its initial, apparently negative form, through its development in Barth's emerging theology, to its Christological and Trinitarian flowering<sup>4</sup>. He followed this up a year later by bringing Barth's doctrine of the church in dialogue with the Catholic theology of the Church. Here he contends that the recent ecumenical council can be viewed as an attempt by the Catholic Church to listen to Karl Barth on his demand that the primary emphasis of Christian theology must be on the trinity of divine persons and their role in the salvation of the world; on the divine origin, freedom and gratuitousness of man's justification; on the priority of community over the individual; on the spiritual, functional and charismatic aspect of Christian existence etc. But on his part, he says Barth has not listened to the legitimate questions of Catholic theology such as the reality of human participation in divine life and activity; the special grace bestowed by God on his human mother on the basis of which she exercises a special role in the economy of salvation; that in the individual's justification by God he is empowered and enlivened to cooperate in his own salvation. He concluded by saying that the basic theological reasons underlying the agreements and disagreements in the Catholic and Barth's theologies of the Church are not necessarily ecclesiological but rather lies on their respective doctrines on election, Jesus Christ and justification<sup>5</sup>.

On his own part, David L. Mueller devoted attention to the study of Barth's doctrine of reconciliation with special reference to its foundations in Jesus' cross and resurrection. Here he

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<sup>3</sup> One has to note here that among other non Anglo-Saxon researches, a recent study was devoted entirely to the *Church Dogmatics* IV which is the heart of Barth's Christology. On this cf. Benoît BOURGINE, *L'herméneutique théologique de Karl Barth. Exégèse et dogmatique dans le quatrième volume de la Kirchliche Dogmatik*, (BETL 171) Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Colm O'GRADY *The Church in the Theology of Karl Barth*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1968.

<sup>5</sup> Colm O'GRADY, *The Church in Catholic Theology. Dialogue with Karl Barth*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1969.

wanted to bring to the fore Barth's depiction of God's reconciling activity in Jesus Christ as the centre of Christian faith and doctrine<sup>6</sup>. As a follow-up, John Webster took up the fourth volume of the *Church Dogmatics* by analysing the ethics of reconciliation, an ethics that focuses on Jesus Christ as the particular person in whom the character of reality becomes clearer than when approached more generally or abstractly<sup>7</sup>. Even though he is more interested in the Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth than in his Christology, the comparative study that Colin E. Gunton did between Charles Hartshorne's and Karl Barth's doctrines of God touched greatly on Barth's doctrine of reconciliation<sup>8</sup>.

Much as these and other authors tried as much as possible to re-direct attention to the study of Karl Barth's Christology, they all had one common shortcoming: their Christological studies were either fragmented or taken in detachment from the rest of Barth's theology. While this methodology of detached study could help develop in detail one aspect of Barth's Christology or the other, it takes Christology as just one theme among many others in Barth's theology. This manner of approach will not get to the heart of Barth's theology which is not only fundamentally Christological but essentially Christocentric. Christology should not be taken just as one topic among others but should be situated where it rightly belongs - at the centre of Barth's theology.

Lucky enough, we have found in the works of two Princeton theologians, two systems of reading Barth which (though very different and often times opposing), place Christology at the very centre of Barth in such a way that it will be impossible to read any aspect of Barth's theology in isolation from Christology or to treat Christology as just one chapter among others in Barth. We found in their works the true meaning of Barth's theology being essentially Christocentric. George Hunsinger developed a synchronic methodology of reading Barth by evolving a thought pattern (or motifs as he called them) that characterize how Barth does his theology. According to him, the whole of Barth's theology come under six motifs of *Actualism*, *Particularism*, *Objectivism*, *Personalism*, *Realism* and *Rationalism*. These motifs are in turn inextricably tied to Jesus Christ as their centre. Such a Christological summation of the whole of Barth's theology is something that was lacking in the earlier attempts by Anglo-Saxon authors to

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<sup>6</sup> David L. MUELLER, *Foundation of Karl Barth's Doctrine of Reconciliation. Jesus Christ Crucified and Risen*, (Toronto Studies in Theology vol. 54), New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

<sup>7</sup> John WEBSTER, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

<sup>8</sup> Colin E. GUNTON, *Becoming and Being. The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1978.

refocus attention to the study of Karl Barth's Christology. However, in choosing to approach it through a synchronic methodology without making any reference to historical context, Hunsinger's method becomes deficient as a tool for accurate interpretation of Barth.

Hunsinger's colleague, Bruce McCormack, tried another system of reading Barth that is diachronic. He did not evolve any static motifs but rather went on an intellectual biography of Karl Barth that shows that a Christological concentration which proceeded progressively marked the evolution of his theology. The diachronic method has the advantage of being capable of "critically correcting" the earlier Barth in the light of the latter Barth. In other words, it is capable of making Barth studies always alive and active. This is where it has an edge over a synchronic method that makes Barth an already finished product, almost incapable of any adjustment. By opting not to follow the usual trend in Barth's study of just treating one aspect of Barth's Christology or the other but rather to Christologically summate the entire theology of Barth, we found in Hunsinger and McCormack worthy case studies of how Anglo-Saxon authors have contributed to the re-discovery of Barth's Christology.

But we should state at the onset that what we are set to do is not a comparative study of Hunsinger and McCormack. We are only interested in seeing how two different methodologies could lead to divergent interpretations of the same subject matter. In fact it was such opposing interpretations of Hunsinger and McCormack about the relation of the trinity and election in Barth's theology that has generated a very heated but lively debate that has kept Barth's Christology alive and interesting.

Our work is divided into three chapters. In chapter one, we tried to bring out the problematics of the study of Christology in Karl Barth's *Der Römerbrief* period. We employed a diachronic method to discover that Barth was reacting against Protestant Liberalism as represented notably by Friedrich Schleiermacher who in a bid to salvage something of religion from the devastating critique of Kant and the Enlightenment period, grounded religion in human feeling and made God immediately perceivable to human senses. His theology precludes any Christological mediation in the knowledge of God. Christ for him is only quantitatively (because he has more God-consciousness in him) but not qualitatively different from the rest of humanity. Barth reacted angrily by removing God totally from the world and placing him in such a diastatic relation to the world that incarnation becomes absurd. Such a "180 degrees" change of course against Protestant Liberalism became an "Achilles' heel" in the study of Christology. No wonder

earlier attempts like that made by Charles Waldrop to characterize Barth's Christology makes it Alexandrian. But thanks to Hunsinger's invention of a "dialectical strategy of juxtaposition" to explain how Barth oscillates between two idioms, scholars have now agreed with him that Barth's Christology is fundamentally Chalcedonian.

In chapter two, we entered properly into investigating how the recent Anglo-Saxon researches have helped in the re-discovery of Karl Barth's Christology. Here as we said earlier, we narrowed our searchlight to Hunsinger and McCormack for the reason we stated above. We shall see here that in synthesizing Barth's theology, Hunsinger employed a synchronic methodology that eventually channelled the whole of Barth's theology to Christology in such a way that it would become impossible to read any aspect of his theology in isolation from Christology. However, the shortcomings of such a synchronic approach will not be immediately perceived until the great debate begins in chapter three. On his part, McCormack did what he knows how to do best by employing a diachronic methodology to run through an intellectual biography of Barth. Such a methodology permitted him to make two outstanding "revolutions": 1. Hans Urs von Balthasar was systematically "retired" as an unquestionable authority in the periodization of Barth's theological development. In place of the Balthasarian "turn from dialectics to analogy" which started with the Anselm book as marking Barth's second "rebirth", McCormack says there was no such second "conversion" but that it was rather a progressive Christological concentration that marked the evolution of Barth's theology. 2. Since there is less to the Anselm book than claimed by Balthasar, and since there is no new starting point in it, Barthian "christocentrism" finds its origin in his modification of the doctrine of election occasioned by the insight he got from Pierre Maury in 1936. Such a modified doctrine makes Jesus Christ both the object and the Subject of election. But this has telling implication to the doctrine of the trinity.

Our chapter three tackles such implication, and this is where the debate begins. McCormack, in registering a "critical correction" of Barth, and in "smoothening" his doctrine of God in the light of his revised doctrine of election, proposes that God's pre-temporal decision of election precedes the Trinity. In fact, he dares to say that such a pre-temporal decision of election actually gave rise to the Trinity. His proposition sounded like throwing a bombshell at the play ground of theologians who were accustomed to taking for granted that the Trinity precedes the election; after all this has been the traditional Trinitarian theology and ought to be maintained.

Hunsinger leads the pack of such “traditionalists” who insist on the maintenance of the status quo, and on liberating Barth from the shackles of the “revisionists” and returning him back to tradition.

In the end however, we discovered that McCormack was closer to Barth in his interpretation of the relation of the trinity to God’s gracious election in Barth’s theology. However, we also reasoned with Hunsinger and saw that he was closer to tradition. We could not just go ahead with McCormack to maintain that election should logically precede God’s Trinitarian being, much less, should give rise to it. Our conclusion is that in order to really understand Barth, a McCormackian diachronic methodology is far better than a Hunsingerian synchronic methodology. But one needs not follow Barth sheepishly. One needs to move beyond Barth and McCormack and find out the reasonableness of their positions.

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1. THE PROBLEMATICS OF THE STUDY OF CHRISTOLOGY IN KARL BARTH'S EARLIER WRITINGS

#### 1.1. Introduction

In this chapter we are going to trace the remote and immediate factors that led Barth to the idea of the absolute transcendence of God. We are going to examine the challenges posed by the Enlightenment, and especially how Kant dealt a deadly blow on religion through his critique of pure reason. It was in an attempt to salvage something of religion from Kant that Schleiermacher sought to search for the origins of religion in human feelings. His theology of religious experience which gave birth to Protestant Liberalism exerted so much influence on modern theologians that liberal theology came to be taken so to say as 'the theology'; well, not until Barth who himself was a product of such theology, fell out with it and attacked it so vehemently that he went from the extreme of absolute immanence of that type of theology to the other extreme of absolute transcendence. With his postulation of God as the 'Wholly Other', the 'unknowable', it became therefore very problematic to come to terms with the idea of incarnation. Though he was to retract his stance latter, but not until he had been accused of Nestorianism and Docetism. Even in recent Barthian scholarship, those who read him through the prism of his earlier works (notably *Der Römerbrief*), still characterize him as Alexandrian, as we shall see in the case of Charles Waldrop. But despite such misreading of Barth, George Hunsinger, in agreement with notable Barthian scholars maintain that Barth is about one of the most Chalcedonian theologian as far as Christology is concerned.

#### 1.2. The Enlightenment challenge and attempted response

The Enlightenment was an eighteenth century movement whose aim was the elevation of reason above authority. It could be described as a movement of liberation which sought, "to liberate science from the control of religion"<sup>9</sup>. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) remains the central and the most influential figure of that period. Neil B. MacDonald asserted that, "Kant's legacy was constituted by the separation of substantive reason, hitherto expressed in religion and metaphysics, into the three autonomous spheres of science, morality and art. Each sphere had its

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<sup>9</sup> Kelly James CLARK, Richard LINTS, and James K. A. SMITH (ed.), *Enlightenment, in 101 Key Terms in Philosophy and their Importance for Theology*, Louisville, London, Westminster John Knox, 2004, p.18-19, p. 18.

own respective criterion: truth, normative rightness and authenticity or beauty”<sup>10</sup>. Kant would go ahead to describe his approach as a ‘Copernican Revolution’ in philosophy. Just as Copernicus reversed the age-long belief that the sun moved round the earth and posited the contrary that it was rather the earth that moves round the sun, so Kant posited and revolutionized the idea that the world as perceived depends on the qualities of, and the categories in, the perceiver’s mind thereby reversing the age- long held view that things exist independently of the perceiver. Instead therefore of being taken as passive recipients of information about the world, he argues that we rather impose certain innate or *a priori* categories on all our experience through the ‘spectacles’ we wear that colour such experiences. In fact for him, if we removed those ‘spectacles’, we would not be able to experience anything at all.

Distinguishing between the world of appearance (the *phenomena* as he called it) and the world as it is (things-in-themselves, or the *noumena* as he called it), Kant drove a wedge between the two worlds, arguing in the words of Alan Padgett that, “humans can know nothing about the noumena except for their bare reality”<sup>11</sup>. This is to say that there is no completely objective knowledge of ‘things-in-themselves’ that is, totally independent of the activity of the knowing mind. He thus rejected the knowledge of God, immortality and human freedom by pure or theoretical reason (since reason was limited to this finite world), but rather took them as postulates of morality which existence must be assumed for there to be a good ethical system and for the fulfilment of our moral duty. In other words, God, immortality and human freedom are necessary postulates for a practical reason. In positing the impossibility of the knowledge of God through pure or theoretical reason, Kant claimed to have done away with knowledge in order to make room for faith. This Kantian claim is a dismissal of natural theology as an illusion. Thus God, for him, is not a matter of knowledge but of faith. His objective reality can neither be proved nor disproved by speculative reasoning. He can at most be apprehended in the moral order which is the only place where He can operate.

This Kantian challenge of limiting theoretical knowledge to the intuitable, made the knowledge of God very problematic to modern theologians. The dilemma as McCormack puts it is this: “if God is a transcendent, wholly spiritual being as the Christian tradition maintained, then

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<sup>10</sup> Neil B. MACDONALD, *Enlightenment*, in Trevor A. HART (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, Michigan, William B. Eerdmans, 2000, p. 175-183, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Alan G. PADGETT, *Kant, Immanuel (1724-1804)*, in Trevor A. HART (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology* p. 296-297, p. 296.

God is unintuitable and – if Kant’s restriction holds – cannot be known”<sup>12</sup>. It was precisely because of the inability of traditional metaphysics to provide solution to this dilemma that made Kant to reduce God to a merely moral regulative idea lacking in content.

However, in opposition to this Enlightenment tendency to rationalism and abstraction, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) posited ‘feeling’ as the means of apprehending God. Feeling as he described it is not a faculty that moves towards something that lies outside of it in the manner of knowing and doing. It is distinguished from knowing and doing in the sense that it takes place in the subject. In other words, “feeling... belongs wholly to the realm of receptivity” and its source belongs “not to the series of ‘objects’ known and acted on by the human subject but is to be fundamentally distinguished from them”<sup>13</sup>. In his very first book *‘On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers’*, Schleiermacher wrote:

“If you have only given attention to these dogmas and opinions..., you do not yet know religion itself, and what you despise is not it. Why have you not penetrated deeper to find the kernel of this shell? ... Why do you not regard the religious life itself, and first those pious exaltations of the mind in which all other known activities are set aside or almost suppressed, and the whole soul is dissolved in the immediate feeling of the Infinite and Eternal? In such moments the disposition you pretend to despise reveals itself in primordial and visible form. He only who has studied and truly known man in these emotions can rediscover religion in those outward manifestations”<sup>14</sup>.

With these words, Schleiermacher announced his intention of searching for the origins of religion in the human feeling. To the cultured despisers of religion he counselled: “I ask, therefore, that you turn from everything usually reckoned religion, and fix your regard on the inward emotions and dispositions”<sup>15</sup>. This is an outright rejection of the Enlightenment form of theology in its supernaturalistic form. In seeking for the essence of religion he contends that one must not look to metaphysics nor to morality as Kant believed, but rather to something that encompasses both of them- the human feeling and emotion. He was thus advocating for a turn to the subject. Kant, he believed, reduced human beings to calculating machines. But for him

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<sup>12</sup> Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth’s Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition*, in *Journal of Religion*, 78,1 (Jan. 1998), p. 18-37, p. 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *On Religion. Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, reproduced in Keith CLEMENTS, *Friedrich Schleiermacher. Pioneer of Modern Theology*, London, Collins, 1987, p. 72.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

(Schleiermacher) on the contrary, human feelings should be the being of humanity, that is, to be a human being is to feel, and that is to be religious. In what could be termed as his *magnum opus*, ‘*The Christian Faith*’, these ‘pious emotions’ would be defined precisely as the feeling of absolute dependence: “The common element in all howsoever diverse expressions of piety, by which these are conjointly distinguished from all other feelings, or, in other words, the self-identical essence of piety, is this: the consciousness of being absolutely dependent, or, which is the same thing, of being in relation with God”<sup>16</sup>. This constant consciousness in man of his absolute dependence gives rise to religion, and that for him is true piety. When we know that we depend on something that doesn’t depend on us, in other words, when we totally give our being in the knowledge that we don’t have the principle of existence in ourselves but rather depend on something else, that is true piety and that is religion. As Jeffrey C. Pugh puts it, Schleiermacher’s fundamental contention is that, “religion arises from the felt awareness of our dependence upon the source and unity of all things, and therefore includes our sense of unity with all that is real”<sup>17</sup>.

We have to note here that Schleiermacher was not just making God a postulate by positing a feeling of absolute dependence as relation to God. He argues that such intuition must contain ontological necessity otherwise it becomes a lie and life loses meaning. But being a theologian of emotion, he focused on experience and made mankind, centred on religious experience, the subject matter of his theology. He says that we cannot talk about God directly but only indirectly through experience. The Bible and the Christian theology, according to him, are nothing but the discourse or the description of human experiences, and, human beings can only progress toward divinity by being more and more God-conscious. In fact, he went as far as saying that it was the constant God-consciousness in Jesus that amounted to the presence of God in him otherwise he was just like all other human beings. He wrote in ‘*The Christian Faith*’: “The redeemer, then, is like all men in virtue of the identity of human nature, but distinguished from them all by the constant potency of his God-consciousness, which was a veritable existence of God in him”<sup>18</sup>. Jesus for him therefore is uniquely the one in whom God dwells, and sin is the absence of God-consciousness.

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<sup>16</sup> Friedrich SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith*, reproduced in K. CLEMENTS, *Friedrich Schleiermacher. Pioneer of Modern Theology*, p. 99.

<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey C. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift. Christology and Method in Karl Barth’s Theology*, New York, Peter Lang, 1990, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> F. SCHLEIERMACHER, *The Christian Faith*, p. 217.

In the years that followed however, it is interesting to see how Barth viewed this total identification of Christ with the rest of humanity, only that one is more God-conscious than the other. Barth was concerned about what to make of a Christology that sees Christ as just being quantitatively rather than qualitatively different from the rest of humanity. He was asking how sinless human development is possible simply based on the premise that there was sinless perfection of the Redeemer. These are some of the issues that very much troubled Barth and would latter form the basis for his attack on Schleiermacher and his Protestant Liberal theological school.

### **1.3. The impact of Marburg neo-Kantianism on Karl Barth**

Karl Barth was born in Basle Switzerland, on 10 May, 1886, but he spent his growing-up years in Bern<sup>19</sup> which was not theologically vibrant at that period. This made him to tow the part of most Swiss theological students by opting to continue his studies in Germany after he completed his first four semesters of theological studies in Bern. His preferred port of call was Marburg, but his father, Friedrich (or simply Fritz as he was called), himself a professor of Early and Medieval Church History in the University of Bern, opposed the idea because of the influence of Ritschlian movement reigning there. He preferred rather that his son went to Halle or Greifswald known then as the centres of conservative theology in Germany. A compromise between him and his son Barth was however reached after much dragging which finally took the young Barth rather to Berlin where he came under the influence of Adolf von Harnack under whom he studied Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure reason*, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*, and Wilhelm Herrmann's *Ethics*<sup>20</sup>. The impact of these authors on him made him all the more to desire desperately to go to Marburg. Finally his father yielded and gave his permission. As McCormack said, "it was there that he finally found his home"<sup>21</sup>. It was here that he came in contact with Herrmann and Martin Rade. The latter was both a professor of theology and the editor of *Die Christliche Welt*, a very influential theological journal in Germany. The young Barth made such impression on Rade that he was chosen to be the editorial assistant of *Die Christliche Welt*.

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<sup>19</sup> Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology. Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995, p. 36.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

In Marburg, Barth made acquaintances with Eduard Thurneysen and Rudolf Bultmann. The theological atmosphere in German universities was “polluted” by Ritschlianism with its emphasis on historical enquiry. Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) was a church historian and a historian of dogma for whom, “religion works primarily not in the realm of feeling, but in the realm of the will”<sup>22</sup> thus challenging Schleiermacher’s theory of religion. He rejected natural theology in all its forms. He also did not accept the notion that in order to do its work properly, theology needs a metaphysical mooring. For him the sole starting point in theology is the revelation of God in the historical person of Jesus Christ. In other words, it is a historical critical foundation that theology needs.

Ritschl influenced such scholars as Wilhelm Herrmann, Adolf von Harnack and Martin Rade among others. Ernst Troeltsch, a one time student of Ritschl, was the one who radicalised (and in doing so, split) Ritschlianism. He was convinced that historical- critical foundation in theology when carried through with radical consistency, would inevitably lead to the abandonment of dogmatic assumption which has been the bedrock of Ritschlian School. This was exactly what he did by focusing on the scientifically oriented history of religions. This split between the older and younger Ritschlians had a telling effect on *Die Christliche Welt* as its editor Rade opened its doors to the Troeltchian School of history of religions who were composed of young radicals. Because of this, the founding fathers of the journal withdrew their support and the journal was never to be the same again so much so that according to McCormack, “what had been a journal promoting the views of classical Ritschlianism became, by the turn of the century, a journal whose editorial policy was oriented in the direction of liberalism”<sup>23</sup>. McCormack noted that by the time Karl Barth studied in Marburg, Wilhelm Herrmann seemed to be the only viable alternative for combating Troeltsch<sup>24</sup>.

In Marburg, the neo-Kantian philosophical school of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp was in constant conversation with theology, and had great influence on Wilhelm Herrmann and by extension, Karl Barth. Cohen and Natorp criticized Kant’s postulation of *noumena* as a pre-critical ontology, arguing that a sufficiently critical thought would at once realize that there is no thing-in-itself as Kant postulated, but that everything that is said to be given to the thought is a creation of thought itself. Thus, human thinking is the only root of our knowledge and, sensation

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<sup>22</sup> Matthias WOLFES, *Ritschl, Albrecht (1822-89)*, in Trevor A. HART (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, p. 493-497, p. 494.

<sup>23</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 41.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

contributes nothing. This, according to them, is “pure reason”. Every being for them has its origin in thought. They recognized only three valid patterns of cognition that can be known scientifically: logic, ethics and aesthetics, representing what is, what ought to be, and beauty, respectively. This reduction of knowledge only to these three branches seems to leave no room for God. There arose then the problem of where to place religion. Being a religious humanist, Cohen decided to locate religion in one of those three acknowledged forms of knowledge, ethics to be precise. But Natorp on the other hand arrived at the conclusion that religion is incapable of generating an object since religion is non-cognitive, and therefore, that there is no God. However, even though Cohen, unlike Natorp, posited the existence of God, he stripped him of any content by equating him to a mathematical concept zero which in the words of McCormack is, “a very important place-holder in the system but completely without content, featureless and colourless”<sup>25</sup>.

Wilhelm Herrmann (1846-1922) was mostly attracted to Ritschl because of the latter’s insistence that religion should be independent from the natural sciences and philosophy. He committed himself deeply to Ritschl especially as he discovered in him a call of theology back from the subjective turn it had taken since Schleiermacher’s theology of emotion and feeling. He also learnt from him that theology should not be rationalistically speculative as it was gradually becoming since the time of Hegel. He rather based his theology on objectively historical facts through a critical study of the Bible. Herrmann followed in the footsteps of Ritschl in the historical-critical method and maintained that faith and knowledge should not be submerged as one but should be distinguished from each other. He sought to purge theology of every metaphysical trace. For him, metaphysics in theology is a circumvention of revelation. Knowledge of God must be a different kind of knowledge from knowledge of the natural world. This is obviously a response to Kant’s epistemology which sought to mix up the two. According to Mark Chapman, “Herrmann... sought a certainty which could never be achieved by science. Whereas science was directed towards a provable (*nachweisbar*) reality, religion was directly experienced (*erlebbar*) in the individual”<sup>26</sup>.

At this point, Herrmann was also struggling with the question of the relation of faith to history and found answer in what is described as “a very strict concentration on the inner life of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 48-49.

<sup>26</sup> Mark D. CHAPMAN, *Herrmann, Wilhelm (1846-1922)*, in T. HART (ed.), *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, p. 246-247, p. 247.

Jesus”<sup>27</sup>. This means that rather than ground theology historically by means of historical enquiry through placing the highest value on the life and teachings of Jesus as Ritschl and some of his followers preferred, Herrmann believed that the historical fact upon which theology is grounded is the inner life of Jesus, the experience of being in communion with God. He believed that, “all personal doubts are overcome in the appropriation of a revelation which is gained neither from the Bible nor from the church but solely from a direct ‘experience’ (*Erlebnis*) of Christ”<sup>28</sup>. Herrmann was to relegate Ritschl to the background when his relationship with the latter became frosty, and with it also, Christology faded into the background in favour of Schleiermacher and the condition for the possibility of religion.

The point we are making here is that the Herrmann that influenced Barth was not the Ritschlian Herrmann but the Schleiermacherian Herrmann; a Herrmann whose central theological theme was ‘the way to religion’; a Herrmann that repudiated science as having no access to God, who was very suspicious of natural theology and who maintained that, “we can only come to God because He has come to us in history”<sup>29</sup>. He located the origin of religion in the heart of the individual arguing, like Schleiermacher, against the reduction of religion to universally valid propositions. For him, even though the reality of God cannot be proved, still it is possible for every person to experience Him. This immediate experience of God in the individual is made possible by the historical reality of the life of Jesus. He contends that, “it is by virtue of the life of Jesus that our certainty of God is grounded”<sup>30</sup>. Thus we see him trying to strike a balance between Schleiermacher’s immediacy position and a strong Christocentric concentration. This, as we shall see, was one of the strong factors that led Barth to be disillusioned with the Liberal Protestantism.

But it is necessary at this point to call attention to the often one-sided presentation of the influence of Herrmann on Barth, as has been the trend in most theological researches (including that of McCormack). Scholars have often presented Herrmann as a typical liberal theologian whose brand of liberalism initiated Barth into his initial love affair with Protestant Liberalism before he abandoned liberalism in favour of a dialectical theology that shaped his thought thereafter. But against this popular one-sided presentation of Herrmann as a thorough-going liberal theologian, Christophe Chalamet argues that Herrmann’s theology is in fact thoroughly

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<sup>27</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 51

<sup>28</sup> M. CHAPMAN, *Herrmann, Wilhelm*, p. 247.

<sup>29</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> J. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift*, p.16.

dialectical. According to him, “to portray Herrmann’s theology as ‘liberal’ does not do justice to Herrmann. His thought certainly contains liberal tendencies, but it is by no means sufficient to label it as ‘liberal’”<sup>31</sup>. He argues that the dialectical theology, with which Barth was to be eventually associated, was a precious inheritance he got from Herrmann. He sees Herrmann’s theology as a decisive key to the understanding of the presence of dialectics in both Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth (the two greatest students of Herrmann). He contends that Bultmann’s programme of demythologizing is a direct prolongation of Herrmann’s theological intent; and that even when he had distanced himself from Herrmann, Barth continued to work with the two sides of Herrmann’s theology namely, the positive side (the Gospel) and the critical side (the Law), only that Barth dramatically changed the way of dealing with the two sides by reversing the order<sup>32</sup>. Bultmann’s disagreement with Barth stems from the fact that he preferred sticking with Herrmann’s order instead of following Barth in his new way of understanding the relationship between these two aspects. But the fact, according to Chalamet, is that it is in Herrmann rather than in Kierkegaard or Hegel, that one can find the root of the dialectical character of Barth and Bultmann. It was he who taught both how to maintain the tension between Law and Gospel, veiling and unveiling, judgement and grace, cross and resurrection, no and yes, God’s absolute and personal being, and how to speak of God hidden in his revelation. To this extent therefore, Barth and Bultmann could be said to have “spoken the same language”. But while Bultmann “remained strongly influenced by Herrmann and his way of understanding the dialectic of the Law and the Gospel, against all objectifications and distortions of faith as mere intellectual assent”, Barth, in a typically Reformed fashion, was led “toward a profound desire to preserve God’s glory against any kind of confusion between the realm of God and the realm of the world”<sup>33</sup>. But even at that, Chalamet insists that it was Herrmann who “provided the initial impetus which led Barth to become – and always remain – sensitive to the danger of confusing God with the world”<sup>34</sup>.

It was Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) however, who gave Barth his deep Christocentric heritage. In his quest to discover the kernel or essence of Christianity, a quest which saw him comparing Socrates and Jesus Christ but placing Jesus on a higher pedestal, he came to the

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<sup>31</sup> Christophe CHALAMET, *Dialectical Theologians. Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann*, Zürich, Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2005, p. 12.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

conclusion that the gospel is that essence. He argued that, “that only is Christian which can be established authoritatively by the Gospel”<sup>35</sup>. While acknowledging that there had always been changing phases of historical Christianity, he insisted that there is always something permanent and valid of all time. This something permanent cannot be located in the dogmas of the church nor in the formulas of the Biblical writers, but rather must be sought for in the founder of Christianity himself as presented in the gospels. Therefore it is in the person and teaching of Jesus Christ that religion can be shown by a historian and not in dogmas which he called a “deification of tradition”<sup>36</sup>. Without the appearance of the historical Jesus, the Christological confessions of the primitive church in forms of dogma would not have any starting- point. His primary concern therefore was to re-direct the Church back to its foundation in Jesus Christ and de-emphasis the place of dogma as a condition for true faith. And he did so by distinguishing between the gospel of Jesus and the gospel about Jesus, or the ‘first Gospel’ and the ‘second Gospel’ respectively as he preferred to label it, claiming that “the first is an authentic movement of God in history, but the other involves questions concerning dogmatic and metaphysical statements which embody a counterfeit gospel”<sup>37</sup>.

So severe was his attack on what he called ‘the metaphysical thought’ of the early church’s Christology, a thought that he believed completely derailed the church of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Christine Axt-Piscalar quoted him as saying that “the whole structure of Church Christology stands quite outside the concrete personality of Jesus Christ”<sup>38</sup> and this is because, “it is not sufficiently biblically grounded, and it undermines the true humanity of Jesus Christ”<sup>39</sup>. For him, the Christological dogma of the early Church is nothing but intellectualism at work and it distorts the real Christ as often times its formulae are incorrect and deludes one into thinking that because he or she has the formulae, he or she thereby has the reality . Faith he believes, does not depend on dogma, and this is his point of attack on Greek theology of the early Church. Pugh however is of the opinion that, “by the differentiation between the authentic Jesus and the Greek philosophic mind, in which the doctrines of the Trinity, the Incarnation of the Logos, and Christ’s

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<sup>35</sup> Ellen LEONARD, *George Tyrrell and the Catholic Tradition*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1982, p. 37.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> J. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift*, p. 21.

<sup>38</sup> Christine AXT-PISCALAR, *Adolf von Harnack’s Christology*, in Stuart George HALL (ed.), *Jesus Christ Today. Studies of Christology in Various Contexts. Proceedings of the Académie Internationale des Sciences Religieuses, Oxford 25-29 August 2006 and Princeton 25-30 August 2007*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2009, p. 161.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159-177, p. 162.

pre-existence found their genesis, Harnack and his theological program dispatch the entire structure of Christological doctrine and reduce Christ to an experientially based teacher”<sup>40</sup>.

This accusation became obvious when, like Schleiermacher, Harnack came to the conclusion that God is found in religious experience through God-consciousness found in all of us. In other words, God is immediately perceivable by everyone in the sense that everyone has a relation with God. Jesus Christ who stands at the centre of the Christian religion then serves to illuminate that relation because, it is in him, it is in his person, that God makes himself known in a unique way.

#### **1.4. Karl Barth’s *Der Römerbrief* period and God as the “Wholly Other” predicament**

The theological landscape into which Karl Barth found himself in Marburg was that of Protestant Liberalism and neo-Kantianism. And having been a devoted student of Herrmann and Harnack, his first glance at this terrain was done through the eyes of these revered professors of his. Just as these were devotees of Schleiermacher, Barth also came to be an ardent admirer and a devotee of Schleiermacher. Eberhard Busch quoted Barth as saying: “The possibility of understanding the Bible in terms of the history of religion began to dawn on me, and alongside Kant, Schleiermacher took a clearer place in my thought than before”<sup>41</sup>. And Balthasar wrote concerning the influence of Schleiermacher on Barth that, “Schleiermacher was for Barth what Plato was for the thinkers of the Renaissance, what Spinoza was for Herder and Goethe, and what Schopenhauer was for Nietzsche”<sup>42</sup>. His earliest theological writings in Marburg and Geneva between July 1909 and July 1911, showed strong Schleiermacherian tradition as well as strong epistemological theory of Cohen and Natorp<sup>43</sup>.

However, it was his call to pastoral duty that witnessed a first turning point in Barth’s thought. In July 1911, he was assigned to manage a small parish of Safenwil. At that period, Safenwil was a small industrial village. When he began what was to eventually be a ten-year pastorate, he noticed for the first time that the conservative culture of Halle or Greifswald was more suitable for pastoral work than the liberal culture of Marburg or Heidelberg. When he came face to face with the miserable living conditions of the working class, he began to understand the

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<sup>40</sup> J. PUGH, *The Anselmic Shift*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> Eberhard BUSCH, *Karl Barth. His Life From Letters and Autobiographical Texts* (trans. by BOWDEN John), London- Philadelphia, SCM Press- Fortress Press, 1976, p. 40.

<sup>42</sup> Hans Urs von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, (trans. by DRURY John), New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971, p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 68-77.

relation of the gospel to politics. Consequently he became more and more involved in socialist movements. His congregation, made up of both workers and employers in industries, was engaged in constant strife and strikes. This often brought sharp division among members of his congregation who would worship together on Sundays and go back to the industries during the week to fight each other. With this class warfare staring him in the face, he soon began to notice that the liberal gospel was miserably incapable of addressing this situation.

Having noticed this deficiency in Liberalism, and having been bound both by his conscience and by his calling to address the situation, he gradually relegated his theological heritage to the second place and, in its stead, turned to socialism. In his lecture titled *Jesus Christ and the Movement for social justice*, Barth wrote: “I really believe that the social movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is not only the greatest and most urgent word of God to the present, but also in particular a quite direct continuation of the spiritual power which... entered into history and life with Jesus”<sup>44</sup>. He then went ahead to compare the mission of the socialists with that of Jesus during his life on earth saying that both have the essential missions of helping the weak, abolishing capitalism and establishing the Kingdom of God. With this type of conviction in his mind, one was not surprised how he was known to have often sided with the workers against the employers, even when that brought serious divisions in his congregation. This alignment with the workers earned him the nickname “The Red Pastor”<sup>45</sup>, and even at a point in November 1913, five of the six members of the church session in Safenwil had to resign in protest against his (Barth’s) socialist sermons<sup>46</sup>.

If he already started taking a second look at the message of Protestant Liberalism as soon as he came face to face with the reality of life in his Safenwil parish, the event of 1914 was the last straw that broke the Camel’s back as far as holding on to the message of Protestant Liberalism was concerned. On 4 August 1914, the German troops invaded neutral Belgium, thus sparking off the First World War. Although his party, the Socialist Party voted for the granting to Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg a credit of 5 million marks to support the war effort, what particularly upset Barth were the reactions of the German theologians. Through the medium of *Die Christliche Welt*, the said theologians presupposed that Germany was right in the war and went ahead to give that presupposition a religious justification thereby in Barth’s estimation,

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<sup>44</sup> Karl BARTH, *Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice*, reproduced in Clifford GREEN (ed.), *Karl Barth. Theologian of Freedom*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p. 98.

<sup>45</sup> Colin GUNTON, *The Barth Lectures* (transcribed and edited by P. H. BRAZIER), London, T & T Clark, 2007, p.23.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 92.

enlisting God on their side in that sinful situation. The latter appearance of a manifesto by ninety-three German intellectuals in support of the war policy of Kaiser Wilhelm II, among whose signatures were found those of his revered professors Wilhelm Herrmann and Adolf von Harnack, only increased his disillusionment. So disappointed was Barth that he had to write his professor Herrmann asking him to clarify where one stood between the belief that religious experience provided ground for theology and the manipulation of that religious experience to legitimate the war which is intrinsically evil and the worst of all human catastrophe. McCormack succinctly captured Barth's worry: "if religious experience could give rise to such divergent and even contradictory conclusions, perhaps it could no longer be relied upon to provide an adequate ground and starting-point for theology"<sup>47</sup>.

Barth saw in the actions of the theologians not only a betrayal but also a bankruptcy of their catechism which was liberal theology. He set off on a mission to find a befitting starting-point for theology. But first he had to find out where theology went astray, and he traced this to the doorstep of Schleiermacher. He could not hold to Schleiermacherian postulations of human progress and innate goodness with the naked reality of hardships, suffering and wickedness occasioned by the war. How could one reconcile the thought of progress of humankind with the situation of these people who have known nothing but struggles all through their lives? His conclusion was that in the face of the war, the liberal message of progress through human effort was simply a mockery.

Having been disillusioned with the message of the ruling theology, preaching became more and more difficult and problematic for him. The question that occupied his mind was how to speak of God, and he was very restless about that. But as Clifford Green observed, "the unrest was not about doubt or unbelief, so much as who God really is, as distinct from our pious notions of God, our wishful illusions and patriotic manipulations; the issue was how to speak properly of God, in distinction from speaking about our own religious feelings"<sup>48</sup>. Barth would now make this knowledge of God the central question of his new theology, a theology which makes a critical distinction between God and humankind, between the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of humankind; a theology which places God in such a diastatic relationship with the world that "World remains world. But God is God"<sup>49</sup>. This is a theology which rather than

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>48</sup> Clifford GREEN (ed.), *Karl Barth. Theologian of Freedom*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1991, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 129.

making the “real” the empirically known world as Thomistic theology did, took the wholly otherness of God as the truly “real” thus validating to some extent Kant’s epistemological theory.

Barth arrived at the ‘Otherness’ of God through his Christological concentration. Having inherited a strong Christocentric input to his emerging theology from Harnack, and having also learnt from Herrmann the importance of the centrality of Jesus Christ, he soon started noticing some crack between the Christocentric positions of these his professors and the Schleiermacherian immediacy position. As Colin Gunton puts it, “the tension is that you cannot have the Schleiermachian immediacy and a strongly Christocentric position. If God is immediately perceivable by all people of all religions then you do not need Christ. If you adopt the position of Schleiermacher, who would talk of the white heat of the soul communicating with God, then the mediator is not needed. Either God is transcendent and redemption/revelation comes through Christ, or Christ is redundant and all can know God immediately”<sup>50</sup>.

The whole of Barth’s life can be described as crisis-ridden. He could be aptly described as a theologian of crisis. He sought to break the crisis and tensions inherent in his Liberal theological heritage and in his Socialist politics by doing what Luther did - turn to the Bible. He embarked on an aggressive study of St Paul’s letter to the Romans with the intention of redirecting the course of theology. Between 1916 and 1919, he wrote and published the first commentary to the Epistle to the Romans. However, it was the second thoroughly revised edition of 1922 which Karl Adam described as falling like a bomb on the playground of the theologians, and which Barth himself likened to a man climbing up the church bell-tower in the dark who, reaching for the handrail, grasped the bell rope instead, and sounded the alarm throughout the whole town<sup>51</sup>. From now on, letting God be God and not man became the most important aspect of Barth’s theology.

Letting God be God means in effect, the characterization of God as the “Wholly Other”<sup>52</sup>. Barth appropriated St. Paul’s teaching on justification through grace alone, and on man’s unrighteousness in everything he does by himself. He then went ahead to use this to denounce all man’s effort to hide this unrighteousness by way of theology, culture or even the church, by using these media to formulate his (man’s) own terms of relationship with God. Barth says God

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<sup>50</sup> C. GUNTON, *The Barth Lectures*, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. C. GREEN, *Karl Barth. Theologian of Freedom*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Steven G. SMITH, *The Argument to the Other. Reason Beyond Reason in the Thought of Karl Barth and Emmanuel Levinas*, California, Scholars Press, 1983, p. 2.

answers ‘No!’ to all effort of man to justify himself. He says that our relation to God is “ungodly” and “unrighteous” in the sense that “we are ourselves the masters in this relationship. We are not concerned with God, but with our own requirements, to which God must adjust Himself”<sup>53</sup>. He contends that God is totally different from any conception of him by man and as such, “we are unable to speak of God, for only God can speak of God. Consequently the only legitimate goal of theology is to announce its inability to speak of God. It can do this by using negative concept of the ‘Wholly Other’, which locates God beyond everything man is capable of knowing”<sup>54</sup>. He maintained this ‘unknowability’ of God in a dialectical and paradoxical form. For him, “God is the unknown and the known. He is known as the unknowable”<sup>55</sup>. In this sense therefore, God is utterly distinct. In other words, God is qualitatively distinct from humanity. As Steven Smith puts it, “God is wholly other than the human; not merely other than this or that human possibility, but other than all human possibility; not merely other than life or death, but other than ‘existence’”<sup>56</sup>. In fact, Barth defined faith as the awareness of this qualitative distinction between God and man and between God and the world<sup>57</sup>. As God is qualitatively distinct from humanity, no amount of ‘experience’ will make theology possible. Theology is only possible in its impossibility, that is, it depends totally on the grace of God. Schleiermacher’s postulation of experience as the proprium of theology is thus vehemently denied and attacked in the concept of the Wholly Other.

Barth’s aim was to place the transcendent God, triune and incarnate, in the centre of Christian thinking. To do this, he had to challenge every tendency to identify God with human personal desires, feelings and thoughts. He seeks to refute any attempt at domestication of God in human language. It is obvious that human beings have had this suppressed tendency to seek equality with God by reducing him to human proportions. This hidden desire to manipulate and control the deity is manifested in the temptation to win divine favour by good works, or to avoid divine punishments through good behaviour. This hidden desire often tends to reduce prayer into magical efforts to influence God. We thus create distorted images of God to which we force God to assume. This was actually the problem Barth noticed with the Protestant Liberalism which relegates to the background the divine judgment of God, the miracles of Christ and the reality of resurrection, while emphasizing the fatherhood of God and the ethical imperative of love. He

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<sup>53</sup> Karl BARTH, *The Epistle to the Romans*, (trans. from the sixth edition by Edwyn C. HOSKYNs), London, Oxford University Press, 1933, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> S. SMITH, *The Argument to the Other*, p. 2.

<sup>55</sup> K. BARTH, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 77.

<sup>56</sup> S. SMITH, *The Argument to the Other*, p. 41.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. K. BARTH, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 39.

accused them of being too individualistic in their emphasis on personal experience and too relativistic in their denial of the absolute truths of revelation. And he insisted that, “men can never make ‘God’s standpoint their own partisan standpoint’ and therefore no individual or group simply stands on God’s side over against others. Rather, in solidarity, together, they all share the responsibility before God”<sup>58</sup>. This was a direct attack on the religious individualism of Protestant Liberalism.

The liberal notion of progress was also put into serious doubt by the experience of the First World War. The message of liberal theology was evidently pastorally ineffective during the war period. With the collaboration of his friend and fellow pastor, Eduard Thurneysen, they embarked on a re-study of the scripture, especially St. Paul’s letter to the Romans where Barth used the insight in Paul’s thought to challenge every effort to reduce or domesticate God. He insisted that, “God is the unknown God, and, precisely because He is unknown, He bestows life and breath and all things. Therefore the power of God can be detected neither in the world of nature nor in the souls of men”<sup>59</sup>. He says that because of their secret desire to identify themselves with God, “men have imprisoned and encased the truth – the righteousness of God; they have trimmed it to their own measure, and thereby robbed it both of its earnestness and of its significance. They have made it ordinary, harmless, and useless; and thereby transformed it into untruth”<sup>60</sup>. But Barth insists that we can neither earn God’s grace nor do anything on our own to escape His wrath, adding that it is only when we discover that “all the world is guilty before God” that we can be in a position to recognize God’s faithfulness<sup>61</sup>.

Reflecting on Romans 11:31-32 where Paul says that ‘God has shut up all unto disobedience that He might have mercy on all’, Barth maintains a qualitative distinction between the true God and human beings in such a way that God can never be identified with anything we name or experience or even worship as God. He insists that the living God “is never a known thing in the midst of other known things”<sup>62</sup>. What is demanded of us is to recognize the limitations of our knowledge and this will obviously prepare us to receive the divine favour. The false prophets try to domesticate God, but we should rather long for a true prophet who will “set

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<sup>58</sup> E. BUSCH, *Karl Barth*, p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> K. BARTH, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 36.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>61</sup> *Cf. Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

before us the complete strangeness of the Wholly Other”<sup>63</sup>. And it is Jesus Christ himself who is that true and genuine prophet. It is he “who exposes the gulf which separates God and man and by exposing it, bridges it”<sup>64</sup>. Thus we can never bridge that gap between us and God from our side through our human means; neither through reason nor through religious feelings or experiences. Mediation can only come through Christ alone.

Barth’s “Wholly Other-God” theology is understandably a justifiable response to the humanistic excesses of liberal theology viewed through the prism of Herrmann and Harnack. The first edition of the commentary to the Romans seemed to have been written in a hurried enthusiasm. Such enthusiasm seemed to have produced a split personality of the conception of God. Steven Smith rightly observed that, “First Romans has a kind of split personality, formed by the tension between Barth’s two great working principles: God as the Wholly Other, whom we dare not invoke, and God as the present Victor, whom we dare not fail to invoke”<sup>65</sup>. In other words, there is a tension between the notion of God as absolute transcendent Being and the idea of God-incarnate in Jesus Christ, thus setting the deity of God over against His humanity. The second more critical edition did not altogether resolve the tension either, even though it asserted that God’s “Otherness” means His revelation; that the Subject *Deus absconditus* is in Jesus Christ the predicate *Deus revelatus*<sup>66</sup>. But he over-emphasized the ‘Otherness’ of God to the detriment of his revelation. And that is why generally speaking, *Der Römerbrief* period of Barth’s writings presented a one-sided notion of God.

Hans Urs von Balthasar gave the following assessment of that type of theology: “The critical point, however, is that the hardcore centre of Christianity, the Incarnation, now becomes impossible. If the divine touches the world only tangentially, if the only relationship between God and the world is that of an infinite qualitative difference, then there can be no such thing as a life of Christ. All there can really be is a death of Christ; this alone can be the meaning and the substance of the Incarnation”<sup>67</sup>. Ian Boyd also saw the necessity of the development from *Romans* to *Church Dogmatics* because according to him, “God’s absoluteness tended in the earlier work to threaten to annihilate the creature”; whereas a more balanced job was done in the later work which “expressed God’s absoluteness as absolute love, in which God’s Yes and No,

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>65</sup> S. SMITH, *The Argument to the Other*, p. 25.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. K. BARTH, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 408.

<sup>67</sup> H. von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p.58.

judgement and grace, are both located”<sup>68</sup>. For this reason he is of the opinion that the doctrine of predestination is the key to Barth’s theology stressing that “the relativity of the creature and the absoluteness of God can both be affirmed only when God’s absoluteness is understood as love, in which his election and rejection of the creature are both grounded”<sup>69</sup>.

The greatest critique of that one-sidedness of his earlier writings however, was done by Barth himself especially in his 1956 lecture titled ‘*The Humanity of God*’. In the said lecture, he admitted of the need for a “change of direction” which should however not be “in opposition to a former critical turn but in distinction from it”<sup>70</sup>. He talked of a “retraction” which “does not by any means consist in a retrospective withdrawal, but in a new start and attack in which what was said before has now to be said properly – in a better way”<sup>71</sup>. This retraction implies a greater Christological concentration because according to him, “God’s divinity rightly understood includes his humanity”<sup>72</sup>. This initial neglect of the humanity of God in an effort to make a “180 degrees” change of course against Protestant Liberalism, was what made the study of Christology in Barth’s earlier writings especially *Der Römerbrief* period, very problematic.

Granted that in order to counter Schleiermacher’s immediacy position, he asserted that God is transcendent and mediation can only come through Christ, and that no amount of human experience would make theology possible, but in emphasizing the Otherness of God, he subsumed the humanity of Christ in his divinity thus setting the stage (as we shall see in the next section of this chapter) for the characterization of his Christology by some scholars, as Alexandrian. It is evident from the point of emphasis of Barth that, at the time of First and Second Romans, he had not as yet assimilated very well the Chalcedonian mediation in the Christological debate between Antiochian and Alexandrian schools. The full import of Chalcedon seemed to have begun dawning on him only after he had written the two commentaries. He rightly observed that in the excessive humanistic bent of liberal theology, “human beings were... magnified at the expense of God”<sup>73</sup>. And seeing that the ship was dangerously running on to the sands, he had then to make that 180 degree turn. In doing so

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<sup>68</sup> Ian R. BOYD, *Dogmatics Among the Ruins. German Expressionism and the Enlightenment as Contexts for Karl Barth’s Theological Development*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004, p. 37.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Karl BARTH, *The Humanity of God*, reproduced in GREEN Clifford (ed.), *Karl Barth. Theologian of Freedom*, p. 47.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

however, he acknowledged that he ran “to some extent in a heretical direction”<sup>74</sup>. That heresy was the employment of diastasis in his presentation of the concept of God. He said:

“It is true, we were fascinated then above all by the image and the conception of a ‘totally other’ which we had no right without more consideration to identify with the divinity of him who is called Yahweh-Kyrios in the Bible. In the isolation, abstraction and absolutism in which we viewed it and opposed it to humanity, poor wretches... it still had or required greater similarity to the divinity of the God of the philosophers than to that of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”<sup>75</sup>.

Of course the divinity of the God of the Patriarchs can only have meaning in dialogue with humanity not apart or distinct from it. And this dialogue with humanity is understood not in the abstract realm but concretely in Jesus Christ whose divine and human natures enable him to “act for God before humanity – and, representing, atoning, interceding, for humanity before God”<sup>76</sup>. Jesus Christ thus fulfils the function of the Mediator and Reconciler between God and humanity. We see Barth here in his Chalcedonian fullness, appropriating and interpreting the formula of that council. He asserted that, “In Jesus Christ there is no barrier on the human side upwards nor one on God’s side downwards”, and that, “in his one person Jesus Christ is at once as true God humanity’s faithful partner, and as true human being God’s faithful partner”; He is “wholly the One and wholly the Other”<sup>77</sup>.

This is a modification of the absolute Otherness of *Der Römerbrief* period and it is intended at giving God a more human face. This modification became necessary because people erroneously thought that the Wholly Other was Barth’s doctrine of God. Smith insists that “Barth’s argument is not that God is the Wholly Other... Barth’s point is that we must speak of God as the Wholly Other because of the actual position in which we find ourselves, in the light of revelation”<sup>78</sup>. And Garrett Green while introducing his own translation of Barth’s work ‘*The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*’ said that, “it is not simply that Barth’s early theology grasped one aspect, God’s divinity, while missing an additional item, his humanity; rather, the divinity itself was inadequately understood because it was conceived ‘abstractly’, that is, apart from the concrete reality of Jesus Christ”<sup>79</sup>. While approaching the doctrine of God from

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> S. SMITH, *The Argument to the Other*, p. 46.

<sup>79</sup> Karl BARTH, *On Religion. The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*, trans. and introduced by Garrett GREEN, London, T & T Clark, 2006, p. 10.

a concrete Christological perspective as Barth did, that doctrine is bound therefore to appear in a new light.

It will however be noted that this revision on the understanding of God did not begin with this lecture on *The Humanity of God*. Already from the little book on Anselm (according to Balthasarian reading)<sup>80</sup>, Barth had started revising what culminated in his doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* II/2. But when read through the prism of *Der Römerbrief*, Barth's Christology is bound to be defective.

## **1.5. Attempts at characterizing Barth's Christology**

### **1.5.1. Charles Waldrop's Alexandrian position**

Moved by the quest for linguistic analysis, Charles T. Waldrop set off to study Karl Barth's Christological language such as the uses of the term 'Jesus Christ' and its variants. He discovered that the principles governing such language were theological rather than linguistic or philosophical. This made him to focus attention on the study of the history of Christian theology especially the debate about the nature of Jesus Christ. During those early centuries of the church when the formative creeds were being developed, two opposing schools emerged regarding the identity of Jesus Christ. On the one hand was the theology of the hypostatic union which was chiefly identified with Alexandria; and on the other hand was the theology of the indwelling Logos identified with Antioch. The question is: Is Jesus Christ first of all a man, a concrete human person who is also divine? Or is he first a divine person who is also a human?

The Antiochian theology held the former view, insisting that the humanity of Jesus is an inherent quality of his being, and that only his unique divine relationship with God makes him divine. On the other hand, the Alexandrian theology maintains Jesus' divinity as an inherent quality of his being, insisting that he was divine prior to and apart from, his incarnation as man. Charles Waldrop captured the emphasis of both schools when he stated: "In Antiochian theology, Jesus Christ is the man who is 'also' divine, while in Alexandrian thinking Jesus Christ is the

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<sup>80</sup> However, this is one of the great areas of contention between McCormack and Balthasar as we shall later on see. McCormack downplays the importance of the Anselm book in the shaping of Barth's thoughts, and rejects totally the purported turn to analogy on the strength of which Balthasar accorded a prominent place to the Anselm book. He maintains that there is no new starting point and no new thought-form in the book; and that as a matter of fact, *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 are merely revision of the 1927 *Die christliche Dogmatik* and not a rewriting of it. We shall discuss this in detail in the next chapter.

divine person who is ‘also’ human”<sup>81</sup>. In his book, Waldrop demonstrated through the examination of three areas of Barth’s Christology, how consistent Barth was with Alexandria rather than Antioch. These three areas were his doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ, his understanding of the unity of the person of Christ, and his use of the name ‘Jesus Christ’ and its variants. While acknowledging that there are elements of both Antiochian and Alexandrian traditions in Barth’s Christology, he however pitched camp with the Alexandrian school over against those characterizing him as Antiochian.

Waldrop began by examining two opposing authors as case studies. First is John McIntyre who argued that since God is not known directly, He reveals Himself through creaturely forms other than Himself. Therefore, if He revealed Himself through the life of Jesus, this does not imply that Jesus is divine. In fact, it implies rather that he is only a medium through which God reveals himself and as such must be different from God. He therefore concluded that for Barth to have claimed in the *Church Dogmatics* 4/2 that the medium of God’s revelation is the human nature of Jesus Christ (a nature which he described as the “organ” of God in his revealing action to man), it implies that Barth was not only Antiochian but was very dangerously near, though not altogether identified with, Nestorianism. On the other hand is Claude Welch who argued that the deity of Jesus is established not in isolation but along the doctrine of the trinity. In this sense it is God who reveals himself through himself. Jesus Christ is therefore not merely the medium of revelation but he is the one who reveals himself. He is the subject of revelation, identical with God. The trinity of Godhead is no threat to his oneness. It is the same God who acts in three modes of existence. If God is revealed in Jesus Christ as Barth affirms, it is God who reveals. Jesus Christ is therefore primarily the son of God, the divine subject who reveals himself.

Waldrop’s conviction is that McIntyre and Welch came to different conclusions about Barth’s derivation of the idea of the divinity of Jesus from the fact of revelation according to how each understood Barth’s position on the subject matter. Both conclusions are consistent with how each understood Barth. One understood Barth from the Antiochian perspective and argued coherently towards that. The other took Alexandrian axis and equally was consistent in his argument. Waldrop is convinced that the different conclusions reached by them was as a result of how each understood the use of the name ‘Jesus Christ’ and its variants in Barth’s theology. While McIntyre understood it to be a purely human person different from God, Welch understood

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<sup>81</sup> Charles T. WALDROP, *Karl Barth’s Christology. Its Basic Alexandrian Character*, Berlin, Mouton Publishers, 1984, p. 2.

it to designate the second mode of being of God, the incarnate Lord. This person is God himself and not just a human person united with God. The question therefore is whether Barth uses the names 'Jesus Christ' and its variants to designate the human person or the divine person. The second aspect is Barth's notion of the unity of the person of Christ. While McIntyre interprets it expressly to mean the unity of the person of God and the human person Jesus who is the form of revelation (though not in a Nestorian fashion), Welch thinks of that unity as a relation between God the Son and his human nature. Lastly, on the divinity of Christ, while McIntyre thinks Barth attributes divinity to the man Jesus Christ because he is the form of revelation, Welch on the other hand thinks that Barth maintains that Jesus is divine because he is of one essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit<sup>82</sup>.

Waldrop claims Barth's Christology could go either way in the ensuing argument, but maintains Barth is more consistent with Alexandria. First, the Antiochian school could easily cite Barth's correlation of the divinity of Christ, the Bible, and proclamation with the event of revelation. According to this school, to have affirmed the divinity of the Bible and proclamation as well as the divinity of Jesus Christ, Barth implies that just as these other creaturely media are said to be divine because of their relation to God and not because of their inherent being, Jesus is also said to be divine not because of his inherent being but because of his special relationship to God. Barth himself affirmed: "The essence of the Divinity ascribed to Jesus is to make clear, impart, and carry out who God the Father, God in the proper sense is, and what He wills and does for man, to represent this God the Father"<sup>83</sup>. What better way (according to the Antiochian readers) to deny the intrinsic divinity of Jesus than this – a divinity which properly speaking, belongs to the Father who alone (in the proper sense) is God. There are still other telling citations in the *Church Dogmatics* where Barth placed the 'divinity-ness' of the Bible and proclamation on the same par with that of Jesus Christ. These could help to justify the classification of Barth's notion of the divinity of Christ as Antiochian because, as Waldrop says, Barth seems to promote the notion of participatory divinity rather than intrinsic divinity, and includes Jesus Christ among the many forms of revelation albeit in a more unique manner.

Secondly, regarding Barth's concept of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, Barth's rejection of the *logos asarkos* has some implications. If we agree with Barth that there is no *logos*

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 8-15.

<sup>83</sup> Karl BARTH, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley, Edinburgh, Clark, 1961. Citations are given according to volume and part such as CD I/1, p. 443, cf. also Charles WALDROP, *Karl Barth's Christology*, p. 30.

without flesh, this would imply the eternal existence of the flesh, that is, the flesh exists throughout eternity, and that includes even prior to incarnation. Barth himself seems to accept this implication by saying, “But the man Jesus already was even before He was”<sup>84</sup>. Waldrop says the Antiochian interpretation of this statement is this: “The man Jesus exists in God’s plan before that plan is executed in time. Since God decides in his eternity for Jesus to exist as a man and to play a significant role in the salvation of all men, it follows that Jesus exists in the mode of God’s intention. However, this does not mean that he exists as a concrete being”<sup>85</sup>. Furthermore, for Barth to have affirmed the existence of *logos asarkos* (even if in a limited, theoretical sense) as a necessary concept for theological reflection, implies in the Antiochian view that Jesus has some relative independence and not just a mere aspect of God’s being.

The Antiochian school argues also that Barth interprets the “become” of the scriptural proclamation that ‘the Word became flesh’ not in the Alexandrian theological tradition which emphasizes the ‘becoming’ of that ‘became’, but rather in the Antiochian tradition which interprets the ‘becoming’ as ‘assuming’ thus avoiding the implication that the Word was transformed into something other than himself when he became man<sup>86</sup>.

The third point of consideration is Barth’s use of the name “Jesus Christ” and its variants. The Antiochian interpretation of this is that Barth uses the term to distinguish two persons – God and Jesus. According to such interpretation, Barth uses the terms ‘Jesus’, ‘Jesus of Nazareth’, ‘the man Jesus’, and ‘Son of Man’ to indicate the individual human being who is related to God in the incarnation. On the other hand, he uses the terms ‘Son of God’, ‘Word of God’, and ‘Logos’ to denote the agent God. He says that the Antiochians argue that more often than not, Barth seems to substitute those names which appear to denote a human person for the human nature which God assumed in incarnation, thus suggesting that he thinks of the human nature in a concrete sense, as a complete individual.

However, despite these possible reasons why Barth’s Christology could be interpreted as Antiochian, Waldrop still uses the same three-fold structural arguments of Barth’s doctrine of the divinity of Jesus Christ, his concept of the unity of the person of Jesus, and his use of the name ‘Jesus Christ’ and its variants, to maintain that his Christology is basically Alexandrian. He says that in the conception of Barth, Jesus Christ is directly identical with God. He is both the person

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<sup>84</sup> CD 3/2, p. 464.

<sup>85</sup> C. WALDROP, *Karl Barth’s Christology*, p. 46.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 50-54.

God and the act of God- a concept which according to him, Barth developed in his doctrines of reconciliation and revelation.

Barth identified reconciliation, revelation and Jesus Christ as one and the same thing. In fact, Jesus Christ is that history of reconciliation, that event in which God descended to the level of humanity in order to raise humanity to Himself. Barth was explicit on this: “Revelation in fact does not differ from the person of Jesus Christ, and again does not differ from the reconciliation which took place in Him”<sup>87</sup>. Waldrop’s interpretation of Barth’s claim that Jesus Christ is the act of God is that Jesus Christ is divine in his essence and therefore that he is God himself. It does not mean that he is merely dependent upon God just like other creatures. To make the point clearer, one needs to understand how Barth relates revelation to the concept of the trinity. If Jesus Christ is identified with revelation as Barth did, and if Christian theology must begin with revelation as he insists, then it means that theology must begin with Jesus Christ. And to begin with Jesus Christ means beginning with His divinity since he is of the same divine essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. This ultimately leads one to the doctrine of the trinity. The God that is therefore known in revelation is the triune God. He reveals Himself through Himself and thereby making the event of revelation Himself. But Waldrop insists that, “When Barth states that Christ’s divinity is his revelation of the Father, this does not mean simply that Jesus Christ is a human medium who is said to be divine because he mediates the knowledge of God. Rather, it means that Jesus Christ is the revelation of God as the act which is God’s second mode of being”<sup>88</sup>.

Barth also identified Jesus Christ with the person of God, and defined a person as one whose being is in act. In other words, a person is one who takes a decision to be what he is. He doesn’t need any other creature to determine for him. In this sense, it is only God who is truly a person since only he fulfils this condition. From the human point of view, we usually ascribe the work of reconciliation/redemption to Jesus Christ, creation to the Father and sanctification to the Holy Spirit. But this does not imply that there are three different agents at work. In fact, the doctrine of appropriation is developed to teach that there is one agent God with three inner distinctions. Hence it is one God at work in those three functions, and the three modes of God’s being participate in each of the works. He made an analogy of two persons holding a coat for the third person to wear. In the end, it is only the third person who wears the coat. But the other two

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<sup>87</sup> CD 1/1, p. 134.

<sup>88</sup> C. WALDROP, *Karl Barth’s Christology*, p. 91.

helped him to wear it. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are involved in the action of the incarnation. But in the end, it is only the Son who becomes flesh. Having identified Jesus Christ with the act, essence and person of God, Barth states that Jesus Christ is by nature God. His divinity is therefore his own and not attributed to him by virtue of any special relationship with God.

On the Alexandrian interpretation of Barth's doctrine of the unity of the person of Jesus Christ, Waldrop says Barth's concept of the *logos ensarkos* stresses the divinity of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the decision of God. Therefore, that Jesus was with God prior to his incarnation in time does not imply that he was just in God's intention prior to creation as were other creatures. Hence, he is not just an object of election, he is the electing subject. He is the agent of incarnation both in its decision and in its execution. Again, he extracted a dialogue from 'Barth's Table Talk' in form of a question by a student and its answer by Barth where the latter implies that the human nature of Jesus Christ has no personality and therefore no centre of consciousness of its own separate from that of the trinity in which he belongs. The human nature therefore is not a person in its own right, and this is a sharp denial of the Antiochian view.

The question however is whether this human nature which is not a person in its essence came to become a person in the incarnation, that is, whether when this human person came into existence through incarnation it assumed a person distinct from the person of the Son of God. Waldrop says Barth's treatment of the concepts of *Anhypostasis* and *Enhypostasis*<sup>89</sup> shows that for him, the human nature of Jesus Christ never was a person before or after the incarnation. Unlike the created beings which have existence independent of and different from God (although they are brought into existence by God), the human nature of Jesus Christ has no such independent existence even after it comes into existence. Therefore one cannot say that this human nature of Christ is a person distinct from God since its existence is identical with God's existence. This is where the revelation of Jesus Christ and the revelations of the Bible and the proclamation or other creaturely media differ. These other creaturely media have independent existence from God. They are not God but can become the Word of God. In the case of Jesus Christ, his human nature does not exist independently as if he were a distinct man. He rather calls his existence God's mode of operation as a man. According to him, "the concepts of *anhypostasis*

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<sup>89</sup> The formula *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* dates back to a sixth-century monk, Leontius of Byzantium, and is used to describe the relation of the human and divine natures of Jesus Christ. In its usage, it expresses the doctrine that the human nature of Jesus Christ has no subsistence (*an-hypostasis*) apart from the union with the *Logos*, but that it has its being only "in" the subsistence (*en-hypostasis*) of the incarnate Son of God.

and *enhypostasis*... affirm that the existence of the human nature of Christ is identical with the existence of Jesus Christ and also the existence of God. There is only one existence here, and it is God's acting in the creaturely realm"<sup>90</sup>. This definitely precludes the idea that Jesus is the human person who exists in the existence of God.

Concerning the analysis of Barth's use of the name 'Jesus Christ' and its variants, Waldrop argues that he uses them in the Alexandrian understanding to denote the personal subject God rather than a human person distinct from God. He says that unlike the Antiochian interpreters of Barth who argue that Barth uses some terms as 'Jesus', 'Jesus of Nazareth' and 'Son of Man' to designate human subject as distinguished from the divine subject which he uses other terms as 'Son of God' and 'Word of God' to designate, the Alexandrian interpretation of Barth sees all these terms as denoting the one divine subject. The only subtle distinction is that the earlier terms connote this subject in his being and action as man, whereas the latter terms connote his being and action as God. He argues that Barth sees the names 'Jesus' and 'Yahweh' as having the same practical meaning, with 'Yahweh' being the Old Testament name for God and 'Jesus' the New Testament name for God. Any use of the name 'Jesus' and its variants to denote a person who is distinct from God (as is the case in the ebionites' and docetists' views), is rejected by Barth. Jesus is the agent of revelation because he is himself God. This is the case because only God can reveal God. The statement that Jesus reveals God should therefore not be understood as meaning a distinct man revealing another entity called God, but rather the identity between the two should be implied. It means God in his second mode of being revealing himself. The man Jesus is originally divine otherwise he wouldn't have accepted human nature. If he was already existing as a man in time, it would have been absurd to accept what he already has. But the fact is that the human essence was not inherently his before he accepted it. Therefore when Barth uses such names as 'the man Jesus', 'Jesus of Nazareth' 'Son of Man' etc. he is using them in direct identification with God hence, they are the names of God.

Waldrop concluded his analysis by indicating how Barth's Alexandrian understanding of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the unity of the person of Christ, and the uses of the name 'Jesus Christ' and its variants, influences his treatment of other doctrines such as revelation, the trinity, election and reconciliation to the extent that not only Barth's Christology but his entire theology could be properly labelled Alexandrian. According to him, the claims he made in these other

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<sup>90</sup> C. WALDROP, *Karl Barth's Christology*, p. 115.

doctrines, e.g. that God's revelation through Christ is the revelation of God and not merely one among God's revelations, would make more sense within an Alexandrian interpretation than within that of Antiochian. If he did not restrict revelation to Christ, then he wouldn't have had enough ground for his sustained attack on natural theology since there would not have been enough justification for denying that God can be known through other media apart from Christ. However, Waldrop acknowledged that, "although Barth's concept of the divinity of Christ is a vigorous and innovative reformulation of the classical Alexandrian perspective, it incorporates significant elements from Antiochian thought"<sup>91</sup>. But despite such incorporation, he insists that Barth's Christological perspective is still Alexandrian, arguing that, "Barth has not found a genuine synthesis which avoids making a choice between the two theologies"<sup>92</sup>. However, that genuine synthesis which he failed to notice in Barth was carefully unveiled by George Hunsinger as we shall see in the next section of this chapter.

#### 1.5.2. George Hunsinger's Chalcedonian alternative

As we saw in the previous section, Waldrop was at a difficulty proving the so-called Barth's Christological Alexandrian character. He admitted that the arguments used in support of Barth's Christological Alexandrian bent, could equally be used to prove its Antiochian bent. He concluded that Barth has not found a genuine synthesis which avoids making a choice between the two theologies but thinks that his Christological perspective remains Alexandrian despite the presence of massive Antiochian elements. But the truth is that it was not Barth who did not found a genuine synthesis; it was rather Waldrop himself who refused to go beyond the two theologies to discover a synthesis scattered throughout Barth's works. Waldrop carried on as if Chalcedonian Christology never existed and that the choice is restricted only to Antioch and Alexandria. He failed to see that a choice between Antioch and Alexandria is a choice between Scylla and Charybdis.

In fact, it was to avoid the two extreme alternatives and especially to address the spread of Monophysitism (a Christological view that emphasizes the divine nature of the incarnate Christ at the expense of the human), that Emperor Marcian summoned the Council of Chalcedon in 451<sup>93</sup>. Though the Council was not without its own problems, and a schism even arose in the East as a

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Jaroslav PELIKAN and Valerie HOTCHKISS (ed.), *Creeks and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition* (vol. 1), New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2003, p. 172.

result of different understanding of the terms *ousia* (substance), *hypostasis* (person or subject or substance), *physis* (nature), and *prosōpon* (person)<sup>94</sup>, it succeeded in giving a minimal standard on which must be based any definition of Christ's two natures. The council declared the incarnate Christ consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father in his divinity and consubstantial with us in his humanity in all respect except for sin. In other words, Jesus Christ is perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity. But these two natures which met in Christ, “undergo no confusion, no change, no division, no separation; at no point was the difference between the natures taken away through the union, but rather the property of both natures is preserved and comes together into a single person and a single subsistent being”<sup>95</sup>. This ‘one person in two natures’ definition of Chalcedon (Christ's divinity and humanity), are to be understood as being internal to his person. This, in the words of Hunsinger, means that, “he is not merely a human being with a special relationship to God, nor is he merely a divine being in the guise of a phantom humanity”<sup>96</sup>.

George Hunsinger, is of the view that Barth presented one of the most fully Chalcedonian Christologies in Christian history, but lamented its continuous classification as otherwise. The reason according to him is not far fetched. The concepts ‘complete in deity’ and ‘complete in humanity’ are like two identical magnetic poles that repel one another. To do justice to one, there is always this tendency that the other will suffer. Antioch and Alexandria had these extreme tendencies, one veering off towards extreme humanity of Christ at the expense of his divinity (technically known as Nestorianism), while the other chose the opposite extreme of emphasizing Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity (better known as Docetism) respectively. What Chalcedon did was to try to bring the two natures together in such a way that there would be ‘no confusion, no change, no division and no separation’. In such a way the deficiencies apparent in both Antioch and Alexandria would have been avoided. To classify Barth's Christology as Antiochian implies then that Barth has a deficient conception of Christ's divinity; whereas to classify him as Alexandrian implies that he has a deficient conception of Christ's humanity. But the truth is that Barth deliberately oscillates between Alexandrian and Antiochian idioms because according to Hunsinger, “the proper way to be Chalcedonian in Christology ... was to follow the lead of the New Testament itself by employing a definite diversity of idioms”<sup>97</sup>, otherwise, any

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>95</sup> For the full text of Chalcedonian declaration, cf. J. PELIKAN and V. HOTCHKISS (ed.), *Creeds and Confessions of Faith*, p. 181.

<sup>96</sup> George HUNSINGER, *Karl Barth's Christology. Its Basic Chalcedonian Character*, in John WEBSTER (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 127-142, p. 127.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

other way of trying to articulate the mystery of Chalcedon is doomed to produce a one-sided conception of Christ.

Hunsinger says Barth believes that the New Testament has given us a method of juxtaposing two different modes of depiction in order to “comprehend the incomprehensibility of the incarnation precisely in its incomprehensibility”<sup>98</sup>. This New Testament lead is depicted by the synoptic and the Johannine traditional modes of illustration. One depicts Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God, and the other depicts the Son of God as Jesus of Nazareth. According to Barth, “it is impossible to listen at one and the same time to the two statements that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God, and that the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth. One hears either the one or the other or one hears nothing. When one is heard, the other can be heard only indirectly, in faith”<sup>99</sup>.

It is informative to note that both Waldrop and Hunsinger appealed to the above quotation from Barth in explaining their points. But whereas Waldrop thinks that the phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” in both statements could be understood to denote the human nature and its personality and goes to show that Barth personalizes the human nature and conceives it as a person distinct from the person of God; hence a strong argument in support of the Antiochian position of Barth’s Christology<sup>100</sup>, Hunsinger on the other hand believes that instead of trying to harmonize the statements which speak each of the humanity and deity of Jesus Christ (though with varying interests and emphasis), Barth deliberately retained the tensions between the two statements, preferring rather what he called “a strategy of juxtaposition” by which he means “surrendering the deeply ingrained expectation that the mystery of the incarnation could be contained by a conceptual scheme”<sup>101</sup>. In fact, he says that it was in their efforts at trying to resolve the mystery of incarnation into something conceivable on the basis of ordinary experience and history that both Antiochian and Alexandrian Christologies were found deficient. Barth, he says, maintains that the Incarnation is inconceivable, though not absurd because it is something that actually took place. He says that Barth understands the complementarity of Antioch and Alexandria as something not mutually exclusive but rather mutually supplementing one another peacefully. This is why according to him, “by speaking now in an ‘Alexandrian’ idiom, and now again in an ‘Antiochian’ idiom, by switching back and forth between them dialectically, Barth hoped to

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> CD 1/1, p. 180.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. C. WALDROP, *Karl Barth’s Christology*, p. 82-84.

<sup>101</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *Karl Barth’s Christology*, p. 131.

provide as descriptively adequate an account as might be possible of an event that was, by definition, inherently ineffable”<sup>102</sup>.

This dialectical strategy of juxtaposition was intended by Barth to make his readers not to read any of the idioms in isolation from the other. When one is reading one idiom, he/she should hear the second idiom in it, and vice versa. Those who impute non-Chalcedonian Christology on Barth do so according to him, as a result of reading one idiom in isolation of the other. They prefer to read Barth analogically and symmetrically by trying to abstract what ‘deity’ and ‘humanity’ really mean, and on the basis of that, try to understand the meaning of incarnation. But it is only when Barth is read dialectically that one would understand these terms in the light of incarnation itself. After all, it was the event of the incarnation that gave rise to the terms ‘complete in divinity’ and ‘complete in humanity’ in their fullness. Therefore any attempt to reverse the order, that is, trying to understand incarnation in the light of prior definitions of ‘deity’ and ‘humanity’, is bound to fail. When thus read dialectically, we discover that it is impossible to listen to the two equally necessary statements that ‘Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God’ and that ‘the Son of God is Jesus of Nazareth’ at the same time. What we can only do is to listen to one statement that is said, and then perceive the other that is not said, that is, hear it in faith. Barth’s dialectical strategy of juxtaposition is therefore a distinguished attempt to be Chalcedonian. And this Christology of dialectical juxtaposition constructed within the premises of Chalcedon is what guaranteed the saving work of Christ because, neither reconciliation nor revelation as Barth explains them could have taken place unless within the premises of two natures meeting in Christ without separation or division, and without confusion or change.

### 1.5.3. Scholars’ agreed option

A careful reading of Waldrop will reveal that he read Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* through the prism of *Der Römerbrief*. Though he never mentioned the *Epistle to the Romans* nor alluded to that period of Barth’s theology with its sharp antithesis between God and humanity, it is evident that anyone familiar with that period of Barth’s theology would immediately perceive in Waldrop a foundation on which he based his characterization not only of Barth’s Christology but his entire theology as Alexandrian. Barth’s insistence on the infinite qualitative difference between God and the world makes Waldrop think that even if we cannot historically deny the incarnation, the quality of humanity in Christ cannot be placed at par with that of the human

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

beings. Since he is already fully divine and therefore fully God, he cannot at the same time be fully human otherwise, there would no longer be that infinite qualitative difference between God and humanity.

Waldrop was deceived by the massive Christological discussion in CDIV/1 which speaks generally in the Alexandrian idiom, and refused to give importance to the Christological discussion in CDIV/2 which speaks in Antiochian idiom. He failed to realize that in CDIV/3, the equation was more or less balanced between Alexandrian idiom and Antiochian idiom, thus giving credence to Hunsinger's theory of dialectical juxtaposition. If he had taken Chalcedon more seriously as a Christological option, and if he had hearkened to the warning of Balthasar that, "any attempt to explain *Church Dogmatics* (and Barth's later writings in general) solely in terms of *The Epistle to the Romans* is really absurd; in fact, such an approach is an affront to Barth"<sup>103</sup>; and more importantly, if he had read carefully the retractions that Barth himself made in '*The Humanity of God*', perhaps he would have been more broad-minded to accommodate a Barthian Christology built on the premises of Chalcedon which most scholars agree to.

Notable Barthian scholars are generally agreed that his Christology is basically Chalcedonian. In his exposition of Barthian contribution to the current debates in Christology, Benoît Bourguine focused on the fourth volume of *Church Dogmatics* dealing with reconciliation as that was where Barth treated most significantly the theme of Christology. He argued that in writing the volume, Barth "struck a new balance" which was this: "the divinity of God is no longer a certain abstraction intended to make war on liberal theology; the divinity, always at the heart of his research, becomes concrete by including his humanity"<sup>104</sup>.

In presenting the structure and guiding principles of the volume four of the *Church Dogmatics*, he brought out two themes that are very relevant to our discussion. One is Barth's re-visitation of the doctrine of the three offices where he said that Barth put an end to the Schleiermacherian isolation of soteriology from Christology. According to him, Barth did this through his exposition of Christology within the context of soteriology by presenting who Christ is in relation to his work, that is, what he accomplishes. With this unification of Christology and soteriology he says, Barth was then armed with a two-fold calling into question of the traditional dogmatic plan of reconciliation as seen since early Protestantism. According to him, "Barth is

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<sup>103</sup> H. von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 44.

<sup>104</sup> B. BOURGUINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 183.

anxious to exclude – in agreement with Chalcedon and, above all, the New Testament – an autonomous doctrine of two natures which would no longer have as its goal the action of God accomplished with regard to humanity”<sup>105</sup>. With the establishment of a close relationship between the person and his work Barth was able to affirm that in Jesus Christ, God is humiliated and man is exalted. This, he says, is a ditching of the classical Reformed and Lutheran dogmatic traditions that have Alexandrian and Antiochian tendencies respectively, in favour of Chalcedon. As he puts it, “Barth’s reception of Chalcedonian Christology took place within a Christological debate that opposed Lutheran and Reformed dogmatic traditions. What is essential is seeing that he refused to take the Christological formulas of IV<sup>th</sup> and V<sup>th</sup> century councils as plans for an abstract Christology: their often polemical and biased viewpoints prevented them from structuring an overall teaching on Christ and salvation”<sup>106</sup>.

Bourgine is not alone in agreeing to the Chalcedonian character of Barth’s Christology. In his assessment of Protestant Christology in the twentieth century, Roch Kereszty wrote that, “Barth accepts the teaching of the great Ecumenical Councils on the two natures and the one person in Christ. But he refuses to see the hypostatic union as distinct from soteriology. Influenced by existentialist thinking, he states that the being of Christ is his action”<sup>107</sup>. Here the divinity of Christ is revealed in first aspect of the work of atonement where the Judge is being judged in our place. With this reversal of the roles of the judge and the judged, Christ’s divinity is, according to him, “the descending movement of God’s self-abasement” and his humanity is “the ascending movement of man’s exaltation”, and, “since the Lord has become a servant, the servant has also become the Lord”<sup>108</sup>. By pointing out that for Barth the exaltation of the man Jesus runs parallel to the humiliation of God and not just a second stage that follows, he is agreeing to the Chalcedonianism of Barth.

Perhaps Balthasar is the first person to call attention to the Chalcedonian character of Barth’s Christology. In arguing his case for Barth’s shift from dialectics to analogy, he said that the analogy became full bloomed when Barth replaced the central notion of God’s Word with the notion of Jesus Christ, God and man. For him, this new Christological foundation began in Volume 2 of the Prolegomena where a provisional Christology is formulated and progressively

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>107</sup> Roch A. KERESZTY, *Jesus Christ. Fundamentals of Christology*, (edited by J. Stephen MADDUX), New York, Alba House, 1991, p. 260.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., p. 261.

developed in Volume 3. According to him, Barth begins the Volume 2 by “strenuously affirming the doctrine of Chalcedon and the concept of nature (*phusis*)”<sup>109</sup>. Rather than endangering the eternal mystery of Revelation and Incarnation, the concept of nature helps to describe it in detail. Nature and spirit are not opposed to each other as most modern Protestantism hold. He argued that to remove the physical in Revelation is to reject the realism of biblical message, stressing that “Christ’s human nature is real only in the actuality of his godhead; it is the potentiality to become a man, which every being has, but his is an authentic human nature just as it has become since Adam’s fall”<sup>110</sup>. This human nature worn by Christ without sin has also human will. In other words it is not a phantom humanity but a true humanity that the divine Son assumed. The divine will and the human will of Christ are distinguished and juxtaposed in a Chalcedonian fashion. Therefore Alexandrianism cannot be justifiably used to characterize Barth’s Christology as Waldrop did.

Over and above the aforementioned authors, perhaps it is informative to point out that the famous public debate between Barth and Paul Tillich centred on the appropriation of the formula of Chalcedon. Tillich criticized Barth and Gogarten for placing over-emphasis on the revelation of Jesus as ‘the revelation’ arguing that one can only understand the Christ- event when interpreted symbolically as a revelation which occurs elsewhere like in culture, history and nature. He accused Barth and Gogarten of self-contradiction by their insistence on the non-immediacy of revelation and at the same time placing much emphasis on the fact that revelation in Jesus is a once and for all event. This for him amounted to singling out and objectifying revelation in a particular piece of history. Barth’s response was to go further to insist that whereas revelation and Christ’s humanity must be distinguished, they cannot be separated because that which is revealed in Jesus is a Person who can freely choose to reveal Himself. McCormack quoted him as criticizing Tillich thus: “What is ‘absurd’ from the Christian or *theological* point of view is not at all what Tillich designates to be so- ‘the once and for all’ – which (it) is rather our theological duty to affirm. What is “absurd” is all unreflecting, unclassical, disrespectful deviation from the formula of the Council of Chalcedon. For, to hold quietly to this formula would *mutatis mutandis*, even today, give evidence of insight”<sup>111</sup>. He accused Tillich of opening the door to relativism and dissociated himself from having anything to do with what he called

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<sup>109</sup> H. von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 101.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 323.

“Tower of Babel theology” smacked of Protestant arbitrariness and inventions parading themselves under the banner of ‘theonomy’<sup>112</sup>.

It would be very difficult to see how someone who so criticized Tillich for deviating disrespectfully from Chalcedonian formula would himself easily fall victim to his own criticism, or so people thought. However, when the chips are down, when it comes to maintaining the Chalcedonian consistency especially as it concerns his advancement of his doctrine of election as it affects his doctrine of the trinity, we shall see that Barth was far from being as faithful to Chalcedon as he and people thought he was. We shall see that his identification of the *Logos asarkos* with the *Logos ensarkos* was a subtle affirmation of a sinful God. This was not of course explicit in his work, but that is the logical conclusion of his argument which some of his most faithful followers explicitly arrived at.

## CONCLUSION

Our aim in this chapter has been to show how Karl Barth’s earlier writings presented a problem to the study of Christology through his over emphasis on God as the ‘Wholly Other’. Our overriding interest was to indicate that in spite of such difficulty, the Anglo-Saxon authors were still able to re-direct interest back to the study of his Christology. One person, reading Barth retrospectively through the eyes of his earlier writings, gave a provocative characterization of his Christology as Alexandrian. But the other saw in him a Christology of dialectical juxtaposition where he consciously and deliberately alternates back and forth between Antiochian and Alexandrian idioms in order to be properly Chalcedonian. He is not alone in imputing Chalcedonian character on Barth’s Christology as notable Barthian scholars have all been in agreement that Barth’s Christology is basically Chalcedonian. In the next chapter, we shall focus more specifically on two of the most renowned Anglo-Saxon Barthian scholars (George Hunsinger and Bruce McCormack) and show how their recent researches have helped immensely in the re-discovery of Barth’s Christology. As we shall see, each approached Barth from a completely different perspective from the other, but their basic point of convergence is that a Christological reading of Barth is the key to understanding and appreciating his theology. However, it is the methodologies that they employed which sparked off heated disagreement between them (and among other Anglo-Saxon Barthians) as to the nature of Barth’s Christology. Hunsinger adopted the methodology of considering the thought of Barth as synchronic. Such

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<sup>112</sup> Cf. Ibid.

descriptive approach does not consider any reference to historical context as relevant. McCormack on the other hand preferred to read Barth diachronically. This evolutionary option accommodates a change of language or thought through time. And this accounted for his opting for a “revisionist’s” version of Barth’s doctrine of election while Hunsinger stood firm for a “traditionalist’s” unchanged version. This will be the full focus of Chapter Three of our work. But for now let us consider their different methodologies in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2. THE RE-DISCOVERY OF KARL BARTH'S CHRISTOLOGY IN RECENT ANGLO-SAXON RESEARCHES

#### 2.1. George Hunsinger's synthesis of Barthian theology<sup>113</sup>

##### 2.1.1. Introduction

Karl Barth left behind massive volumes of work that covered a wide-range of themes in theology. Because of the sheer magnitude of his works, people have often tended to approach him from different and often unconnected perspectives depending on how one views him. However, seeking for a single overriding conception to unlock the whole of Barth seems to be not only unattainable, but such attempts in the past was as obscurant of Barth's essential doctrines as the attempts at loci approach which do not look for overall coherence<sup>114</sup>. But the truth of fact still remains that beneath these contrapuntal elephantine volumes of Barth's theology there is a tread running through the whole that connects and fuses them together. This tread could serve as a key for unlocking the riches of his theology. A careful reading of Barth reveals a certain pattern that characterizes the way he does his own theology. This steady pattern is the tread and the key to his theology. But not many writers have identified this pattern. In fact many of them overlook this pattern often because of the stolid and uninspiring nature of Barth's works, and chose rather to approach him from general perspective and focusing on one or the other topic that they are interested in.

George Hunsinger, in departure from these general studies of Barth, set out to identify the key through which the riches of Barth's theology could be unlocked. In his book, '*How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of his Theology*', he identified six themes (or motifs as he calls them) that

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. George HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth. The Shape of his Theology*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1991.

<sup>114</sup> In the prologue to his book under consideration, Hunsinger examined five of the previous works on Barth as examples of how authors in the past had fallen under the pitfall of either trying to look for an overarching formal and/or material principle or thought form which governs the *Church Dogmatics*, or attempting a loci approach which does not look for overall coherence. In the end, he was not satisfied with any of the attempt since none was able to give account of the coherence and internal logic of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. They could not just show how the *Church Dogmatics* combines 'genuine unity with irreducible complexity' tending rather to explain one at the expense of the other. It was precisely to avoid these noticeable inadequacies in the earlier approaches to Barth's theology that he decided to approach it from a somewhat novel line of thought. Instead therefore of looking for a single overriding conception or applying the loci approach with its inherent limitations as have done the authors in the past, he rather chose to unlock the key to Barth's theology through an interrelated set of motifs. These are thought forms or patterns the identification of which he believes is a clue to understanding the shape of Barth's theology.

could serve as that key to Barth's interiority. These six themes are: Actualism, Particularism, Objectivism, Personalism, Realism, and Rationalism. These motifs are not just another loci approach that moves from one topic to the other in a disconnected manner. They are rather thought forms, patterns running through the whole of *Church Dogmatics* and shape the doctrinal content of Barth's theology. Pattern recognition is therefore the point of Hunsinger's proposal so that the ability to recognize the patterns is the key to understanding Barth's theology. But he warned that mere pattern recognition does not translate automatically to Barth's knowledge.

### 2.1.2. The motifs examined

#### 2.1.2. 1. Actualism

By this coinage, Hunsinger means to explain Barth's constant use of what he called "the language of occurrence, happening, event, history, decisions, and act". Barth conceives of truth as an event rather than a static proposition or conceptual abstraction. He means to point out that Barth "thinks primarily in terms of events and relationships rather than monadic or self-contained substances"; and this is so strong in Barth to warrant the whole of his theology to be described as "a theology of active relations"<sup>115</sup>. When Barth says for instance, that God's being is a being in act, he means to say that one cannot describe God in static or inactive terms because God lives in a set of active relations. We relate to God in historical terms, but in this relationship it is the grace of God rather than our own innate capacity which makes it possible. Therefore this theology of active relations is a theology which places emphasis on the grace of God which can only be miraculously bestowed on the creature who intrinsically lacks that capacity.

Hunsinger says this is a frequently recurring pattern in Barth's theology especially in the *Church Dogmatics* and it explains why he says an emphatic 'No' to natural theology. In his estimation, natural theology by pretending that our access to God is not mediated in and through Jesus Christ but rather could be immediately open to us, not miraculous but natural in terms of being at the disposal of our own innate capacity, and not unique in kind but generally given, violates the essential precepts of objectivism, actualism, and particularism. Barth's Christological concentration and his high tolerance for the language of mystery could not just allow him to give natural theology a chance. His theology and natural theology run in opposite directions. The naturalistic conception of our access to God cannot be reconciled with Barth's insistence on

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<sup>115</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 30.

grace, incapacity of creatures and miracle. The motif of actualism is bound up with Barth's use of the terms 'abstract' and 'concrete'. To charge that a theological concept is 'abstract', Barth means that such concept disregards the particularity of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and looks instead to the general principles. In other words, "it is formulated without reference to the nexus of active relations in which God and humanity have their respective modes of being"<sup>116</sup>. On the other hand, a 'concrete' theological proposal is the one that reflects the specific reality of God in Christ which means that "it pays attention to the patterns of God's sovereign activity"<sup>117</sup>. According to this classification, natural theology is an abstract theological proposition.

#### 2.1.2.2. *Particularism*

The general tendency of theologians had been to move from the general to the particular. But Hunsinger by using the word 'Particularism', argues that Barth rather moves in an opposite direction, that is, from particular to the general, maintaining that it is the particular which comes first before the general and not the other way round as is generally believed. Using non-theological ground to explain theological language is likened to a procrustean bed<sup>118</sup> that does devastating damage to the individual. This is precisely why Barth had always been suspicious of using general philosophical concepts or categories to explain theological terms. He believes rather that every theological concept should be explained on the basis of the particular reality of Jesus Christ who is God's act of self-revelation. The possibility of God's revelation can be known only from its actuality. If theology moves away from this particular event attested to by the scripture, then it is inevitably heading towards the disasters of the Procrustean bed. If we then apply ordinary words (as they are generally used) to God, they become grossly inadequate. To understand the meaning of such words as 'love', 'person', 'father', etc., as applied to God, we have to let their particular usages in the scripture teach us, instead of pretending to already know them from the everyday usages of the words.

Barth thinks that it is absurd to think of God on the basis of what we may know about other realities. The unique particularity of God is beyond conceivable analogy hence, the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> A 'procrustean method' is one that relentlessly tries to shape a person, an argument, or an idea to a predetermined pattern. The expression originated from a Greek mythology of a giant called *Damastes* or *Polypemon* but nicknamed *Procrustes* ('The Stretcher') because he would capture his victims and try to force them to fit into his iron bed. If they were longer than the bed, he would cut off their limbs until they fit into the bed. And if they were shorter, he would stretch them to the right size.

impossibility of proceeding from general to particular. To proceed from general to the particular is like fashioning the image of God according to our own image or the image of the world. We take the concepts we already know and apply it to God in a higher sense, forgetting as Hunsinger puts it, that, “God and other realities are separated by an ontological divide”<sup>119</sup>. This ontological divide between God and other realities is of such that gives us no leeway of crossing over to God neither *via negativa* nor *via eminentiae* because, “both remain fatally grounded in that side of the divide which is not God”<sup>120</sup>. The only real possibility of a ‘cross over’ is God crossing over to us by his self-revelation made possible only through his miracle of love and grace and never through our immanent capacity. Thus theological language should be language of mystery. It is this high tolerance of mystery that distinguishes Barth’s theology from other modern theologies, and which brought in the misnomer ‘neo-orthodoxy’ as a qualification of his theology.

### 2.1.2.3. Objectivism

By this third terminology is simply meant that the divine acts of revelation and salvation are mediated by God’s sovereignty through creaturely objects and creaturely sphere. God takes form in the creaturely sphere that can be apprehensible to us, and thereby becomes a genuine object of knowledge. But he still remains hidden even in the midst of revelation. This is the implication of the mediation of the divine truth in Jesus’ incarnation, that God’s identity remains hidden in the midst of revelation and revealed in the midst of hiddenness. Knowledge of God being objective means therefore that its basis lies in God and not in human subjectivity. This is where Schleiermacher and liberal theology got it all wrong, by reducing theology into anthropology. Barth on the other hand is convinced that God’s being is the ground for the assertions of faith about God. God’s being for instance must be Trinitarian in eternity otherwise he wouldn’t have revealed his being as Trinitarian in history. The basis of faith therefore does not lie in itself but in God as revealed in Jesus Christ. “It is not faith”, writes Hunsinger, “which incorporates humanity into Jesus Christ. Faith is rather the acknowledgement of a mysterious incorporation already objectively accomplished on humanity’s behalf”<sup>121</sup>.

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<sup>119</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 71.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

#### 2.1.2.4. *Personalism*

By ‘personalism’, Hunsinger meant to say that Barth balances his objectivist emphasis with a personalist emphasis. Here he emphasizes that God’s self-revelation and salvation come to us in the form of personal address to which we respond as persons. This personal encounter with God is not innate to human nature. Barth insists that this human encounter with God is a mediated one given by grace, and not an immediate one given by nature; it can only take place in and with Jesus Christ who constantly maintains the centre and through whom alone salvation can come to us. No amount of human action detachable from Jesus Christ can make salvation occur. Barth believes that a balance has to be maintained between objective and existential moments of salvation. This is why the personalist motif is brought in to balance the objective motif. And Hunsinger says that this personalist motif is most obvious whenever Barth speaks in terms of ‘I – Thou’ relations thus: “In Jesus Christ (objectivism), God establishes an active, historical relationship with us (actualism), a relationship of love and freedom, and thus a relationship of deepest intimacy (personalism). It is the event of I-Thou relations”<sup>122</sup>. In this event of I-Thou relations, we see that rather than being diametrically opposed to each other, objectivism and personalism exist one for the other. One is the condition which makes the other possible, and the other is the goal which establishes the one. Put clearer, “being incorporated into Jesus Christ is the necessary and sufficient condition of our encounter with God, and personal encounter with God is the necessary and sufficient goal of our incorporation into him”<sup>123</sup>.

The objective and subjective elements should therefore be viewed together and not taken one in isolation from the other. In this way God and humanity would no longer be seen in isolation but in a divine encounter whereby “in Jesus Christ... God does not exist without humanity and... humanity does not exist without God”<sup>124</sup>. Any contrary conception of existence, one without the other, is mere abstraction without any ultimate reality.

However, this last statement of Hunsinger that God does not exist without humanity and vice versa seems to have blurred the distinction between the immanent and the economic trinity, an error which Paul Molnar (who belongs to the traditionalists school of Hunsinger) would later on accuse McCormack of being guilty of, and which in his views, renders God no longer free as he would have been tied perpetually to creation. Hunsinger’s inconsistency is glaring here

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

especially when one observes that in the very next motif (Realism), he rejected what he called “literalism” as a theological language in Barth on the basis of the fact that it undermines the Otherness of God and does not clearly uphold the distinction between the Creator and the creature.

#### 2.1.2.5. *Realism*

This concerns Barth’s interpretation of theological language which he believes, differs from its subject matter by way of analogy<sup>125</sup>. By his insistence on analogy as a theological language, Barth tends to emphasise the incapacity of human language to refer to God. This view differs from what Hunsinger calls ‘literalism’ which maintains that human language is intrinsically capable of referring to God. The difference is that Realism with its way of analogy, allows for the language of mystery and insists that it is through the grace of God that it can go beyond what it is capable of doing naturally, to really refer to God. Literalism on the other hand with its univocal mode of linguistic reference, underestimates God’s otherness thereby not clearly upholding the distinction between the Creator and the creature. Barth’s realism also differs from what Hunsinger refers to as ‘expressivism’ by which he means a mode of referring to God that is basically equivocal, that is, taking theological language as symbolical, incapable of conveying any cognitive information about God.

Barth, according to him, rejected both literalism and expressivism on the basis of the fact that both are inadequate to convey the mystery of God as witnessed by the scripture. While literalism construe biblical narrative as historically factual, expressivism on the other hand construe it as mythological or symbolical or metaphorical. The first is guilty of ‘precritical’ reading of the bible and the second is guilty of ‘critical’ reading. Barth’s realism transcends both and proposes a ‘postcritical’ reading whereby “the results of modern historical criticism were neither simply accepted nor rejected. Rather, even at their most compelling, they were conceived as essentially external to the theological task, for the subject matter of theology was, by definition, categorically beyond their reach”<sup>126</sup>. This postcritical reading of the scripture would enable us to see that biblical narratives are neither factual nor mythological but rather ‘legendary’. They are ‘*saga*’ as Barth would prefer to use the term. They function as witnesses;

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<sup>125</sup> ‘Analogy’ here does not refer to the ‘analogy of being’ which Barth had always opposed as the common error of Catholicism and modern Protestantism. He means rather to insist that theological language is neither literal nor equivocal but grounded in the biblical ‘analogy of faith’.

<sup>126</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 47.

and only as witnesses can biblical narratives such as creation, incarnation and resurrection be understood as real even though inconceivable.

#### 2.1.2.6. Rationalism

Hunsinger uses the term ‘rationalism’ not in its philosophical connotation, but in a very restricted and special case as is peculiar to Barth’s theology especially his view of the relation of faith and reason. Faith is the basis for rational reflection in theology. Such rationalism is internal and not external to faith. It is “reason within the limits of revelation alone”. It means “seeking to understand the content of faith strictly within the limits of faith”<sup>127</sup>. This for him is the meaning of the Anselmean dictum *Fides quaerens intellectum*. Rationalism is a technical word he uses to underscore Barth’s insistence that ‘there is no knowledge without faith’ just as ‘there is no faith without knowledge’. *Fides quaerens intellectum*, in Barth’s understanding, means that faith seeks to understand precisely what it is that we cannot understand. This knowledge of faith is a peculiar kind possible only within the web of Christian belief where there is no neutrality, no speculation, no apologetics, and no system<sup>128</sup>. On the other hand, ‘no faith without knowledge’ underscores the intrinsically rational conception of faith by Barth. Even though faith is more than knowledge, it always includes a cognitive dimension. Here, *fides quaerens intellectum* means ‘faith seeking to understand the implications of the cognitive content intrinsic to faith’. Theology is thus conceived in a coherentist fashion where there are procedures of ‘deriving, grounding, ordering, testing and assimilating’.

According to Hunsinger, these six motifs are the formal patterns that recur regularly in Barth’s theology and they could serve as the key for unlocking the richness of his theology. But he warns that, it is only when these motifs serve to make clearer Barth’s work as categories of discernment could they be useful. On their own they mean nothing. Therefore pattern recognition does not automatically translate to Barth’s understanding, nor does their acceptance or rejection have anything to do with Barth as a theologian. These patterns are instruments of perception and not Barth’s arguments themselves. They can help to shape Barth’s argument at any given point in time, but they do not predict the content of such argument. Barth’s interest is on the subject matter which these patterns help to shape and illuminate, not on the patterns themselves. One

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 49-54.

should therefore not confuse the subject matter with the patterns. In other words, one should go beyond these patterns to the subject matter which they serve as categories of discernment.

### 2.1.3. Jesus Christ as the centre of the motifs

Barth's interest as has been noted earlier is not so much in the motifs as in the subject matter. An object seen through a lens is more important than the lens through which it is seen. One does not discard the object for the lens. On the contrary, the lens is only useful in so far as it helps one see the object clearer. The motifs though not external to the object as in the case of lens but embedded in the object of perception, can nonetheless be likened to a lens. Having identified these categories of discernment, Hunsinger set off to indicate (and this is our great interest) how Jesus Christ is the centre of the motifs. He says of the motifs in relation to Jesus Christ:

“They are all descriptive of him. With him in mind they are meant to be instructive and thought-provoking. Without him they are meant to be nothing. They are of no interest in and of themselves, but only as they point to him. Only as they point to him are they meant to be used; but if they do point to him, and thereby enlarge the understanding and devotion of faith, it is thought to be enough”.<sup>129</sup>

The foundational motifs of realism and rationalism, with their views of truth as correspondence and coherence respectively, finally centre on Jesus Christ. He is the centre of the scripture and therefore the centre of the realist motif. Since realism allows for analogical reference in its method of reading the scripture, such realistic language of scripture is according to Hunsinger, “the indispensable vehicle of reference to the risen Christ”<sup>130</sup>. In the same way, the rationalist motif finds its centre in Jesus Christ. He is its centre because, “he is regarded as the Word and therefore the rationality of God”<sup>131</sup>. It is on the basis of the fact that Jesus Christ is the rationality of God that “faith must seek understanding” and “that doctrines may legitimately be derived and tested”. We use our power of reason because God addresses us as rational creatures in him<sup>132</sup>.

As it is with the foundational motifs of realism and rationalism, so it is with the structural motifs of actualism and particularism. As structural motifs, they do not stand on their own; they

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>132</sup> Cf. Ibid.

rather permeate and structure the other motifs. They govern truth as event and as unique in kind. Actualism is the motif that holds truth as event or history. When we talk about event or history, we are talking about the history of God-made-man in Jesus Christ which is a miracle of God. But that history is not confined to the archive of the past; it is still happening and it will continue to happen otherwise Jesus Christ would have been a dead prophet who lived centuries ago. But the fact is that Jesus Christ is a crucified and resurrected Son of God who will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. Barth maintains that the existence of Jesus Christ is act, and that “it is being in spontaneous actualization”<sup>133</sup>. This actualization in Jesus Christ as attested to in Scripture is both creative and creaturely in the Chalcedonian fashion of two natures meeting in one person without separation or division and without confusion or change.

The other structural motif is particularism which allows for the language of mystery. Here again we see Jesus Christ occupying the centre of particularist motif because he is the mystery of God. In fact, that Jesus Christ is the Word became flesh is the ultimate mystery which can never be ‘de-mystified’ in the sense of rendering it a non-mystery. This ultimate mystery is “absolutely the sole point in which the New Testament witness originates”, and, “no ‘higher vantage point’ is to be sought, because none is to be found”<sup>134</sup>. Theological language must therefore be determined by this unique object, and from this particular we can now move to the general. We don’t begin from abstract general concept or idea. All theological concepts like God, eternity, grace, humanity etc. can only find their significance from the particular name of Jesus Christ through which (and only through which) all can be explained. Any attempt at independent explanation of such concepts or ideas devoid of the name of Jesus Christ, cannot be allowed.

The last two motifs, objectivism and personalism, are the freestanding motifs and they bear the essential content of Barth’s theology. One is the centre and the other is the periphery. One takes place for the sake of the other, and the other presupposes the one. Objectivism indicates truth as mediated and, being the decisive locus of revelation and salvation, it is the centre. On the other hand, personalism indicates truth as encounter and, though at the periphery and not the decisive locus of revelation and salvation, yet it is not excluded but included. It is the periphery of the centre. The point Hunsinger is trying to make is that as in the case of the other motifs, the two freestanding motifs of objectivism and personalism finally centre on Jesus Christ. He is the mediator of the truth of God. It is through his revelation that the incomprehensibility of

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<sup>133</sup> CD IV/3, 40.

<sup>134</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *How to Read Karl Barth*, p. 231.

God is made comprehensible to us even in his hiddenness i.e. we come to know God not directly but indirectly through Jesus Christ. This objectivist motif is complemented by the personalist motif; and from the standpoint of the latter, Jesus Christ as the Word become flesh means that it is a declaration that encounters us as a personal address in an I-Thou relationship to which we must respond to the question it posits to us. At the heart of this encounter is the cross which is a sign of contradiction that shatters all human self-sufficiency, but which we must recognize through prayer as indeed very effective.

We have seen how the six motifs which serve as the synthesis of Barth's theology according to Hunsinger, all have Jesus Christ as their centre. The following rather long quotation from Hunsinger could serve as the recapitulation of his argument:

“... As the living reality to whom his scriptural depiction analogically points, and as the divine rationality by whom the understanding sought by faith is warranted, Jesus Christ is the centre of the foundational motifs. As the event of the absolute miracle of grace and as the absolute mystery of its content, Jesus Christ is the centre of the structural motifs. And as the objective Mediator of revelation and salvation, in whom the truth of God may be known and the reality of humanity found, and as the Word of personal address encountered in fellowship, attested in witness and appropriated by prayer, he is the centre of the freestanding motifs. Realism, rationalism, actualism, particularism, objectivism, and personalism, as they shape Karl Barth's theology, are directed toward Christ the centre”<sup>135</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The novelty in Hunsinger's approach does not lie so much in his evolution of a thought pattern or set of motifs as in how he inextricably tied these motifs to Jesus Christ as their centre. It is this Christological summation of the motifs and by implication the whole of Barth's theology that could serve as the major contribution of Hunsinger to Barthian studies. From now on, it would be impossible to read any aspect of Barth's theology in isolation from Christology. If the whole of his theology come under the motifs and the motifs all have Christ as their centre, it follows therefore that any reading of Barth that is not Christocentric is not only inadequate but obscurant. However, one pitfall in Hunsinger's synchronic approach to Barth's thoughts is that it renders Barth's study static and monadic. Even if pattern recognition does not translate

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., p. 233.

automatically to Barth's understanding, the fact that these patterns or motifs are instruments of perception makes one wonder whether objects seen through a prism is clearer than objects seen directly. The prism is already a limitation factor in the perception of an object. When the great debate about the relation of the trinity and election in Barth's theology begins, Hunsinger would not notice when the train had already left one station and is heading to another station because he is transfixed by his invented motifs. His lack of historical interest makes him not to notice that Barth has always been flexible in his theology and kept on revising and modifying his thoughts. Hunsinger's rigidity concerning the priority of the trinity over election would though prove to be a better theological option, but to have projected that rigidity unto Barth is a misreading of Barth which McCormack (thanks to his diachronic approach) would critically correct, even though both McCormack's and Barth's positions are seen as not biblically and theologically acceptable.

## **2.2. Bruce McCormack's periodization of Karl Barth's theological evolution (1909-1936)**

### **2.2.1. Introduction**

The standard theological opinion has for long been to distinguish between two 'conversions' or 'turning points' in the theological evolution of Karl Barth. The first is incontestably his rebellion against liberalism into which he was brought up. This culminated with the dialectical theology of the second edition of *Der Römerbrief* in 1922. This is popularly known as the "early Barth". The second conversion according to this opinion, saw Barth rebelling against his own rebellion by replacing the dialectical method with a new orthodoxy in the *Church Dogmatics* from 1932-1965. This period of Barth's theological development is known as the "later Barth". Hans Urs von Balthasar is the first and the chief proponent of this second turning point in Barth's theology, calling it a 'turn to analogy'. For many years to come, this Balthasarian interpretation of a sharp distinction between the early Barth and the latter Barth which is characterized by a turn from dialectics to analogy was to go unchallenged. Balthasar had argued that Barth abandoned dialectical theology in his 1931 little book on Anselm and replaced it with an *analogia fidei* in the *Church Dogmatics* that gradually shifted from the central concept "Word of God" and concentrated on the central concept "Jesus Christ, God and Man". This paradigm suggests that there is more of a radical discontinuity or a 'radical change' rather than continuity in the development of Barth's theology between *Der Römerbrief* period and the beginning of the *Church Dogmatics* in 1932. No thanks to this purported turn to analogy, Barth has been classified as representing the neo-orthodox theology dominant between the 1930s to the 1960s.

In order however to impugn that charge of neo-orthodoxy levelled against Barth, Bruce McCormack set out to challenge that age-long reading of Barth in the light of Balthasar's thesis of a turn to analogy. He argued that there was never such a turn, but that Barth remained what he called "a critically realistic dialectical theologian"<sup>136</sup> throughout his life. And as Bourguine would opine, "McCormack shows that a progressive Christological concentration determines the evolution of his (Barth's) theology". And that "this occurred once he found an adequate basis for the knowability of God in Chalcedonian Christology"<sup>137</sup>.

It is this progressive Christological concentration in Barth's theological development which McCormack exposes that captured our interest to use him (McCormack) as a case study of how Anglo-Saxon authors have contributed to the re-discovery of Barth's Christology. As we shall see, his approach is quite different from that of Hunsinger that was earlier examined. Whereas Hunsinger was not interested in the biography of Karl Barth but rather sought to develop a set of interlocking and interrelated motifs that characterize how Barth does his theology, McCormack journeyed through an intellectual biography that has the advantage of combining the exposition of Barth's theology with the historical factors that gave rise and condition such theology. In the process, he identified four evolutions that mark Barth's theological development between the periods 1909- 1936. The first could be located in 1915 with his break with liberalism. Between that period and January 1920, what emerged in Barth's theology was a form of dialectical theology that was controlled by what he called "a process eschatology"<sup>138</sup>. Here could be located the *Romans* I. The second evolution, according to him, occurred at the beginning of the 1920 with a shift in his eschatology that saw him moving from a process eschatology to what he called 'a consistent' or thoroughgoing eschatology which necessitated the revision of the *Romans* commentary giving rise to *Romans* II. The third happened around May 1924 with a passage from eschatological foundation to Christological foundation. But as yet, his theology cannot be said to be governed by a 'Christological concentration'. This period corresponds to the period of *Göttingen Dogmatics*. The fourth and final evolution saw to a shift from pneumatocentric concentration to a Christological concentration as a result of his revision of the doctrine of election which started in 1936. McCormack applied a diachronic methodology that allows him to move front and back in Barth's theology.

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<sup>136</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. vii.

<sup>137</sup> B. BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 181.

<sup>138</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 21.

The advantage of this method over against Hunsinger's synchronic method is that one is able to "pick up" what Barth "forgot" as an oversight and voice out what he ought to have said but for occasional "lapse" in concentration. The full advantage of this methodology would become evident when we discuss in chapter three the debate on the subject of the relation of the trinity to election in Barth's theology. But already from this chapter, McCormack will introduce what would become the controverted point of the debate.

### 2.2.2. Break with Liberalism and the emergence of a Process Eschatology

In chapter one of our work, we dealt extensively with Karl Barth's early influences and especially his formation in the protestant liberalism of his day as represented by Herrmann and Harnack. These great teachers of his were Schleiermacherians to the core, and from them Barth was himself converted to Schleiermacher. We also saw how the betrayal of his teachers with the role they played during the First World War led Barth to question the authenticity and sustainability of liberal theology. Schleiermacher who was his greatest ally then became his greatest adversary. Consequently, he had to abandon liberalism in search of a new starting-point for theology.

We shall presume here these remote factors that led Barth to search for a new starting-point for theological reflection and go straight to what I may term the immediate factors. And I am talking here of Barth's encounter with Christoph Blumhardt in April 1915. It was from Blumhardt that Barth's attention was directed toward the theme of eschatology. He noticed that the man took God very seriously, teaching his followers to expect God's activity. Stephen Webb described Blumhardt as a man who "preached an eschatological version of Christianity, which was at one time biblical, realistic, and socialistic"; and that "his nonpietistic outlook could be even more critical of the established order than socialism"<sup>139</sup>. According to McCormack, a year after Barth met Blumhardt he wrote what he found so interesting in him, saying that Blumhardt always began right away with God's presence, might, and purpose, that he starts out from God, that he does not begin by climbing upwards to Him by means of contemplation and deliberation. He concluded by saying that God is the end, and that because we already know Him as the beginning, we may await His consummating acts<sup>140</sup>.

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<sup>139</sup> Stephen H. WEBB, *Re-figuring Theology. The Rhetoric of Karl Barth*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1991, p. 63.

<sup>140</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 123.

With this eschatological bent in his thinking, ethical question of ‘what should we do?’ was seen as problematic since this world as we know it is passing away. Of what use is it to construct an ethical question on the ground of a world that is passing away? This ethical question that is characteristic of protestant liberalism, gradually gave way to the question of knowledge of God which became central in his new theology. According to McCormack, it is exactly at this point that in principle we can say that Barth has completed his break with liberalism and Marburg theology and begun a new starting described as critically realistic.

This new starting point places God in a critical distinction from the world, and theology is thought to begin from the standpoint of God Himself completely lying beyond this world. Therefore instead of a ‘turn to the subject’ characteristic of the nineteenth century theology, Barth chose a new course which is “a turn to theological objectivism”<sup>141</sup>. With this new starting-point, McCormack says Barth became critical of religion and came to see it as “essentially profane... belonging to the world of human possibilities resident in history and as such, hemmed in on all sides by error and confusion”<sup>142</sup>. As a pious feeling prone to error, religion is different from *Sache* which is not a feeling but an objective *fact*. Even though Religion points to it, but it is greater and clearer than religion. That *Sache*, that *fact*, is the Kingdom of God. He calls religion a *symptom* or a *sign* of this *fact*, but nonetheless, not the only one (he named socialism as even a more important sign). According to him, it (religion) is “one of its reflections in the very imperfect mirror of the human soul, human institutions, and experiments”<sup>143</sup>.

Latter he was to become very negative about religion calling it an exercise in self-delusion because we strive to use our unrighteous will to seek to penetrate the righteous will of God that is a ‘wholly other’ will than we know. Such exercise is an attempt to domesticate God. From this point of view, the religious man can be said to be “a sinner in the clearest sense of the word, for he does what he cannot and dare not do. He establishes a relationship between himself and God, and thus he sets himself over against God”<sup>144</sup>. The only way to come to a correct relation to the righteousness of God is not by ‘doing’ but by ‘being still’, allowing God to speak to us. The righteousness of God can only be revealed within the framework of conscience alone. The righteous will of God can only come to us from God alone and this is the way of faith not of

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>144</sup> H. von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 54.

religion. It was from this point that Barth focused his theological theme on the oft- seeming tautological statement that ‘God is God’.

It is within this period of Barth’s diastatic distinction between God and humanity that we can situate the theology of Romans I. Having broken with the theology they inherited from their teachers, Barth and his friend Eduard Thurneysen decided from June 1916 to systematize their own new-found theology. This led Barth to an aggressive and exegetical study of St. Paul’s epistle to the Romans. The product of such study was a new theology in the form of a commentary. According to McCormack, that new theology “represented an assault on the central feature of the late nineteenth-century bourgeois culture: the understanding of the human individual as the creative subject of culture and history (and even of her own being and worth)”<sup>145</sup>. Barth believed that it was the divisive individualism that gave rise to class warfare and the world war. The alternative was for him to posit “a divine universalism”<sup>146</sup>, that is, the God who is qualitatively distinct, whole and complete in Himself, and who judges the whole of creation.

In insisting that ‘world remains world but God is God’, Barth encountered the problem of how to reconcile how these two realities (God and the world) could relate and at the same time maintain the qualitative distinction between them. The solution to this riddle lies according to him, in the relation of eschatology to history. To discover such relation, he distinguished between what he called ‘so-called history’ and ‘real history’. ‘So-called history’ is the world history with observable past, present and future. This is the human history arising from the fall of humanity from the original state of grace. With that fall came suffering and death. Human beings can restore that original relationship to God through obedience to the Law. But there is always this tension arising from effort to transcend what is to what ought to be. In this sense we can say that ‘so-called history’ is “the history of a rift – a split between ideal and life”<sup>147</sup>. This is distinguished from ‘real history’ where this split is overcome and healed. This is the history of God, the world of God.

The relationship between the two histories (or the two worlds) is such that the new world takes place within the old world. They interpenetrate one another. Thus in Barth’s thinking ‘real history’ which is the Kingdom of God is present in ‘so-called history’, that is, history as we know

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<sup>145</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 141.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

it. But despite the presence, he still maintains a distinction in their relationship, describing the entrance of ‘real history’ into ‘so-called history’ as “the irruption of the power of God from above, cutting through history ‘longitudinally’”<sup>148</sup>. This irruption takes place in such a way that though in history, it is still independent of history in the sense that it is not bounded by chronologically successive time of before and after. It occurred in space and time, yet does not belong to space and time. It rather takes place in the “‘now-time’ or ‘fulfilled time’ in which time as we know it is brought to a standstill”<sup>149</sup>. He insists that in spite of the fundamental difference between ‘real history’ and ‘so-called history’, there is still a real relation between them. One does not set aside the other.

Barth’s insistence on a special kind of relation of ‘real history’ and ‘so-called history’ is intended to put ‘real history’ which is the action of God in history beyond the prying eye of historical criticism. The history of incarnation is not a historical event even though it occurred in history. It is the history of reconciliation in which Christ created and inaugurated a new world and rediscovered a life of immediacy to God. This reconciliation is a “cosmic reconciliation” having the entire world as beneficiaries of Christ’s redemptive reconciliatory act. This is what McCormack called *Objective Soteriology*<sup>150</sup> and it was directed against religious individualism of Protestant Liberalism. With this process set in motion, we see a gradual realization of the Kingdom of God in history. Michael Beintker described *Romans I* as a book “stamped by a process eschatology which clearly maintains no direct continuity between the Kingdom of God and the world but know of a history of God which breaks through secretly out of the history of the death of this world”<sup>151</sup>. With this secret breakthrough of God into human history, God thereby “planted a seed in us which must grow” and this growth is “an organic growth of the individual in faith, knowledge of God and righteousness”<sup>152</sup>. This knowledge of God is participatory in which God speaks and human beings hear. But the ability to hear God is given by God and not a possession of the human subject. God makes himself known in Christ, and it is in him that knowledge of God is realized.

The central motive of Barth in the first edition of *Romans* which was the first apparition of his new theology was to propound a theological realism that is conditioned by eschatology.

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

But as Boyd rightly noted, “this eschatology is emphatically not about hope for this world as such. It is hope for the new world of God which is distinguished radically from our world. Even if the new world is to grow in the midst of this world ‘organically’, this world as such is already finished with. The divine flood-tide will tear it to pieces (*zerreißen*)”<sup>153</sup>. Already from the First *Romans* we have started noticing the estrangement between the demand of the Kingdom of God and the ethical and political programmes of this world. This estrangement was to definitively culminate in *Romans* II as we shall see shortly. But meanwhile, Balthasar describes the form of eschatology found in *Romans* I as a “‘dynamic eschatology’, the irreversible movement from a doomed temporal order to a new living order ruled by God, the total restoration (*apokatastasis*) of the original, ideal creation in God”<sup>154</sup>. Through this ‘dynamic eschatology’, he hoped to overcome the shortcomings of liberalism that grounded theology in the human subject. Knowledge of God can only come from God alone; and Christ’s work of reconciliation is outside the capacity of historical investigation just as faith cannot be reduced to an empirical or psychological scrutiny. However, Barth’s theology at any point in time was always in the state of development and modification. Hardly had he evolved his process eschatology of *Romans* I than it gradually started giving way to the consistent eschatology that would be the hallmark of *Romans* II.

### 2.2.3. *Romans* II and the Consistent Eschatology

The political unrest and chaos in the aftermath of the war that ended in November 1918 influenced in no small measure Barth’s theological thinking. His friend Thurneysen suggested that in the wake of all the strikes by workers and government obstinacy, it was better to think of the Kingdom of God consistently as “other” and keep their hope pure from all democratic and other “preliminary stages”<sup>155</sup>. Barth was convinced that there must be some inner connection between the world of the contemporary events and the Kingdom of God, but as the drama of the strike unfolded, he became more and more disillusioned about seeing such an organic connection between the two worlds. Gradually he began to distance himself from religious socialism, convincing himself that, “Pacifism and social democracy do not represent the kingdom of God, but the old kingdom of man in new forms. The criticisms and protests... which they sling against

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<sup>153</sup> Ian R. BOYD, *Dogmatics Among the Ruins. German Expressionism and the Enlightenment as Contexts for Karl Barth’s Theological Development*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2004, p. 71.

<sup>154</sup> H. von BALTHASAR, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 48.

<sup>155</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 187-188.

the course of the world history are of this world; they are born of need, and are no use”<sup>156</sup>. His search for an organic connection between the world of God and the human world led him in his Tambach lecture of 25 September 1919<sup>157</sup> to posit that the world of God has an opening towards the society only from the movement of God, that is, we cannot move from here to there but God moves from there to here. We cannot go to God but God can come to us. God comes to us “perpendicularly from above”<sup>158</sup> by cutting through our history through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, thus revealing the eternal life of God.

But the central problem of Romans II became: how can God make Himself known to human beings without ceasing - at any point in the process of Self-communication – to be the Subject of revelation?<sup>159</sup> Two factors namely, limits of human knowledge and divine election, made the knowledge of God problematic in Barth’s view. Having been schooled in Kantianism with its insistence that theoretical knowledge is limited to the intuitable, he soon noticed a crack somewhere as far as human knowledge of God was concerned. If God makes Himself an object of intuition by human beings, then it implies that He will somehow be liable to the control and manipulation of human *a priori* categories. If this happens, then it will become clear that human beings have taken over, becoming the master in the relation between God and human beings, and God is no longer God. Yet the issue of divine election makes God the subject of election who elects to reveal Himself and make Himself known by human beings. Because of the precision with which he formulated this problem that was already there right from the period he turned to the ‘wholly other’ God theology, “Barth” according to McCormack, “abandoned the process eschatology of Romans I in favour of a radically futurist ‘consistent’ eschatology according to which the Kingdom of God is understood as that which brings about ‘the dissolution of all things, the cessation of all becoming, the passing away of this world’s time’”<sup>160</sup>. Or as Bourguine puts it, Barth made a shift in his eschatology “leading to accentuation of the ‘not yet’, to the point of appearing to reduce to silence the ‘already’ of salvation”<sup>161</sup>. Put in another way, the rewriting of the commentary to the Romans completed the estrangement of the demands of God’s Kingdom and the worldly ethical and political demands. In the ensuing *Romans II*, Barth according to

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. E. BUSCH, *Karl Barth*, p. 101.

<sup>157</sup> For a full account of the Tambach lecture cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 195-202.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>161</sup> B. BOURGINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 181.

Boyd, “replaced his organological conceptuality with the idea of the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between God and the world”<sup>162</sup>.

A number of factors and influences combined to lead Barth to a more consistent eschatology of *Romans II* from a process eschatology of *Romans I*. Perhaps in the order of importance, his philosopher-brother Heinrich Barth exercised a greater influence in re-shaping his understanding of Plato and Kant. The younger Barth, Heinrich, was also brought up in Marburg neo-Kantian school of Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. But he was a critical follower of that school. Against Cohen and his neo-Kantianism who argue that reality is itself the product of the knowing process and not an external reality, thus grounding human thinking in itself, Heinrich argued that “what was required was a more original grounding of the subject and its objects in a non-given, absolutely superior, objective Reality which is ‘fundamentally removed from the psychological sphere; indeed, from the given reality generally’”<sup>163</sup>. He identified this wholly transcendent Reality as God and argued that for philosophy to be truly critical, it must turn to this Reality and not turning to the self as Cohen had been teaching. This Reality which grounds knowledge according to him is non-given. It was this element of non-givenness that captured the interest of his elder brother Karl who after listening to his Aarau lecture in March 1919 expressed his impression of the lecture to Thurneysen by saying that Heiner’s lecture has become for him an impetus to keep much more powerfully in view the *totaliter aliter* of the Kingdom of God<sup>164</sup>.

Franz Overbeck was probably the most unlikely influence on Karl Barth’s theology. Being a self-professed atheist and a great friend of Nietzsche “whom one only had to mention in Basle at that time to make everyone’s hair stand on end”<sup>165</sup>, one would simply ask “what indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?”<sup>166</sup> Indeed, where other theologians believed that Athens has nothing whatsoever to do with Jerusalem; where they saw Overbeck as simply having nothing positive to contribute to Christianity, Barth saw in him a “Melchizedek” of their day<sup>167</sup>, as

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<sup>162</sup> I. BOYD, *Dogmatics Among the Ruins*, p. 71.

<sup>163</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 218.

<sup>164</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>165</sup> E. BUSCH, *Karl Barth*, p. 115.

<sup>166</sup> This question, “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” is the famous question of the relation between reason and faith posed by Tertullian, with Athens representing reason, and Jerusalem standing for faith, respectively. ‘Fideism’ is the name given to the school of thought (to which Tertullian himself was said to have belonged) which views faith as not only being in some sense independent of, but also opposed to reason. It argues that reason is unnecessary and inappropriate for the justification of religious beliefs such as arguing for the existence of God. However, I use the expression here metaphorically and not analogically.

<sup>167</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 227.

somewhat “a heroic Christian”<sup>168</sup>. Overbeck had written that Christianity had reached a dead end since it had deviated from the original true essence of Christianity which is eschatological. Christianity’s entrance into the world and culture is a denial of that original faith. He thought of theology therefore as corrupt and false. Barth quickly saw something positive here, comparing Overbeck with Blumhardt. For him, both men present the same message, that Christianity is essentially eschatological. But whereas Blumhardt presented his message positively, Overbeck presented his’ negatively, confronting the world with “a great either-or: either history or Christianity”<sup>169</sup>. The concept of ‘Historical’ Christianity is therefore absurd since both concepts preclude each other. He argued that history says nothing about Christianity since Christianity is not of this world; it even contradicts the world. Christianity lies somewhere beyond history and transcends historical time. He calls this abode “primal history” (*Urgeschichte*)<sup>170</sup>, and says ironically that only those with ‘cats’ eyes’ can find their way in the darkness of this primal region. This *Urgeschichte* belongs to the ‘pre-historical time’; it is ‘originating history’<sup>171</sup> and as such one cannot use the normal historical principles to evaluate it. Because of this, he accuses church history as being by necessity a degenerative process because it is involved in history; it is “based on a compromise with the vicissitude of time”<sup>172</sup>, whereas true Christianity should consist of the expectation of the Kingdom of God. He waited in great expectation for the continuous fading away of Christianity.

Overbeck’s intention was of course to discredit Christianity’s continued existence in time as something absurd since the earliest Christians expected the immediate end of the world. But Barth saw in him “a reluctant theologian who, by destroying church history, actually provides possibilities for the liberation of true Christianity”<sup>173</sup>. Busch puts it that Barth was of the view that, “Overbeck, with his radical criticism of Christianity, has seen very accurately ‘the negative side of the point which has now to be dealt with positively’”<sup>174</sup>. To deal positively with the negative side is to work to liberate Christianity by making theology to focus on eschatology, speaking of that unknown and unknowable world of God. This was exactly what Barth did, and by doing so, turned completely to a consistent eschatology which is the hallmark of Romans II.

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<sup>168</sup> S.WEBB, *Re-figuring Theology. The Rhetoric of Karl Barth*, p. 64.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>170</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 228.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>172</sup> S. WEBB, *Re-figuring Theology*, p. 64.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> E. BUSCH, *Karl Barth*, p. 115.

He was convinced that a Christianity which is not eschatological has absolutely nothing to do with Christ. His intention was not to be anti-historical in the ordinary sense of the word. He rather wishes to speak of a revelation which occurred *in* history but was not *of* history.

Søren Kierkegaard was another influence on Barth as he moved from a process eschatology to a consistent eschatology. Though he read Kierkegaard's *The Moment* as early as 1909, it did not make a serious impression on him. Busch quoted him as having said of Kierkegaard that he only entered his thinking seriously, and more extensively, in 1919, at the critical turning-point between the first and second editions of his *Romans*; and that after that he could be seen in a more important role in his other literary works<sup>175</sup>. But McCormack wouldn't want to overestimate the importance of Kierkegaard as a decisive influence on Barth in this phase of his theological evolution. He agreed with Michael Beintker that most of the conceptual building-blocks needed to produce the characteristic shape of dialectic of *Romans II* were already in place before his encounter with Kierkegaard<sup>176</sup>. In fact most of these conceptual building-blocks were acquired through his reception of his brother's (Heinrich's) philosophy. However, this does not mean that Kierkegaard contributed nothing to the theology of *Romans II*. According to him, "from Kierkegaard, Barth learned above all a style of communication ('indirect communication') and an attitude (the attitude of the critic of Christianity as a religion). And the Kierkegaardian understanding of the paradoxicality of the incarnation certainly provided Barth with ample ammunition for stressing the incomprehensibility of a revelation which can take place only as a divine possibility and never as a human possibility"<sup>177</sup>. It is in the light of the incomprehensibility of revelation, the 'impossible possibility of faith'<sup>178</sup>, that Barth casts the theology of *Romans II*.

#### 2.2.3.1. *Knowledge of God in Romans II*

In the theology of *Romans II*, Barth maintains the knowledge of God as the central theme of the new edition, but in trying to maintain a consistent eschatology, he developed a diastasis motif which thereafter governed the edition. This accounted for the radical and one-sidedness of the book that is also anti-metaphysical in the sense that he rejects the order of knowing which starts from observable phenomena to the positing of a First Cause. The style of the book is quite

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<sup>175</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>176</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 237.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 240.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

different from the earlier edition. According to McCormack, “what makes the style of *Romans II* distinctive is the tone of anger with which it is written; its proclivity for ‘indirect communication’ (i.e. a Kierkegaardian form of communication which seeks not so much to convince the reader of an argument as it does to clear away obstacles to the Spirit’s work of making her to be a witness to the truth); and paradoxical forms of expression (e.g. ‘through faith, we are what we are not’)”<sup>179</sup>. His reversal of the order of knowing saw him starting not from observed phenomena from below, but rather directly from above, from God’s self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This, of course, is with the conviction that the process of knowing determines what one knows. If one begins directly from God above, one would know God, but if one chooses to begin from below as was the case with the theology of his time, what one will inevitably arrive at is the “‘No-God’ of this world in whom is mirrored the disorderliness of the human soul”<sup>180</sup>; a No-God which is a construct of the human mind taken as something in contrast to another something. This type of ‘God’ is not the ‘Wholly Other’ God which is qualitatively distinct from any human imagination of Him. It is not the ‘Unknown God’ revealed to the Jews and made known to the Gentiles. It is rather a No-God fashioned in the image and likeness of human beings and subjected under their whims and caprices. He is vehement in locating God beyond any conceptuality that we might have of Him. God is simply beyond our grasp. He is Unknown and unknowable because He “lies on the far side of the ‘line of death’”<sup>181</sup> which separates the world from eternity.

If this absolute impossibility of the knowledge of God stands as Barth would have it stand, then the problem becomes how God can then be known since he is not only Unknown but unknowable. This is the question that *Romans II* tackled. Barth insists that knowledge of God is possible only through one channel – God Himself. There is no human possibility of the knowledge of God, but there is a divine possibility through miracle. There is ‘the impossible possibility’ of faith whose possibility lies not in human capacity but in God. It is God who makes Himself known, but in doing so, he remains God even in his revelation and cannot be said to be directly given to our perception by way of entering into our secure possession. If this were to be so, the implication is that God is then reduced to a creaturely reality, and worse still, to a reality whose being is ebbled because it is under our web. Barth’s insistence that God is God means that even in the form of a revealed man Jesus Christ, God is still qualitatively distinct from the world; he is God before, during and after revelation. The man Jesus Christ whom he said is the medium

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 243-244.

<sup>180</sup> K. BARTH, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 189.

<sup>181</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 248.

of revelation and not the revelation per se, makes the Unintuitable God intuitable but in such a way that it does not involve a change in the Unintuitable. McCormack quoted Rusche as saying that, “For this reason, Barth’s theology knows of no Jesuology; rather it is decidedly Christology. Christ is the wholly other in Jesus, the revelation of God in Jesus, the ‘truth from beyond the grave’, the ‘arrow from the other shore’”<sup>182</sup>.

The statement that Jesus Christ is the medium of revelation can be misleading. As we saw in the last chapter, it was precisely such statements as this that Waldrop argued is the backbone of the interpreters of Barth’s Christology as Antiochian. But McCormack would not subscribe to such statements without qualifications. He claims that what is nearer to Barth’s intention is that Jesus of Nazareth as a historical figure is not even the medium of revelation but rather the veil of revelation. It is in Jesus Christ that the true mystery of God becomes apparent. In him, God makes Himself known as the Unknown. Through the veil, he makes His unknown thinkable, but the veil does not thereby become a medium through which God is seen as such. Revelation still remains critically distinct from medium. He says that strictly speaking, revelation for Barth is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event which he insists is “unhistorical” in the sense that it is not subjected to time else it becomes limited. Resurrection (and therefore, revelation) occurred *in* history but it is not *of* history. There is a gulf existing between the historical and the unhistorical. That chasm that separates history from eternity (and therefore history from eschatology and humanity from God) is impossible to bridge from our side. It is only from the side of God that it could become superable. Knowledge of God therefore can only be possible from the side of God. And it is in the event of the cross that the unintuitable becomes intuitable.

It is paradoxical that it is in the negation of the cross, in God-abandonment on the cross, that God’s revelation is fully manifested. McCormack says: “in the dialectic of veiling and unveiling which occurs in the cross and the resurrection, Barth sees the actualization of a relationship of correspondence between the hidden God and the death of this man in God-abandonment”<sup>183</sup>. This relationship is such that the event of the cross becomes therefore “the parable of the Kingdom” in the sense that through the cross “is revealed the fact that the Kingdom of God is realized only through the negation of all human, historical, temporal possibilities” because it lies “on the other side of the ‘line of death’ which separates eschatology

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<sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 250.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

from history”<sup>184</sup>. This negation of all human possibilities safeguards the distance between humanity and God. But a relation is established in the event of revelation, a relation that must be established again and again, and, thanks to that relation, we really can *know* God.

The point Barth is making here is that knowledge of God which is a human impossibility, is a divine possibility. But the time-eternity dialectic he used to establish this, gives room for misunderstanding his work as nothing short of theological scepticism regarding the knowledge of God. Some argue that Barth was a thoroughgoing sceptic when it comes to the knowledge of God, and that his emphasis on the diastasis of time and eternity does not lead to knowledge of biblical God but to a God without content. This of course, makes incarnation problematic. We dealt with such problematic in the previous chapter. McCormack while acknowledging that there is a foundation in Barth’s thinking for such misunderstanding, however argues that Barth insisted on using the time-eternity dialectic despite the fact that it is prone to misunderstanding because of not only the fact of its obvious effectiveness in negating all human possibilities, but also because of the fact of its positive function of bearing witness to a theological state of affairs. If you subject eternity to time, then it ceases to be eternity and becomes temporal. Eternity cannot therefore become time, but it can encounter time. In the same manner, we must preserve that critical distinction between revelation and the medium of revelation. If the two are identified as one, that is, if God who is the content of revelation becomes at the same time the medium in which He veils Himself, then He ceases to be God. Moreover, McCormack argues further that Barth could not have been so much aware of the inadequacy of the time-eternity dialectic as a tool for explaining his new theology since he was only interested in letting his eschatology be taken serious. He says Barth took the time-eternity dialectic only as an “apparatus” bearing witness to the subject- matter, and that the apparatus should not therefore be identified with the subject-matter which is the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in revelation.

#### 2.2.3.2. *Dialectics of Romans II*

Apart from the time-eternity dialectics, McCormack distinguishes four types of dialectics at work in *Romans II* and says it is necessary to put the time-eternity dialectic in perspective in order to understand these other dialectics. These dialectics are: The Adam- Christ dialectic, the dialectic of Veiling and Unveiling, the dialectical method and the dialectic of life. The Adam-Christ dialectic signifying the old fallen world and the new world can make meaning in the

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

context of time-eternity. The old world of Adam is a historical world of time, people, and things, which cannot stand alongside the new world of Christ which in itself is “unhistorical” and eternal, but which paradoxically is the “real reality”. There is no genuine movement back and forth between the two worlds, but there is only a single genuine movement that has taken place in eternity and not in time. Such a movement was accomplished by the act of resurrection of Jesus from the dead, an act that brought about our redemption from the original fallen state of humankind. This is an eternal dialectic, the “reality” per se. This is revelation which occurred ‘in time’ from the standpoint of God.

But in revealing himself, God conceals himself in a creaturely medium. There is dialectic of veiling and unveiling. The encounter between God and humanity did not diminish the ‘infinite qualitative difference’ between God and the world. The unveiling occurs through the veil. And as McCormack puts it: “God chooses where and when the veil becomes transparent and faith is created”<sup>185</sup>. So strong is this dialectic of veiling and unveiling that McCormack would place it over and above all the other dialectics at work in *Romans II* in the order of importance. And this includes even the so-called ‘dialectical method’ of pitting a thesis over against an antithesis without resolving them in a synthesis (a method on the strength of which Balthasar talked of a turn from dialectic to analogy but which McCormack says is unimportant to Barth except to bear witness to the human impossibility of “correct” speech about God). For McCormack, what made Barth’s theology “dialectical” was not the dialectical method but the dialectic of veiling and unveiling which continued to shape his theology even after the abandonment of time-eternity dialectic of *Romans II*. He says Barth had to abandon the time-eternity dialectic (and with it the consistent eschatology) because he latter realized that his interpretation of post-temporality was that of “a future which ‘never has come and never will come’”<sup>186</sup>. In trying to avoid the supra-temporality of the neo-Protestants, he ended up going close to it. Latter on in *Church Dogmatics* II/1 he was very unequivocal in stating that the eternity of God involves pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality.

#### 2.2.3.3. Abandonment of Consistent Eschatology

According to McCormack, there are several factors that led Barth to abandon the consistent eschatology of *Romans II* in favour of a Christology. One of the most important ones

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 268.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 289.

is his encounter with the writings of Erich Przywara, a Polish Jesuit with a specialization in Augustine studies. His friend Eduard Thurneysen called his attention to an article written by Przywara in a Catholic theological journal called *Stimmen der Zeit*. The said article was titled ‘*God in Us or above Us? (Immanence and Transcendence in Today’s Spiritual Life)*’. Here, in assessing the contemporary trend in theology, Przywara took on Karl Barth and gave an astonishing assessment of his theology and his theological group of ‘*Between the Times*’ journal. He lauded their school (Barth-Gogarten school) as “the rebirth of genuine Protestantism”<sup>187</sup>, but at the same time, pointed out the one-sidedness of his theology.

For him, Barth is “a one-sided objectivist; one in whom subjectivism and immanence cannot come to expression”<sup>188</sup>. While acknowledging that Barth is closer to Luther than the Protestant Liberals, he says he still falls short of the Catholic standard in terms of the concept of God that is both transcendent and immanent. He says that it is only the Catholics that have a concept that allows both the objectivist and subjectivist tendencies to come to full expression. This tendency according to him, is taken from Augustine’s ‘God in us - god above us’ as distinguished from Luther’s wholly transcendent God from where Barth developed his concept of God that has no true unity with humanity- a concept that is one sided. This one-sidedness gives rise to an inadequate doctrine of the Incarnation. He contrasted Barth’s wholly other God with Augustine’s God of the ‘*analogia entis*’ saying that Barth put: “in the place of the ‘analogy’ between God and the creature, the pure ‘negation’”. If the *analogia entis* of the Catholic concept of God means the mysterious tension of a ‘similar-dissimilar’, corresponding to the tension of the ‘God in us and above us’, then in the Protestant concept of God, the ‘similarity’ has been completely crossed out”<sup>189</sup>. The implication is that in Barth’s theology, there is no true unity of God with humanity hence, there is no place for both Incarnation and an ecclesiology that would help to explain the continuing presence of God in the world.

Barth was happy that at last one person has at least seen him as an objectivist contrary to the charge of a fanatic subjectivist placed on him by liberal Protestant colleagues. But he immediately devoted time to addressing the problem of the inadequate doctrine of the Incarnation apparent in his theology as pointed out by Przywara. Thus it was his first encounter with

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<sup>187</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 320-321.

Catholicism that pushed him to once again revise the theology of Romans II. And this time the stage was set for another shift from an eschatological to a Christological grounding of theology.

#### 2.2.4. From Eschatology to Christology

According to McCormack, Barth's change of emphasis from an eschatological to a Christological grounding of theology corresponds to the period of the Göttingen Dogmatics (April 1924-October 1925), and began with a discovery of a Christological dogmatic formula of *anhypostatic-enhypostatic* in a textbook of post-Reformation theology. In brief, the formula *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* is a Christological formula traced back to Leontius of Byzantium in the sixth century and it is meant to clarify the confession that Jesus Christ is fully divine and fully human in one person. In the formula is expressed the doctrine that the human nature of Jesus has no subsistence (*an-hypostasis*) apart from the union with the *Logos*, but that it has its being only "in" the subsistence (*en-hypostasis*) of the incarnate Son of God<sup>190</sup>. McCormack says Barth saw in this formulation an understanding of the incarnate being of the Mediator which preserved that infinite qualitative distinction between God and humanity. The understanding that the *Logos* took complete human nature and lived a human life in and through it is very proximate according to him, to Barth's dialectic of veiling and unveiling. For God to take to Himself human nature means for Him to veil Himself in a creaturely medium. Because of this veil, the Subject of this human nature which is the Second Person of the Trinity remains unintuitable. And because of this unintuitability, God can only be known in faith through Jesus Christ in whom He unveils Himself in and through the veil of human flesh.

McCormack says that what Barth achieved by re-appropriating the *anhypostatic-enhypostatic* model of Christology was to build the eschatological reservation safeguarded by the time-eternity dialectic into the very structure of his Christology. In doing so, he could dispense with the time-eternity dialectic without losing the critical distinction between God and humanity which the time-eternity dialectic helps to preserve. In doing so, "a Christological grounding of theology could take place with no weakening of the eschatological reservation"<sup>191</sup>. Secondly, the incarnation could now take its proper place because with the dialectic of veiling and unveiling, one could understand the whole of the incarnate existence of the Mediator. But he says that

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<sup>190</sup> For the genesis and development of these terms from Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth, see F. LeRON SHULTS, *A Dubious Christological Formula: From Leontius of Byzantium to Karl Barth*, in *Theological Studies*, 57 (1996), p. 431-446.

<sup>191</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 328.

though the ground for his theology at this phase was clearly Christological, his theology was largely pneumatocentric as his doctrine of election shows clearly. It is only with the modification of that doctrine of election which occurred after 1936 that Barth's theology became truly a Christologically grounded, christocentric theology.

#### 2.2.4.1. *Starting point of Dogmatics*

According to McCormack, when Barth announced his intention in the winter semester of 1923/24 to begin a lecture on 'Prolegomena to Dogmatics' in the spring, he started looking for a starting point and raw material of dogmatics. He eventually arrived at the point where he took dogmatics as consisting in critically testing the content of preaching in the light of its double origin in Revelation and Scripture. Preaching is therefore seen by him at this point as the starting point of dogmatics. He defined dogmatics as a "scientific reflection on the Word of God"<sup>192</sup>. The Word of God is Revelation and Revelation in the strict sense is "*Deus dixit*", that is, a speaking by God which is identical with God. Revelation as the Word of God is an eternal happening and as such, is far from us. It does not continue. If it is to be known therefore, it must be received by us in the present; it must continue in some form. That form of continuation is the Holy Scripture. But being the testimony of the prophets and the apostles, the Holy Scripture is a piece of history which belongs to the past and as such does not continue. It is only in the third form of the Word of God which is Christian preaching that the Word of God reaches us in the present and continues.

We see here Barth's distinction between three forms of the Word of God namely: the Word of God in its eternal form, the Word of God in its historical form, and, the Word of God in its present form. Preaching is therefore the present form of the Word of God when it is based upon the testimony of the apostles and the prophets. When it is thus based, then the *Deus dixit* makes itself known through it. Dogmatics for Barth therefore exists for the sake of preaching. But it does not lie within the power of the dogmatician to make preaching the Word of God. All he does is to criticize and correct preaching in the light of the Word of God by calling attention to the Word of God in preaching and applying it in criticism of preaching. In this sense he says that preaching is both the starting point and the goal of dogmatics.

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<sup>192</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 338.

Preaching is criticized and corrected by revelation and Scripture. And for preaching to become the Word of God, God has to testify to Himself through it. The dogmatician can never make preaching to become the Word of God. All he does is to offer guidance as to what ought to be said and what ought not to be said in the light of the Scripture and revelation, and thus tries to create a space for the Word to unveil itself in the words. This dogmatic method of critically testing the preaching is, according to McCormack, what Barth would continue to advocate in the 1931 Anselm book and in the *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 with the result that the proclamations which has already been tested yesterday, is what will be critically tested today. Put in another word, when a proclamation is tested, its fruit becomes a dogma, and it is this dogma that is further critically tested today. Therefore if the starting point and goal of dogmatics is preaching, then it implies that it is the dogmas of the Church that is the starting point and goal of dogmatics.

#### 2.2.4.2. *Subject of Revelation*

If preaching is criticized and corrected by revelation and Scripture, one needs to know the Subject of revelation. According to McCormack, Barth took up the doctrine of the Trinity in the Göttingen Dogmatics precisely to provide answer to the question of the Subject of revelation. In his understanding of revelation as Self-revelation, he refuses to subscribe to the concept of revelation that deifies creatures (even if that creature is called Jesus of Nazareth). He says dogmatics should be less christocentric (in the sense of trying to historicize revelation in the manner of Albrecht Ritschl and Adolph von Harnack), but should rather focus more on the subject-matter which is God in His entirety, wholly God. The content of revelation therefore is wholly God; and this position of his is to avoid the tendency (as in natural theology) to make God partly hidden and partly revealed. There is no evolution in God, he says, from a lower to higher consciousness. God corresponds to Himself in revelation, and thus, the immanent Trinity is identical with the economic Trinity in content. As he puts it, “The Subject of revelation is not a second *next to* God, but a second *in* God, and, therefore, fully God”<sup>193</sup>. The Subject of revelation in Jesus Christ is therefore truly God. And the affirmation that ‘Jesus is Lord’ means that Jesus reveals the Father. But the Father is God, and since no one can reveal God except God Himself, Jesus must be God Himself in order to be able to reveal God.

His point here is to show that God is not just the wholly transcendent God but that He also has his being in the contradiction of our existence. This is a clear break from the time-eternity

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid., p. 354

dialectic of *Romans* II. From now God is seen not only as the Father who exists above the contradiction, but also as the Son who exists in the contradiction and conquers it. But if men and women were able to confess that 'Jesus is Lord' they could only do so, according to Pauline theology, by the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 12:3). This gift of faith bestowed on us by God by which we come to know Him implies that He exists in a third hypostasis, that is, He exists as a third 'Person' which is the Person of the Holy Spirit. Therefore as God is Father and Son from and in eternity, so also is He Spirit from and in eternity. He agrees with the *filioque* doctrine of the Spirit proceeding from both the Father and the Son.

#### 2.2.4.3. Possibility of Revelation

Having treated the reality of revelation (*Deus dixit*) and the content or Subject of revelation (the Trinity), Barth focuses on the problem of the possibility of revelation which is Christology. He wanted to discover how it is possible that God's revelation encounters human beings living in history. The possibility of revelation of course presupposes the reality of revelation. And having established the reality of revelation as *Deus dixit*, it is easy to see that the Subject of the incarnation is the second Person of the Trinity – Jesus Christ. According to Barth, revelation in the form of incarnation was necessary because of the *Fall*. It took place to reverse the *Fall* and make it possible for humanity to be redeemed and be free from its punishment. He says that prior to the *Fall*, revelation was direct and immediate to humanity. But as a consequence of the *Fall*, it became 'objective', needing to occur through the veil of human flesh. The incarnation therefore is the assumption of human nature by the eternal Son. But this assumption did not in any way alter the divine nature of the Son. He merely took a human mode of existence without surrendering the divine nature proper to Him. But at the same time this human nature which He assumed is not altered by the act of assumption by way of divinization of the human nature. There is a dialectical union at play here where the divine and the human natures are united in differentiation.

It is at this point according to McCormack that Barth introduced the ancient dogma of *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* with regards to the human nature of Christ. And he says that this adoption of the Christological formula marked a watershed in Barth's theological development. He says: "Its significance for his development lay, first of all, in the fact that the dialectic of veiling and unveiling had now been localized in the incarnation as a whole, and not just in the event of the cross. Second, he could now affirm the presence of the second Person of the Trinity

in history, as a Subject who enters fully into the contradiction of human existence and overcomes it, without fear of historicizing revelation”<sup>194</sup>. In this sense, one could see that Jesus Christ as the eternal Son is present in history indirectly, that is, without being directly identical with the veil of human flesh in which He conceals. It is with the adoption of the *anhypostatic-enhypostatic* model of Christology that Barth’s theology moved into a new phase. From now on Barth will bring to the fore God’s ability to make Himself ‘objective’ without ceasing to be the Subject.

It was from this point of the adoption of the *anhypostatic-enhypostatic* model of Christology that Barth began for the first time his treatment of the doctrine of election. His doctrine of election followed the classical Reformed doctrine but with some innovations. His understanding of election was at the same time both theocentric and actualistic. By shifting attention from predestined human being to the predestinating God, it was theocentric. And by taking election as a description of a concrete event in time and not just a fixed and unchangeable reality, it was actualistic. McCormack says that the only thing that was missing at this stage of his development of the doctrine of election is the fact that election is ‘in Christ’. His mature doctrine of election in the *Church Dogmatics* according to him took care of this missing point.

#### 2.2.4. 4. *Fides Quaerens Intellectum: A new starting point?*

During the in-fighting amongst the dialectical theologians that led to the eventual demise of their school in 1933, Barth’s major concern between 1930 and 1931 was the production of a book on Anselm. The common belief is that Barth’s study of Anselm led him to a new starting point in thought, to the extent that he had to abandon as a ‘false start’ the project he had already started in *Die christliche Dogmatik*, in order to begin afresh a new dogmatics which was the *Church Dogmatics*. This belief was hinged on Barth’s assessment of the book himself in an essay he contributed to *The Christian Century* series, ‘*How My Mind Has Changed*’. In this said essay he wrote:

“... in these years I have had to rid myself of the last remnants of a philosophical, i.e. anthropological (in America one says ‘humanistic’ or ‘naturalistic’) foundation and exposition of Christian doctrine. The real document of this farewell is, in truth, not the much-read brochure *Nein!*, directed against Brunner in 1934, but rather the book about the evidence for God of Anselm of Canterbury which appeared in 1931. Among all my books I regard this as the one

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

written with the greatest satisfaction. ... For before, I had been at least partly hampered... by the eggshells of philosophical systematics”<sup>195</sup>.

Emboldened by this assessment, Hans Urs von Balthasar began an interpretation of Barth’s theological development that was to last for over forty years. This development according to him was characterized by two turning points or conversions. The first was a turn from liberalism to Christian radicalism that found expression in the *Römerbrief*. The second was a gradual self-extrication from the shackles of philosophy so as to arrive at a truly independent theology. And the real document of this farewell (to use Barth’s own expression), is the Anselm book. Balthasar calls this second conversion ‘a turn from dialectic to analogy’. Barth seemed to have agreed with Balthasar’s assessment when he said in the preface to the second edition of *Fides quaerens intellectum* that only few people like Balthasar have noticed that, if not the key, at least a very important key to understanding of the movement of his thought lies with the Anselm book<sup>196</sup>.

The key is the establishment of the way of knowledge which leads to the reality of God. And in this Barth found a very strong attraction to the famous phrase of Anselm which is a modification from Augustine: *Fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). This means human thought seeking to understand the intelligibility of what God reveals which is something that is believed in faith. In seeking to do this, human knowledge of God is analogical but this is not equated with “*analogia entis*” (analogy of being) which places God on the same level with the rest of the being and makes them accessible to human reason generally. It is rather an “*analogia fidei*” (analogy of faith) – God’s Self-revelation and human acknowledgement of that Self-revelation in faith. One therefore can understand God only on the basis of faith. Barth saw in the argument of Anselm a true theological presentation, though he dismissed as nonsense the common view that Anselm’s “rational demonstration” amounted to an “ontological” proof of the existence of God.

It is precisely because of his insistence on “demonstrating” the fact of God’s being from the standpoint of revelation (in agreement with Anselm), that Balthasar et al. categorized Barth’s theology from Anselm book onwards as a turn to analogy. But against this popular interpretation, McCormack takes the unpopular negative position by de-emphasising the importance of the

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<sup>195</sup> Karl BARTH, *How I Changed My Mind* (with an Introduction and an Epilogue by John D. GODSEY), Richmond, John Knox Press, 1966, p. 42-43.

<sup>196</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 422.

Anselm book in the theological development of Barth arguing that the book is an exercise in dialectical theology. He says that there is no new starting point to be found in the book, and that the theological method found there was already outlined in the *Göttingen Prolegomena*. He says that according to the Balthasarian notion of a turn from dialectic to analogy, ‘dialectic’ is understood as a system of grounding theology in philosophical categories of existentialism and phenomenology, whereas ‘analogy’ is effort to ground theology in revelation alone and thus develop what may be termed ‘a pure’ theology free from any philosophical stain. But he argues that in this sense, analogy and dialectic coexisted in Barth’s theology throughout the 1920s, thus, analogy is not a new element in Anselm book. Again, he says that Barth was still a dialectical theologian in the *Church Dogmatics*. But he refused to subscribe to an attempted recasting of the formula by Michael Beintker suggesting that from dialectal method as the leading thought-form, Barth turned to analogical method as the leading thought-form. He says that while this formulation allows for the coexistence of dialectical and analogical methods before and after the Anselm book, its defect is the presumption that there was a predominance of dialectical method in Barth prior to the Anselm book. But he argues that a careful study of the *Göttingen Dogmatics* shows a predominance not of dialectical method but of dogmatic method. The dialectical method was only employed in such areas of investigation as the doctrine of God and Christology, which require such. This system of employing the dialectical method used in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, continued to be used in the *Church Dogmatics* for the same areas as mentioned above. He concluded that on the basis of a survey he made, “it is clear that what is ‘new’ in the Anselm book is at most a *relatively* more faithful unfolding of the dogmatic method which Barth had been employing since 1924. There is no new starting-point here, and no new thought-form”<sup>197</sup>.

However, this sloppy dismissal of the importance of the Anselm book with a wave of hand has been recently challenged. While agreeing with McCormack that there was no turn from dialectics to analogy in Barth starting from the Anselm book, Chalamet however insists that something new was evidently present in Barth’s theology around 1930. The other aspect of Balthasar’s thesis that the discovery of the *analogia fidei* helped Barth to move from a critical (that is, a philosophical type of dialectics) to a theological dialectic that helps in a better understanding of the relation between God and his creatures, is often not talked about. He says that despite the contradiction between this thesis and the main thesis of Balthasar of a turn from dialectic to analogy (which Balthasar himself noticed), he was convinced that Balthasar was on

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

the right track by arguing that Barth moved from a critical dialectic to a theological dialectic. He says: “with von Balthasar, I do believe that there was a subtle but important modification in Barth’s theology around 1931. I also agree with him when he writes that this modification had something to do with a move beyond a critical form of dialectic”<sup>198</sup>. On his part, Timothy Stanley contends that McCormack concentrated on the first section of Barth’s Anselm book (in his assessment of it) in order to refute the Balthasarian thesis of a turn from dialectic to analogy. But he argues that “a more thorough engagement with Barth’s exegesis of *Proslogion* 2-4 might give crucial insight into the onto-theological nature of the ‘vital key’ he referred to in his preface”<sup>199</sup>. But our interest here is not to enter into the debate of whether the Anselm book presents any significant change in the thought of Barth or not (we leave this area for future researches). We are only interested here in how McCormack de-emphasized its importance in order to prop up the importance of Pierre Maury’s paper to Barth’s modification of the doctrine of the election which made Barth’s theology thoroughly Christocentric.

#### 2.2.4.5. *Old wine in a new wineskin*

If we agree with McCormack that the Anselm book did not usher in any new starting-point, the question is, why then did Barth rewrite *Die christliche Dogmatik*? McCormack’s answer is that *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 are merely revision of the 1927 book and not a rewriting of it, arguing that Barth already signified his intention to modify the prolegomena to make his thought clearly understood, before ever he began the study of Anselm. This decision, according to him, was as a result of the misreading of *Die christliche Dogmatik* in the reviews done by Theodore Siegfried and Friedrich Gogarten respectively. *Church Dogmatics* I/1 and I/2 were only the fruits of that decision. But he says that in line with a Barth’s personality quirk of exaggerating the newness of a new version of an old work, he exaggerated the difference between *Die christliche Dogmatik* and the *Church Dogmatics*. This tendency, according to him, was already seen in Barth’s exaggeration of the distance between the two *Romans* and between *Die christliche Dogmatik* and the *Göttingen Prolegomena*. And he summarized this Barthian quirk by saying that, “in his enthusiasm for his work, everything was new to him every day”<sup>200</sup>. Moreover, because of the political situation in Germany at that period and the bastardization of the usage of the prefix “Christian” especially by his dialectical theologian colleagues, Barth not only wanted

<sup>198</sup> C. CHALAMET, *Dialectical Theologians*, p. 225.

<sup>199</sup> Timothy STANLEY, *Returning Barth to Anselm*, in *Modern Theology*, 24,3 (July 2008), p. 413-437, p. 414.

<sup>200</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 442.

to distance himself publicly from them by exaggerating the distance between the two versions of the Prolegomena, but also by changing the prefix “Christian” to “Church” because he believed strongly that theology as he perceived it is a function of the Church.

#### 2.2.5. Christological concentration

If there is less to the Anselm book than claimed by Balthasar et al; if there is no new starting-point and no new thought-form in it, then what gave impetus to Barth’s form of “christocentrism” which has become synonymous with his name? McCormack would easily answer that it was his modification of his doctrine of election occasioned by the insight he got from a Parisian pastor, Pierre Maury. He says that during the ‘*Congrès international de théologie calviniste*’ which was held in June 1936 in Geneva with the theme of Calvin’s doctrine of predestination, and in which Barth participated, he listened to a paper presented by Maury entitled “*Election and Faith*”.

In the said paper, Maury defended a thesis that the doctrine of election is not to be treated in abstraction from the concrete reality in which it is realized and made known, namely Jesus Christ. According to him, “outside of Christ, we know neither of the electing God, nor of His elect, nor of the act of election”<sup>201</sup>. He went further to say that the election and rejection come together in the cross of Christ in such a way that there is no former without the latter. We are elected in Christ and Christ takes our rejection upon Himself so that we do not suffer what He suffered on the cross. The cross thus becomes something positive for us because our sins having been borne away by Christ on the cross, we can adequately be called sons and daughters of God, thanks to that event of the cross. Reprobation therefore leads to election. First, in the cross, Christ becomes the object of God’s reprobation, but in the resurrection he becomes the object of God’s electing love. We are therefore all elect for His sake. We see here that predestination is double but not in terms of double categories of persons (i.e. the elect and the reprobate), but rather in terms of a double content of election and rejection which come together and are realized in Christ.

According to McCormack, Maury’s paper, which was a call for a Christological grounding of election, so attracted and made such an impact on Barth that he had to begin immediately a process of revising his doctrine of election which he already treated in the

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<sup>201</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 457.

*Göttingen Dogmatics*. It only took three months from the time he listened to Maury in June for him to give his own public lecture in Debrecen, Hungary, in September 1936, on the theme of ‘God’s Gracious Election’. McCormack says Barth’s central thesis in Debrecen was that God’s gracious election can only be known and understood as it is revealed in Jesus Christ. It is not a necessity of thought<sup>202</sup>. Calvin had a tendency of using predestination to explain the fact of some people believing and others not believing whenever the gospel is preached. In the doctrine of predestination (which was a concept Calvin borrowed from Augustine), his main concern was to solve a practical question. He was worried about the fact of some people accepting the gospel and others rejecting the same gospel when it is preached. He believed that while the Word remains external and therefore ineffectual to some, to others, the Holy Spirit stirs the desire for repentance and faith. His conclusion is therefore that from eternity God elects some to salvation and reprobates others to damnation. This is his famous double predestination. According to John Hesselink, “In the later extended discussion in the *Institutes* of 1559, Calvin referred to God’s decree of rejection as a ‘dreadful decree’ (*decretum horribile*, *Inst.* III.23.7). But he was convinced that this was the Apostle Paul’s teaching in Romans 9:6-24”<sup>203</sup>.

Against this Calvinist tendency, and in departure from his earlier teaching on the subject matter in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth now advocates for a strict Christological grounding of the doctrine of predestination by explaining it in terms of Christology. In this sense, the Subject and the object of election is the eternal Son of God – the former in His divine triune nature, and the later in His human nature. Explained in this way, we see that Jesus Christ was elected to take our rejection upon Himself so that the goal of His rejection becomes our election. And as McCormack explains it, “In Him, the full reality of the divine predestination in both of its aspects is realized”<sup>204</sup>.

This, according to him, is a significant advance from Barth’s treatment of the same subject in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* where election and reprobation are treated as mere possibilities. Now it is no longer a question of possibilities, but a fait accompli. It has taken place in Jesus Christ. The election of individual having been definitively decided in Jesus Christ, what is decided in the revelation-event is whether the individual will leave as one who is elect or as one who is reprobate. In this way, the actualism of Barth’s doctrine of revelation is preserved,

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 458.

<sup>203</sup> I. John HESSELINK, *Calvin’s Theology*, in Donald K. MCKIN (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Calvin*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 74-92, p. 83-84.

<sup>204</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, p. 458.

and as McCormack says, Barth now sees the doctrine of predestination as a “regulative principle which stands at the beginning of and behind all Christian thinking”<sup>205</sup>. This is so because Jesus Christ being the Subject and object of God’s gracious election means that He is its ground. No longer will Barth uphold the Reformed doctrine of election in terms of a *decretum absolutum*. God couldn’t have decreed to fix a number of people to be elect and others to be rejected, prior to the decree to send the eternal Son as Mediator. This is because the will in God is His will to be gracious. He creates in order to redeem.

This Christological grounding of the doctrine of the election had serious significance to the shape of Barth’s theology. In fact McCormack was convinced that, “with the material modification of his doctrine of election in 1936, Barth’s theology had arrived at a new stage of consistency with itself. Henceforth, his theology would not only be Christologically grounded in theory but in practice as well”<sup>206</sup>. It would only take his consideration of the being of God in Church Dogmatics II/1 for a Christologically grounded christocentric theology to appear not only just in theory but also in practice as well. Here he explicates the being of God by a ground provided by a christocentric doctrine of election.

## CONCLUSION

McCormack has dealt a blow to the Balthasarian mode of interpretation of Barth’s theological development. Where Balthasar sees discontinuity in Barth’s three dogmatic efforts (*Göttingen Dogmatics*, *Die christliche Dogmatik* and *Church Dogmatics*), McCormack sees continuity. Where others look to methodology to explain Barth’s development, McCormack says Barth was not so much interested in methodology as in the subject matter of theology and that change in methodology was only as a result of theological decisions. He argued that the mistake Balthasar made was to identify dialectic with a dialectical method, saying that it is not dialectic as a theological method that marks Barth as a dialectical theologian but rather the dialectic of veiling and unveiling in divine revelation. The purported turn to analogy on which Balthasar hinged his elevation of the Anselm book was vehemently rejected by McCormack who insists that after his break with liberalism in 1915, Barth was and remained a critically realistic dialectical theologian. In place of a turn to analogy, he proposes that what marked Barth’s development was a gradual Christological concentration as a result of his revision of his doctrine

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid., p. 460.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., p. 462.

of election. From the movement of Barth's theological development which he re-periodized, we see that it is a story of a gradual movement towards its destination which is a Christologically grounded christocentric theology. It is the attention he called to this gradual Christological progression of Barth's theology that is a distinctive contribution of McCormack towards the rediscovery of Barth's Christology. However, in placing the reason for such Christologically grounded christocentric theology at the doorstep of a material modification of his doctrine of election in 1936, he sparked off a great debate about Barth's doctrine of election among the Anglo-Saxon Barthian scholars between what has now come to be known as the "traditionalists" school of Hunsinger and the "revisionists" school of McCormack. This will be the focus of our next chapter.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3. KARL BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF ELECTION: THE McCORMACK-HUNSINGER DEBATE

#### 3.1. Introduction

In his introduction to his translation of Eberhard Jüngel's *God's Being is in Becoming*, John Webster says that one of Jüngel's missions in the book was to demonstrate that for Karl Barth the doctrine of election is drawn back into the being of God. He says that for Barth, "... election is God's self-election, God's decision to be God in this way, in and as the man Jesus. The consequence is that God is the one who determines himself to be in relation to us through Christ".<sup>207</sup> It was in his effort to explain Barth's conviction that God is God's act, and that God corresponds to himself, that Bruce McCormack concluded his re-periodization of Karl Barth's theological evolution from 1919-1936 by positing that in order to Christologically ground the doctrine of election, Barth had to reverse what he had already treated in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* on the subject matter. Such revisionist's proposal makes Jesus Christ the Subject and the object of God's gracious act of election. In insisting however that Jesus Christ, the God-human in His divine-human unity should be conceived of as the Subject of election, the issue of how the Trinity and election are related is brought to the fore. And there arose therefrom, a debate that is currently ongoing among Barth scholars, concerning his (Barth's) understanding of the relation between the Trinity and God's divine act of election.

At the heart of the debate, according to James Cassidy is this question: "Does God's being in triunity constitute his divine act of electing, or, conversely, does God's act of election constitute his essence as the triune God?" In other words, "Does God's act constitute his being or does his being constitute his act?"<sup>208</sup> This question can further be simplified to whether God's triunity is prior to his decision to be God-with us or whether his determination to be with us is the basis of his triunity. McCormack, who sparked off the debate, leads the pack that argues that the later Barth revised the traditional order of the triune life of God being prior to the divine decision of election. They argue that in his revision of the doctrine of election, Barth made God's pre-temporal decision of election to be the factor that gave rise to the Trinity. However, against this

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<sup>207</sup> Eberhard JÜNGEL, *God's Being is in Becoming. The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth. A Paraphrase*, trans. by John WEBSTER, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2001, p. xvii.

<sup>208</sup> James J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 71,1 (2009), p. 53-81, p. 53.

revisionists' proposal, George Hunsinger and his colleagues of 'traditionalists' insist that throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth never changed his mind about the triune life of God being prior to the divine decision of election.

In this chapter, we are going to examine closely the two opposing propositions. In doing so our aim is not just to discover which of the two positions represents a more accurate interpretation of Barth, but more importantly, to find out whether Barth's position is theologically more reasonable, more viable and more sustainable. The later emphasis has become necessary because from the way the debate is going, it seems that both parties have taken it for granted that Barth's position is sacrosanct and that to maintain his position is to be on the path of the truth while to go against his position means to be already on the path of falsehood.

### **3.2. The "Revisionists" school of McCormack**

#### **3.2.1. McCormack's theological bombshell**

The import of what McCormack proposed in its embryonic form in his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology* concerning Barth's revision of his doctrine of election, was further developed in an essay he contributed to *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* which he entitled, *Grace and Being: The Role of God's gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology*. In this essay, he exuded confidence that when the history of theology in the twentieth century will be written in about a hundred years coming, it will be discovered that the greatest contribution of Karl Barth to the development of church doctrine will definitely be located in his doctrine of election. According to him, "What Barth accomplished with his doctrine of election was to establish a hermeneutical rule which would allow the church to speak authoritatively about what God was doing – and, indeed, who and what God was/is – 'before the foundation of the world', *without engaging in speculation*"<sup>209</sup>.

At the heart of Barth's doctrine of election is, according to him, the thesis that Jesus Christ is the electing God and the elect man, thus making him both the Subject and the object of election. That Jesus Christ is the object of election is not a new theology. What is new, and thus the unique contribution of Barth to the doctrine of election (in McCormack's proposition), is that Jesus Christ is also the electing Subject. This proposition lays to rest Brunner's abstract *Logos*

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<sup>209</sup> Bruce MCCORMACK, *Grace and Being. The Role of God's Gracious Election in Karl Barth's Theological Ontology*, in John WEBSTER (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 92-110, p. 92 (emphasis is his).

*asarkos* (Logos without flesh) by identifying it as one and the same with the *Logos ensarkos* (that is, Logos ‘within the flesh’). Therefore the electing God is and will always remain Jesus Christ the God-human and not a *Logos asarkos* existing in an abstract and absolute sense. In making Jesus Christ the Subject of election, he also effected a revolution in the Reformed concept of predestination by replacing Calvin’s double predestination with a universal election. This revolution according to McCormack, is a revolution in the doctrine of God. This is because, in place of focusing attention to the question of ‘to whom does election apply?’ he rather occupied himself with what he deemed a more primary question of ‘who is the God who elects and what does a knowledge of this God tell us about the nature of election?’

Barth defends his identification of the *Logos asarkos* with the same Logos who through the incarnation, became *ensarkos* (within flesh) by exegeting the prologue of John’s Gospel which says that the Logos who was in the beginning with God and who in fact was God is the same Logos who was made flesh (cf. John 1: 1-14). He appropriated the Orthodox Reformed distinction between *Logos incarnandus* (that is, the Logos ‘to be incarnate’), and the *Logos incarnatus* (that is, the Logos incarnate). The former (*incarnandus*) refers to the Logos as he appears in the eternal plan of God. This is popularly known as predestination. The later (*incarnatus*) refers to the Logos as he appears in the actual execution of that plan in time. But there is a difference in the traditional usage of the terminologies and Barth’s usage. In the traditional usage, the *Logos incarnandus* is the Logos as he appeared in the eternal plan of God. In this eternal plan of God, he is the object of election, and as the object of election, he is determined to be *incarnandus* by a prior decision of the triune God to elect certain people in Christ. The implication is that in this prior decision, the Logos appears as One whose identity is not yet determined by the decision for incarnation, and that he only became *incarnandus* as a result of subsequent decision. His being and existence are undetermined prior to making such subsequent decision.

Now by speaking of Jesus Christ as the Subject of election, Barth wants to deny to the Logos such undetermined existence. He wants to say that the *Logos incarnandus* is the electing God. There is no abstractly conceived *Logos asarkos* somewhere different from God’s decision to be God-with-us. The Logos is always *incarnandus* in eternity, and this makes Jesus Christ to be the Subject of election and not an indeterminate *Logos asarkos*. With this postulation, Barth wanted to put a stop to any speculation about the being and existence of a posited *Logos asarkos*,

a speculation that naturally would have to look away from incarnation and look for answers from other sources. This is precisely why he criticized the *extra Calvinisticum* prevalent among the Reformed theologians in their treatment of Christology. In brief, the *extra Calvinisticum* is the denial of the omnipresence of the human nature of the Logos. It teaches that after the hypostatic union in which the Logos assumed the human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary, the Logos continued to fill heaven and earth, but did so only as Logos *asarkos*. This Reformed teaching was rejected by the Lutherans on the ground that it is a reinvention of the Nestorian separation of the two natures in Christ. They argue that the hypostatic union means that after its occurrence, Christ carries with him both the divine and the human nature everywhere, whether in heaven or on the earth.

Barth's critique of the *extra Calvinisticum* was not to deny the distinction between the Logos *asarkos* and the Logos *ensarkos*. He could not deny that the human nature of Jesus Christ was not eternal but that it came into existence in time. Thus he agreed that there was the existence of Logos *asarkos* prior to incarnation, and even after the incarnation as the Reformed Christology teaches. What then was the basis of his criticism of *extra Calvinisticum*? McCormack refers to Barth's famous criticism of Calvin regarding this:

"There is something regrettable about that theory insofar as it could lead, as it has to the present day, to disastrous speculation about a being and activity of a Logos *asarkos* and, therefore, about a God who could be known and whose divine essence could be defined on some other basis than in and from the perception of his presence and action as incarnate Word. And it cannot be denied that Calvin himself (with especially serious consequences in his doctrine of predestination) went a long way in falling prey to the temptation of reckoning with such an 'other God'"<sup>210</sup>.

He goes further to say that Barth's concern was not an epistemological but an ontological one. He was concerned about the possibility of God entering into time, becoming human with all its limitations, without undergoing any essential ontological change. The answer according to him lies in the eternal decision of God to be God with us. Because he freely decides to be who he is, that eternal divine decision to act in election constitutes and grounds the divine essence without changing it. Thus in becoming incarnate in time, God does not undergo any change on the ontic level. Barth's rejection of the *extra Calvinisticum* is therefore to avoid the tendency of supposing that, prior to the determination to be incarnate, there was an indeterminate mode of

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<sup>210</sup> CD IV/1, p. 181; cf. also B. MCCORMACK, *Grace and Being*, p. 96.

existence in the life of the Logos. It was precisely this point that made Barth to modify and correct Calvin's doctrine of predestination. No longer would he uphold the Reformed doctrine of predestination whereby election and reprobation (that is, the decree to elect some people and reject others), precedes the decree to send the eternal Son as Mediator. He views this position as indirectly questioning the full divinity of Jesus Christ because this position tends to say that as the Subject of election, the Logos is not controlled by the decision to become Mediator in time. McCormack puts the self-evident problem of this Reformed position clearer by bringing out the implication of its logic which according to him is this:

“The identity of this Logos is, in fact, *already established* prior to that eternal act of Self-determination by means of which the Logos *became* the *Logos incarnandus*. And if all that were true, then the decision to assume flesh in time could only result in something being added to that already completed identity; an addition which has no effect upon what he is essentially”<sup>211</sup>.

The point McCormack is making here is that the implication of this position is that the eternal being of the Logos is already determined, and therefore that the fact of his being the redeemer is only an addition of a role which in any case, does not affect his essential being. If one subscribes to this view, one could therefore legitimately ask whether Jesus Christ is fully God or not. According to McCormack, Barth wriggled out of this problem by insisting that God is not just an unknown entity but an electing God whose being is determined from eternity by what he revealed in Jesus Christ. And what he reveals is a God of mercy and love towards humanity and not an abstract *Logos asarkos*. This, according to him, is precisely the meaning of Barth's affirmation that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election. It means that the eternal God is Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ is the eternal God. It means, according to him, that his humanity and his divinity are co-extensive. It means in his words that, “election is the event in God's life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity. 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”<sup>212</sup>. In such a Christological drama where God and humanity exchange roles, God does not diminish any atom of ‘God-ness’ in him by the fact of his taking up the role of a sinner and choosing reprobation for himself. There is no ontological change in his being by the fact of his taking up this role because this is the role he already determined from eternity to play.

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<sup>211</sup> B. MCCORMACK, *Grace and Being*, p. 97 (emphasis his).

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

McCormack says that the essential difference between Calvin and Barth is that whereas Calvin talks of the existence of the *Logos asarkos* independent of his being as Redeemer, and in which case making the divine essence of that *Logos asarkos* unknowable to the human perception, Barth makes the divine essence to be determined by his act of electing. Such divine essence is therefore not hidden to human perception but is knowable in his act. His essence and his act of free decision in election are identical. The incarnation is thus constitutive of the being of God in eternity. But this does not make incarnation an eternal event; it remains a historical event. But the historicity here does not imply the Hegelian or the process theological notion of God becoming conscious of himself in history. God, as a matter of fact, has always existed in eternity before creation, as a self-conscious being. The incarnation is therefore a free act of God. The sense in which the incarnation is constitutive of the eternal being of God says McCormack, is only in the sense that, “as a consequence of the primal decision in which God assigned to himself the being he would have throughout eternity (a being-for-the human race), God is already in pre-temporal eternity – *by way of anticipation* – that which he would become in time”<sup>213</sup>.

From the foregoing, the full meaning of Barth’s postulation that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election becomes clearer. The statement precludes any existence of a *Logos asarkos* in the mode of existence of the second person of the Trinity independent of the decision to be incarnate; it means that there is no eternal Son independent of God’s gracious election. And as McCormack believes, “Perhaps the most significant consequence of this move is that the immanent Trinity is made to be wholly identical in content with the economic Trinity”<sup>214</sup>. But there are some implications of this position according to him, to the doctrine of the Trinity. This position brings to the fore the logical relation of God’s gracious election to the triunity of God, that is, which comes first logically and which follows? In other words, what is the relation of act and being in God? He acknowledged that Barth did not precise this question the way he (McCormack) is doing it now. But he was quick to observe that this obvious ‘neglect’ on the part of Barth was due to the periodization of the development of his doctrine of election. We have already noted in the previous chapter how McCormack posited that there was a revision in Barth’s doctrine of election from 1936 on, as a result of the insight he got from listening to Pierre Maury’s paper on ‘Election and Faith’. This revised doctrine of election, according to him, constitutes Barth’s mature doctrine of election, and, judging from the date it started emerging, it

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 100 (emphasis his).

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

means that Barth had already treated the doctrine of the Trinity before he got the insight to revise the doctrine of election. Because of this, he says Barth never went back to correct his doctrine of the Trinity in the light of this new-found doctrine of election. In order therefore to remove what he called “an inconsistency in Barth’s thought”, McCormack offers “to register a critical correction against Barth”<sup>215</sup>. This critical correction would make God’s pre-temporal decision of election to precede the Trinity. In fact, according to him, such pre-temporal decision of election actually gave rise to the Trinity:

“The *decision* for the covenant of grace is the ground of God’s triunity and, therefore, of the eternal generation of the Son and of the eternal procession of the Holy Spirit from Father and Son. In other words, the works of God *ad intra* (the trinitarian processions) find their ground in the *first* of the works of God *ad extra* (viz. election). And that also means that eternal generation and eternal procession are willed by God; they are not natural to him if ‘natural’ is taken to mean a determination of being fixed in advance of all actions and relations”<sup>216</sup>.

This indeed is a theological bombshell that shatters all traditional Trinitarian theology. It has always been taken for granted in the traditional order that the trinity precedes the election. But here is McCormack saying that it is the exact opposite, and maintaining that this view is compatible with Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity along the lines of a single Subject in three modes of being. Is this a McCormackian or a Barthian Copernican Revolution? Whichever it is, it is jolting, and it really jolted a lot of theologians as we shall see shortly.

But meanwhile, McCormack argues that Barth maintains that Jesus Christ is also the Object of election. He is not only the electing God but equally the elect human. It is in his divine-human unity that he chose God’s wrath and judgment unto himself. In choosing reprobation, all humans have come to be elected in him. In saying that God decreed his own abandonment, Barth believes that the doctrine of double predestination is thus reconfigured and not necessarily eliminated. But it is altered in its original formulation and usage. McCormack puts it that “Predestination is ‘double’ because, in choosing himself for the sinful creature, God was choosing reprobation, perdition and death for himself and mercy, grace, and life for human beings”<sup>217</sup>. This makes Jesus Christ both the elect and the reprobate. He becomes both the

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<sup>215</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid., p. 103 (emphasis his).

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

electing God and the reprobate man who elected, in a dramatic Christology<sup>218</sup>, to freely become both the reprobate God and the elected ‘royal’ man who inaugurates a new humanity under the conditions of the old.

### 3.2.2. Adding salt to injury: Barth linked with Schleiermacher

McCormack’s thesis that Barth revised his doctrine of election influenced in no small measures a number of upcoming theologians, especially those who worked very closely with him. Matthias Gockel wrote his 2002 doctoral dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary under the supervision of Bruce McCormack. He later revised and published the dissertation under the title, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison*<sup>219</sup> where he not only subscribed to the idea that Barth revised his doctrine of election, but equally tries to demonstrate how such a revised doctrine of Barth is in fact already present in Schleiermacher. Gockel, by appealing to Schleiermacher in order to understand Barth, attempted the most bizarre unification of two strange bedfellows. The general conviction has been that once he bade farewell to Schleiermacher and liberal Protestantism, Barth never stopped to look for anything good in Schleiermacher. Any reference to Schleiermacher from then on, was made in the negative. Barth had the occasion to describe Schleiermacher as irresponsible when he wrote: “Schleiermacher did not speak as a responsible servant of Christianity but, like a true virtuoso, as a free master of it”<sup>220</sup>. Elsewhere, Barth was even more emphatic in his condemnation of Schleiermacher when he said: “No one really needs to believe the Christianity defined and described by Schleiermacher: in its own way it is a historical phenomenon like all others, and as such it can at bottom be perceived generally”<sup>221</sup>.

But against all these statements and condemnations, Gockel argues that Barth’s rejection of the old Reformed understanding of election in terms of a *decretum absolutum* with its consequent resultant effect of a division of people into unbelievers who will incur God’s wrath and the believers who will merit God’s love, was in fact a reformulation of Schleiermacher’s

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<sup>218</sup> The expression “dramatic Christology” is a concept I borrowed from Jason BYASSE, *Praise Seeking Understanding. Reading the Psalms with Augustine*, Cambridge, William B. Eerdmans, 2007. In his usage of the terminology, he means to say that Christ enters into a drama with sinful humanity and plays the role of the sinner while inviting the sinner to play the role of divine Sonship.

<sup>219</sup> Matthias GOCKEL, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election. A Systematic-Theological Comparison*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007.

<sup>220</sup> Karl BARTH, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century. Its Background and History*, Valley Forge, Judson Press, 1973, p. 446.

<sup>221</sup> CD IV/1, p. 656

unique interpretation of election in terms of a single divine decree that concerns God's action in Christ rather than the salvation of particular persons<sup>222</sup>. Although this shared view with Schleiermacher concerns Barth's doctrine of election in the 1922 edition of *Der Römerbrief*, Gockel was quick to conclude that "teleological view of the relation between reprobation and election, which the earlier Barth shared with Schleiermacher, is affirmed"<sup>223</sup> even in his later christologically grounded doctrine of election. For him therefore, "Barth's theology is not just a repudiation of Schleiermacher but an expansion of his predecessor's work in a new framework"<sup>224</sup>. Thus Barth was still working from the liberal theological framework he inherited from his master even when he shouted to the rooftop that he had most sharply abandoned it.

Gockel was more interested in establishing continuity between Schleiermacher and Barth than in exploring and developing Barth's thought. He agreed with McCormack that Barth revised his doctrine of election, but he was not interested in the implication of such a revised doctrine to the doctrine of the Trinity. His concern was to say that even the revised doctrine of election which is acclaimed to be the greatest contribution of Barth to theology was in fact already present in Schleiermacher and not a novelty in Barth. Because our interest here is not to explore such a link between Barth and Schleiermacher (we reserve this for future researches) but rather to delve into the implication of the revised doctrine of election to the doctrine of the Trinity as proposed by McCormack, we shall pass by Gockel. We only mentioned him because he consented to the idea of Barth revising the doctrine of election hence, we categorize him as belonging to the revisionists group. But he also added salt to injury by saying that Barth's "new" doctrine of election is in fact an "old" teaching of Schleiermacher his enemy.

There are still others who belong to the revisionists' school, but we shall consider them later on. For now let us turn our attention to the counter proposition which we have termed 'the traditionalists' school'.

### **3.3. The "Traditionalists'" school of Hunsinger**

#### **3.3.1. Returning Barth to tradition: Paul Molnar and the question of God's freedom**

The first person to respond to McCormack's treatment of Karl Barth's Trinitarian theology in the light of his doctrine of election was not Hunsinger. Before Hunsinger, Paul

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<sup>222</sup> Cf. M. GÖCKEL, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election*, p. 123.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

Molnar had already argued *contra* McCormack that it is not possible to make the triunity of God a function of God's electing activity, fearing that because McCormack failed to make the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity to play any conceptual role in his argument, he is "misled into believing that God became the triune God only by virtue of his self-determination to be our God"<sup>225</sup>. He rejected McCormack's non-appreciation of the function of the *Logos asarkos* by identifying it with the *Logos incarnandus* on the ground that such identification "blurs the distinction between the immanent and economic Trinity"<sup>226</sup>, as that would eternally tie the immanent trinity to economic trinity thus making God to no longer be free. If God cannot be God without us; if his being would require to be incarnate or to create; if God would necessarily need all those requirements, then God could not after all be free. He maintains that for Barth, creation, reconciliation and redemption, have no constitutive effect on the eternal existence of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, saying that "the order between election and triunity cannot be logically reversed without in fact making creation, reconciliation and redemption necessary to God"<sup>227</sup>. Such reversal as attempted by McCormack is viewed by Molnar as a critical error and an illicit compromise of God's freedom.

Molnar accuses McCormack of trying to eat his cake and have it. On one hand McCormack says it is necessary to make a distinction between the economic and immanent trinity. But on the other hand he makes what happens economically (God's eternal act of election), to constitute who God is. And because election presupposes a creation, a Fall, and a redemption in history, this position implies that God's being is contingent upon something outside of himself; and this position which culminates in the rejection of the *Logos asarkos* in McCormack's view, is seen by Molnar as a compromise of God's freedom. Such a collapsing of the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity, which he says is characteristic of the contemporary Trinitarian theology, reduces theology to anthropology as people begin their theologizing from their own experiences instead of beginning with God's revelation in the Word of God. He says that in formulating a Trinitarian theology, we must begin with God's act in Jesus Christ, failure which it would blur the distinction between the immanent and the economic Trinity. We shall return to Molnar later on.

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<sup>225</sup> Paul D. MOLNAR, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity*. In *Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology*, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 2002, p. 64.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 58.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

### 3.3.2. George Hunsinger's concise response

Perhaps the most concise response to McCormack was formulated by Hunsinger in a thesis format that makes it easier for the debate to continue. It is precisely because of his concise formulation that we decided to name the school that sticks to the traditional order of the trinity preceding election, after him. It does not in any way imply that he started the school by way of being the first person to react to McCormack. It means only that whereas others' reactions have been fragmented, his is more concise. We shall therefore turn to the examination of Hunsinger's position.

George Hunsinger presented his critical response to McCormack in an article published in the journal, *Modern Theology*. He began his thesis by an outright denial of McCormack's interpretation of Barth. He says:

“Barth nowhere says that God's being is *constituted* by God's act. He says only that God's being and act are inseparable. I read him to mean that act and being for God are each ontologically basic. Act for Barth is no more prior to or constitutive of God's being than the reverse. Barth does not teach, and nowhere states, that act is a consequence of being (*operari sequitur esse*), or that being is a consequence of act (*esse sequitur operari*). They are equally and primordially basic”<sup>228</sup>.

He argues that whereas Barth talks of the Trinity being *determined* by God's free decision of election, McCormack understood the word *determined* as meaning *constitutive*. But he says that for Barth something can be *determined* only if it exists. Therefore if the Trinity is *determined* by election, then it implies that the former is ontologically prior to and logically presupposed by, the later. Instead therefore of understanding as McCormack did, this ‘determination’ as ontologically implying that election is the event in God's life in which he assigns to himself the being he will have for all eternity, Hunsinger chose to understand election in Barth as “an act of the Holy Trinity in which God determines himself *ad intra* for the sake of his saving work *ad extra*”<sup>229</sup>. This definition implies that God's triunity is eternally necessary to his being while his act of election is only eternally contingent to his being. Thus by definition God is necessarily Trinitarian, but his act of election is not a necessary definition of his being; it is only a contingent one.

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<sup>228</sup> George HUNSINGER, *Election and Trinity: Twenty-five Thesis on the Theology of Karl Barth*, in *Modern Theology*, 24,2 (April 2008), p. 179-198, p. 180.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 181.

Hunsinger went ahead in thesis no. 4, to cite numerous passages from Barth in which he (Barth) states categorically that with or without the creation of the world, God would still be Holy Trinity. He says Barth held this view from 1932 and clung unto it ever after as attested to in an interview he granted in 1968 (the year of his death) when he was asked whether he still stood by those 1932 views, and he replied: “*Ist doch herrlich, nicht?* (Splendid, isn’t it?)”<sup>230</sup>.

Hunsinger’s number 5 thesis is a clue on how to read Karl Barth. According to him, when Barth states that Jesus Christ is ‘the subject of election’ he is not speaking without qualification (*simpliciter*) but in a certain respect (*secundum quid*). Such qualification is the distinction between eternal Son as such and eternal Son as incarnate Son, which, despite their numerical sameness, are different in their modes of existence. As eternal Son qua eternal, he is not *incarnatus*; he is not even necessarily *incarnandus* but is so only contingently. By necessity and by definition, the eternal Son is the second person of the Trinity generated eternally by the Father, and he remains so independent of the creation of the world. Therefore, that Jesus Christ elects to be *incarnandus* is only by virtue of the fact that he is numerically the same as the eternal Son. But he argued that “strictly speaking, it is the eternal Son, not the Son *incarnatus*, nor even the Son *incarnandus*, who is the subject of this decision”<sup>231</sup>. But because of the Barthian thesis about the Trinitarian shape of eternity as simultaneity-in-distinction and distinction-in-simultaneity, one can make a stronger sense of the statement that Jesus Christ is the Subject of election. From one point of view, Barth views the cross of Christ, the Last Judgment, and pre-temporal election not as three different events but as three different forms of one and the same event. Each contains the other two by way of anticipation or recapitulation. In this sense therefore, the cross can be said to be present in the pre-temporal decision of election, so that the Lamb of God is slain from the foundation of the world. But in participating in the pre-temporal form of election, the cross does not cease to be temporal. Therefore the Son *incarnatus* subsists in the eternal Son without ceasing to be *incarnatus*. There is a real unity in distinction between the eternal Son and the Son *incarnatus*. And it is only because of this unity-in-distinction that it can be said in a certain respect (*secundum quid*, and not *simpliciter*) that the Son *incarnatus* or Jesus Christ (being internal and not external to the pre-existing eternal Son), is the subject of election.

There are some passages in the *Church Dogmatics* which McCormack alluded to as suggesting that for Barth election is ontologically prior to the Trinity so that the Trinity is a

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

consequence of election. Such passages as this: “what God is as God... the *essentia* or ‘essence’ of God is something which we will encounter either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Savior or not at all” (II/1, p. 261), are apparently glaring. But Hunsinger argues that this and similar other passages do not appear in Barth’s doctrine of election, nor do they pertain to it. He says Barth is speaking about “the act of revelation” not the act of election. In the act of revelation, Barth is saying that we cannot know God apart from the place in history where God deals with us; but the issue of pre-temporal election is not being discussed here. He says that when Barth discusses the pre-temporal decision even in 1942, he never changed his mind regarding the Trinity being ontologically prior to, and presupposed in, the pre-temporal act of election. According to him, the acting subject of the choice of the Son in the beginning to be obedient to grace, offering himself to become human, is unmistakably the eternal Son. He says that there is no clearer passage to support this than the one where Barth says: “The subject of this decision is the triune God – the Son of God no less than the Father and the Holy Spirit”<sup>232</sup>. The entire Trinity is, according to him, the subject of the decision of election while the lost Son of Man is its object. This being the case, the Trinity is presupposed, not generated, by this decision.

On the issue of Barth’s usage of the *logos asarkos*, he says Barth uses it always *secundum quid*, and that he does not reject the idea absolutely but rather affirms it as necessary in principle. What, in his opinion, Barth rejects, is the idea that we might still have access to a *logos asarkos* above and beyond the *logos ensarkos*, as a matter of contingent fact. But the *logos asarkos* is essential to the logic of his theology, serving to make clearer the idea that God the Holy Trinity has a relationship in and for himself that cannot be collapsed into, or strictly identified with, God’s relationship in and for the world. This for him is the meaning of Barth’s assertion that, “The second ‘person’ of the Godhead in himself and as such is not God the Reconciler. In himself and as such he is not revealed to us. In himself and as such he is not *Deus pro nobis*, either ontologically or epistemologically”<sup>233</sup>. When Barth therefore affirms the idea of the *logos asarkos*, he means to say that the eternal Word in itself and as such is perfectly determinate without us and not indeterminate, and that the Trinity in itself and as such is perfectly determinate (not indeterminate) without us. This means therefore according to him that, “*Deus pro nobis* would not be God if he were not perfectly and primordially *Deus extra nos*”<sup>234</sup>. He concluded by saying that, “For Barth, God is necessarily the Holy Trinity, but only contingently the God of

<sup>232</sup> CD II/2, p.110, cf. also George HUNSINGER, *Election and Trinity*, p. 187.

<sup>233</sup> CD IV/1, p. 52.

<sup>234</sup> G. HUNSINGER, *Election and Trinity*, p. 189.

election... The pre-temporal act of election is not an act of Trinitarian self-origination. It is rather an act of Trinitarian self-determination”<sup>235</sup>. Jesus Christ can only be said *secundum quid* not *simpliciter*, to be the electing God.

This conclusion is an attempt by Hunsinger to maintain the distinction between the *Logos* in his divine self-contained nature, and who he is at the incarnation. By such a distinction, he wants to establish that God’s eternal act of election and who he is in himself should be distinguished from what he does in time for us. This is a distinction which McCormack’s proposition denies. But how consistent Hunsinger’s position is with that of Barth will be examined later. A strong position which he maintains though, is that it is eternally necessary that the Son is *asarkos*, but only eternally contingent that he is also *ensarkos*. His interpretation of “eternally contingent” is that the incarnation rests entirely in the free grace of God and not upon any necessity in the divine nature, a position which will definitely make the Son of the Father to exist as the eternal *Logos* not just in relation to the world, but independently and primordially from all eternity. This is a position which maintains that the eternal *Logos* in its prior existence was presupposed in the act of election; and this is the position which he claims Barth held and never changed his mind about even in his later theology.

In Hunsinger’s understanding, Barth’s crucial distinction between the idea of the divine self-constitution in which God was constituted as the Holy Trinity, and that of the divine self-determination in which God determined by a free inner-Trinitarian decision to be God with us, does not make this secondary self-determination to entail a radical change in the divine being. He says that, “God’s being for himself is the *ground* of God’s being for us. But God’s being for us does not arise as a *necessary entailment* of God’s being for himself as the Holy Trinity”<sup>236</sup>. There is no necessary entailment on the part of God to be God for us, but only a free inner-Trinitarian decision which presupposes a prior independent existence of the Holy Trinity. This being the case, God would still be the Holy Trinity without us and without the existence of time. He does not need the world to be God nor to be the Holy Trinity. Hunsinger maintains that this is a view that is internally coherent with Barth. One is free according to him, to disagree with this Barth’s view. But he says that, “the notion that the eternal Son was constituted by pre-temporal election was something so bizarre, and obviously false, that Barth could see little point in pausing very

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<sup>235</sup> Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 195 (emphasis his).

long to refute it”<sup>237</sup>, except a statement Barth made in CD II/2 saying: “Of course, the fact that Jesus Christ is the Son of God does not rest on election”<sup>238</sup>. This ‘Of course’ according to him, makes it dubious for anyone to claim that Barth changed his mind in the course of writing the *Church Dogmatics* about the Trinity being prior to the eternal act of election.

Was Hunsinger interpreting Barth objectively or was he being influenced by his own strong traditional Trinitarian doctrinal conviction? Much as I see his position as being closer to tradition, I suspect that his synchronic method of approach to Barth could not allow him to read Barth in the light of the ensuing historical development of Barth’s thought. A diachronic methodology such as McCormack’s would allow one to move from latter more mature thought back to the earlier thought and critically correct the earlier thought in the light of the latter thought as McCormack just did. However, whether McCormack (and Barth for that matter) is theologically correct in making the election to have a priority over the trinity is a different thing altogether which we shall examine later on.

### **3.4. Attempts at reconciliation**

#### **3.4.1. A hybrid language of “simultaneity”: Just how reconciliatory?**

The “traditionalists” and the “revisionists” propositions regarding Karl Barth’s doctrine of election and its implication to his doctrine of the Trinity are mutually exclusive. The two propositions, as exposed above, move in opposite directions. One cannot therefore possibly reconcile them by way of harmonizing them into one single position. However, since both positions claim to be the authentic interpretation of Karl Barth, one can only seek to know which of the positions is closer to what Barth wanted to express. In seeking such knowledge, we shall rely heavily on the critiques of experts who criticized them. The danger of such approach though, is that one cannot completely take a distance from pitching his/her tent in one of the camps because majority of those who have tried to mediate between the two positions ended up taking sides (even if inadvertently).

Kevin W. Hector for instance, while trying to mediate between Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar, argued *contra* McCormack that God’s triunity logically precedes God’s determination to be with us, but also *contra* Molnar that this logical precedence entails neither

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> CD II/2, p. 107.

that the pre-incarnate Son is utterly unknown to us nor that God retains some freedom to be God-without-humanity<sup>239</sup>. He very correctly observed that both McCormack and Molnar agree that God's economic triunity must be the source of our understanding of God's immanent triunity. But he says that this formulation means different things to both of them. McCormack's conclusion from looking at the economic trinity was that God must always have been God-with-us, while Molnar's conclusion from looking at the same economic trinity was that God must always have been the triune God, but who could have been otherwise-than-with-us. Such different conclusions arrived at from looking at the same subject matter, led them to divergent directions. McCormack's rejection of *Logos asarkos* by collapsing it into the *Logos incarnandus*, did not, in Molnar's view, account for God's freedom. He, on the contrary, is of the opinion that, if God is to retain his freedom, then that freedom must include his freedom to be without us. But McCormack makes God's self-determination to be God-with-us as constitutive of God's triunity. Thus God is not free not to be God-with-us since such is his being. His economic triunity points the fact that his being is eternally oriented towards being-with-us. Molnar on the other hand points out that the economic triunity reveals the fact that God being with us is a free decision which could have been decided otherwise so that he could have been God-without-us.

In examining the two positions in the light of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, Hector observed that the source of their divergent claims stems from the fact that in the *Church Dogmatics*, "some texts point to God's triunity as the guarantee of God's freedom, whereas others point to God's triunity as the disclosure of God as eternally God-with-us"<sup>240</sup>. In CD I/1, p. 306, for instance, Barth affirmed that God's immanent triunity is the guarantee of God's freedom when he says: "Lordship is present in revelation because its reality and truth are so fully self-grounded, because it does not need any other actualization or validation than that of its actual occurrence, because it is revelation through itself and not in relation to something else... Lordship means freedom"<sup>241</sup>. But in CD II/2 p. 101, Barth suggested that God's immanent triunity is tied together with God's creatures when he says: "In the beginning, before time and space as we know them, before creation, before there was any reality distinct from God which could be the object of the love of God or the setting for His acts of freedom, God anticipated and determined within Himself...that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as-yet non-

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<sup>239</sup> Kevin W. HECTOR, *God's Triunity and Self-determination. A Conversation with Karl Barth, Bruce McCormack and Paul Molnar*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7, 3 (July 2005), p. 246-261.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>241</sup> Cf. Ibid., p. 255.

existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him”<sup>242</sup>. This implies according to Hector that if God reveals Godself in Christ, and if in Christ God is unreservedly God-with-and-for-us, then it means that God in Godself (and thus eternally) is determined to be God-with-and-for-us. But he says that the two positions are not as far from each other as they apparently seem if we really examine them in the light of Barth’s definition of ‘freedom’. When this is done it would become clear according to him, that Molnar’s position is a departure from that of Barth.

In Barthian understanding, according to Hector, ‘freedom’ must be defined in relation to God rather than the contrary, that is, God being defined in relation to ‘freedom’. God is free in the sense of being self-moved. His work is absolutely his own; it is independently his own, needing no dictation from outside or conditioning from any higher necessity. It is his own decision and his own will. His freedom includes not being limited by his freedom from eternal conditioning. He is free with regards to his freedom. He is free not to surrender himself to his freedom but to use it to give himself to the covenant community between God and humanity. God is the God of the covenant. But his freedom is freedom *for* the covenant and not as it were freedom *from* the covenant. According to him, “to suggest that God cannot use God’s freedom to bind Godself – would be to make God a servant of God’s freedom and thus ‘God’ a predicate of ‘freedom’ rather than vice-versa”<sup>243</sup>. This is because Barth has always insisted that God’s independence must be seen in the light of God’s revelation in Christ instead of beginning with some abstract assertion of God’s independence. God is independent from the world, yes; but this is not an absolute independence, it is rather an independence necessary for God to be God-with-us in spite of our unworthiness. In the words of Hector, “God is free-*from* the world in order to be free-*for* it”<sup>244</sup>. Viewed in this way, we can see that God’s freedom is not jeopardised by his eternal Self-determination to be God-with-us, but rather corresponds with it. This is because for Barth God’s freedom is *for* not *from*, humanity. And if his freedom is *for* us, there is no theological basis to assert that he has another freedom above this freedom *for* us. His freedom is only this freedom *for* and no other freedom. If this is the case, if from eternity God determined to be God-with-us, then his being is not an indeterminate *logos asarkos* but rather eternally a *logos incarnandus* (as McCormack rightly pointed out).

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<sup>242</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.* (emphasis his).

But Hector argues that while McCormack's position regarding the identification of the *logos asarkos* with the *logos incarnandus* appears to be the position which is more in consonance with Barth's theology, it is very unlikely that Barth would have followed McCormack in suggesting that God's eternal self-determination *constitutes* God's triunity. The reason is not that it poses the problem of God's freedom (because in his views, it does not, since God's freedom is freedom *for* and not freedom *from* us). The reason he deduced is that McCormack's conclusion appears to make God's self-determination into an abstraction, making God's self-determination into a 'thing-in-itself' divorced from the concrete interaction between Father, Son and Holy Spirit as Barth would have it identified. This, according to Hector, turns God's decision to be God-with-us into an 'absolute will' rather than God's eternal, triune act. In his opinion, Barth's insistence on the concrete interaction between Father, Son and Spirit in the act of election logically implies that the triunity is prior to election since the triunity is logically necessary to this self-determination called election. There is no other election apart from that which exists in the relationship of Father, Son and Spirit. But because God is eternally God-with-us, his triune being must coincide eternally with his decision to be God-with-us. His conclusion is that one must best speak of the simultaneity of God's triunity and self-determination; of the simultaneity of triunity and election. He says:

"Father, Son and Spirit subsist eternally in the movement of this decision, and this decision is always concretely enacted in the relations of Father, Son and Spirit. Trinity and election, therefore, are each logically prerequisite for a proper understanding of the other: we cannot rightly understand God's determination to be with us apart from the triune identities who enact this determination, and we cannot rightly understand the triune identities apart from God's decision to be with us"<sup>245</sup>.

But he acknowledged that this simultaneity of God's triunity and determination to be God-with-us might carry some weighty implication. One of such is that it could lead to the conclusion that creation is not only good but in some sense, contingently *necessary*. This means that if God has eternally determined to be God-with-us, then he has freely *bound* Godself to creating 'us' with whom God would be. He says that such implication of the direction Barth's doctrine of election is going could have been the reason why people like Molnar decided to turn back and fashion another direction.

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., p. 258.

Has Hector mediated between the two opposing thesis? Certainly not! All he tried to do was to be a sympathetic critic of the two positions. He tried to maintain McCormack's position while avoiding what he perceived as its pitfall; and at the same time using such perceived pitfall as an argument in support of Molnar's position while at the same time refusing to follow Molnar to the logical conclusion such a premise would lead to. In the end, he invented the language of 'simultaneity' which strictly speaking, is untenable. If any thing, such 'simultaneity option' gives credence more to Molnar's position as he implicitly agreed, because, if creation becomes in any sense contingently necessary for God, then God is after all not as free. In the end, his proposition leaves us with a worse form of pure abstraction devoid of any concreteness, the very thing he accuses McCormack of being guilty of. This is the danger of most hybrids – they could sometimes leave us with some form of monstrous creation which is neither this nor that.

Hector's basic position is that McCormack is justified in characterizing as a lapse Barth's later suggestion that the pre-incarnate identity of the *logos* remains a mystery and hence is unknown. He says that Barth's position that God is eternally God-for-us implies that the *logos* is eternally *logos incarnandus* and so, known. But this self-determination does not imply its priority over triunity by way of constituting it (as McCormack argued), not because this will touch on the authenticity of God's freedom (as Molnar argued), but because it turns the very self-determination into an absolute in itself.

But Molnar in a quick reaction to Hector's article, pointed out that the later was mistaken in assuming that Barth's emphasis on God *for* us meant that he no longer emphasized God's freedom *from* us. He also said Hector incorrectly equated triunity and election, and that it was erroneous for him to have thought that creation is contingently necessary for God. He says that Barth's dialectical understanding of the triune God's freedom *from* and *for* creatures disallowed equating God's ontological freedom with election in the manner suggested by McCormack and Hector. According to him, "equating election with God's triunity is comparable to equating God's omnipotence with his omnicausality – something which Barth absolutely refused to do precisely because he recognized God's freedom"<sup>246</sup>. He says the crucial error McCormack made was the assumption that the incarnation and outpouring of the Spirit are constitutive of the Trinity in such a way that God can only be triune as a consequence of that primal decision of God to assign to himself the being-with-and-for-humanity, which is a being that he would have eternally.

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<sup>246</sup> Paul D. MOLNAR, *The Trinity, Election and God's Ontological Freedom. A Response to Kevin W. Hector*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8, 3 (July 2006), p. 294-306, p. 296.

But he argues that for Barth, God is eternally Father, Son and Spirit, so that he does not need to assign that being to himself but rather that he freely re-affirms himself as the God he is. According to him, it is this element of the need on the part of God to assign a being to himself that is the nub of the difficulty in the rest of McCormack's position.

When Hector argues therefore that the idea that election constitutes God's triunity is not a matter of the divine freedom for Barth, but rather only a matter of abstraction, he is wrong in Molnar's view. On the contrary, Molnar believes strongly that it is a matter of divine freedom which God did not abandon but rather exercised in determining to be God for us and acting historically on that determination. He is optimistic that he had not only properly conceptualized the divine freedom but that his thought is faithfully in continuity with that of Barth. This is because, like Barth and T. F. Torrance, he believes that "what God is toward us in the economy he is eternally within himself, but that God's eternal being is not exhausted in his determination to be God for us and his actions *ad extra*, and therefore there are certain things that cannot be read back from the economy into the immanent Trinity without rationalizing the doctrine of the Trinity and without resolving God's essence into his activity *ad extra*"<sup>247</sup>. There are certain ineffable realities which we cannot explain the 'how' of. Such is the 'how' of the divine relation between election and the Trinity which we are incapable of knowing unless we are prepared to dabble into what he called "the error of insisting that because God is graciously free *for us* in his Word and Spirit, he *had to be* so from all eternity"<sup>248</sup>. This is the error which he thinks made Hector and McCormack to reduce the *logos asarkos* into the *logos incarnandus*. The former is identical with the later but cannot be reduced into it. One needs to agree with Torrance that while God was and is always Father, he was not always Creator, and while he was always Son, he was not always incarnate. This distinction, in his view, is necessary in order not to collapse the *logos asarkos* into the *logos incarnandus* as did Hector and McCormack.

### 3.4.2. Moving beyond Barth and McCormack

Perhaps the most interesting contribution to the debate (that I have read so far) is that made by James J. Cassidy in which he attempted to show that in the unfolding debate, two mutually exclusive positions emerged – one proving to be a more accurate interpretation of Barth,

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. (emphasis his).

and the other proving to be closer to the historic Christian position on the matter<sup>249</sup>. His contribution is particularly interesting as it seems to be the only way out of the present impasse.

After examining the position of McCormack on the one hand, and those of Hunsinger and Molnar on the other hand, he decided first to test their conformity to Barth in the light of the *Church Dogmatics*. The first thing he observed was that McCormack said he was only ‘smoothing out’ Barth’s doctrine of God in the light of his later developed doctrine of election. McCormack had argued that before he listened to the 1936 lecture of Pierre Maury, Barth was committed to aspects of classical metaphysics. But once he listened to the said lecture, he entered into a post-metaphysical stage in his thinking, and this was when he developed his doctrine of election. He did not though rule out any traces in the *Church Dogmatics* of ‘metaphysical’ doctrine of God. But he is saying that, given the current modification in the doctrine of election, it is illogical to still maintain his earlier notion concerning God’s being. He is saying in effect that the revised Barthian doctrine of election must compel us to understand his doctrine of God in a way that makes election constitute the Being of God; in other words, in actualistic terms. Such actualistic terms imply that in spite of some glaring passages in the *Church Dogmatics* that support the claim that God’s being is prior to his act, we must read such passages not in isolation but in the light of his broader doctrine of election where Jesus is said to be both the object and subject of election. Here Cassidy agrees with McCormack’s approach because he is convinced that to really understand a theologian, one needs to read him/her in the light of his/her more mature works, and from such mature works, one can then move back to the beginning of the theologian’s thought. The advantage of this method is that the mature thought will help to clarify the earlier thought.

It is in the light of such methodology of reading from last to first that Cassidy noted that though Barth’s theology is Christocentric, but the Christocentrism of his theology found fuller and mature expression in CD IV/1 where Barth presented his understanding of the person of Jesus Christ in the light of the hypostatic union. He says Barth wrote this volume with Rudolf Bultmann’s tendency toward Docetism in mind. Here Barth makes the incarnation (God with us) the centre of Christian message and theology particularly the doctrine of reconciliation which he says has taken place objectively in the incarnation. We do not know the reconciler as the *Logos asarkos*, the abstracted second person of the Trinity without human flesh (as Bultmann believes).

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<sup>249</sup> Cf. James J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, in *Westminster Theological Journal*, 71,1 (2009), p. 53-81.

We know him in the joining of God and man in the one God-human. He says that the question Barth raises here is that the eternal Son in himself and apart from being *pro nobis*, is not ‘pre-existent’:

“At the beginning of all things in God there is the Gospel and the Law, the gracious address of God and the gracious claim of God, both directed to man... For Jesus Christ – not an empty *Logos*, but Jesus Christ the incarnate Word, the baby born in Bethlehem, the man put to death at Golgotha and raised in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, the man whose history this is – is the unity of the two. He is both at one and the same time. ... That He is both as the Word of God spoken in His work, as the Word of God which has become work, is something which belongs to Himself as the eternal Son of God for Himself and prior to us. In this He is the pre-existent *Deus pro nobis*. ... To that extent He alone is there at the beginning of all things”<sup>250</sup>.

Cassidy’s reading of this text is that Barth is suggesting that we cannot speak of the *Logos* as some abstract *asarkos* apart from his being with us, his incarnation, which implies that the incarnation is an eternal act of God that makes God who he is. According to him, “Barth, far from divinizing the humanity of Jesus Christ, has humanized God. God from all eternity is God in the flesh”<sup>251</sup>. He followed this up by saying that in CD IV/3, Barth resolved the problem of the relation between reconciliation and revelation by identifying the two. It is in the union of the two movements of God in the Christ event that we have at one and the same time reconciliation between God and man and God’s revelation to man. He says Barth seems to imply that Jesus Christ as the God-human existed before creation when he said: “That Jesus Christ lives means quite simply that He exists in the manner of God, and therefore prior to all else that exists. ... But it also means quite simply that He exists in the manner of a man”<sup>252</sup>. And he says that whenever Barth speaks of ‘Jesus Christ’, he is speaking of Jesus Christ as God-human, as God in flesh, and not as some abstract second person of the Trinity, the *Logos asarkos*. Therefore when he says here that Jesus Christ is prior to all things that exists, he really means that Jesus Christ as God-human is eternal.

In positing this however, he believes Barth seems to have radically gone beyond the traditional Chalcedonian formulation by seeming to imply that God exists from all eternity as *Jesus Christ* in which both God and the world co-exist. This of course implies making the

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<sup>250</sup> CD IV/ 1, p. 53.

<sup>251</sup> J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, p. 63.

<sup>252</sup> CD IV/ 3, p. 39.

incarnation an eternal event. And in Cassidy's interpretation, not only is the humanity of Jesus Christ eternalized but the world also, so that the *Logos* never did exist apart from the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth. As radical as this type of Christology is, Cassidy believes this is just in line with Barth's earlier emphatic denial of the *Logos asarkos* in CD I/2: "The inconceivable fact in it is that without ceasing to be God the Word of God is among us in such a way that He takes over human being, which is His creature, into his own being and to that extent makes it his own being"<sup>253</sup>. One can say therefore that by assuming the humanity of Christ into the being of God, Barth implies that God really has no being without the act of incarnation. His incarnation, which is his act, is eternal and constitutes who God is by nature. In maintaining this position, Barth rejected the famous *extra Calvinisticum* of the Reformed theology. He sees the Reformed *totus intra et extra* as offering as much problems as the Lutheran *totus intra* in the discussion of the hypostatic union. He had then to abandon the classical Reformed view (and with it the traditional Chalcedonian view) when he insists that all we can know about God are His acts. Cassidy articulated the thought of Barth by saying:

"What Barth says in his later work (CD II/1 and 2) is supported by what he says about Christology elsewhere. In jettisoning the traditional Chalcedonian model, and eternalizing human flesh (and with the flesh of Christ, all of creation as well), we can understand how God's single eye toward reconciliation and revelation for us determines and constitutes who he is in his very nature. There is no being of God that stands 'abstracted' from his work for us in Christ. God exists as *actus purus*: he is always acting and never just 'being' in a static sense"<sup>254</sup>.

From the evidence of Barth's thought in the *Church Dogmatics*, Cassidy concluded that it seems McCormack is closer in his assessment of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity which should be understood in the light of his actualistic doctrine of election, than did Hunsinger and Molnar. McCormack (especially by acknowledging the inconsistencies and developments in Barth's thought, an acknowledgement which is lacking in Hunsinger and Molnar), proves to be a more consistent and a more accurate interpreter of Barth. But the big question is whether McCormack is theologically correct on the issue at stake. The issue is whether it is reasonable to maintain the belief that God's act is logically prior to his triunity. On this Cassidy came hard on both McCormack and Barth when he said: "In fact, McCormack's formulation – as well as that of Barth before him – proves to be a radical aberration from both Reformed theology and sound

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<sup>253</sup> CD I/2, p. 160-161.

<sup>254</sup> J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, p. 66.

biblical exegesis”<sup>255</sup>. By saying this Cassidy has now shifted the debate from who interpreted Barth more accurately to whether Barth is traditionally and theologically sound in the first instance. This, in my view, is a very new approach of moving beyond Barth and McCormack, and, one that could provide a leeway out of the present impasse. This is exactly what Cassidy did in the remaining pages that follow.

Cassidy went beyond Barth to lean on the insights provided by Cornelius Van Til and Geerhardus Vos in order to show how the systematic-theological and biblical-theological approaches work in harmony to faithfully formulate how God remains God *ad intra* while at the same time being God-for-us in his act of election *ad extra*. In other words, God remains self-contained without being an impersonal abstraction. In order to explain the relation between God’s knowledge and our knowledge, Van Til employed the archetype/ectype relation. He says that God’s knowledge is archetypal because he is the original speaker, while our knowledge is ectypal because we are speakers in a derivative fashion. God created language to reflect something of his very nature so that even when we use human language to describe God, such language really refers to God in his very nature as a concrete self-existent being and not just providing only a “name” for God. God is the starting point of our knowledge and as such His speech and knowledge are prior to our speech and knowledge. If this is the case, then his being must be prior to, and the ground for, his redemptive acts. Cassidy puts it that, “His personal intertrinitarian being (with the perichoretic relationship between the three persons) forms the archetypal ground of which his covenantal acts are its ectypal manifestation. God’s acts *pro nobis* can be truly personal only because he first exists as absolute personality itself”<sup>256</sup>. This means that in himself and as such, in his triunity, God’s being is essentially and eternally personal.

The relationship between the trinity prior to and apart from his acts towards humanity is that of personal love. The Father eternally begets and loves the Son. The Son who is eternally begotten of the Father equally loves the Father. The Spirit who eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son loves both and both love him. The three persons have one absolute personality. One can therefore maintain an absolute triune God who is prior to his act without sacrificing relationality. This is because God is not abstract but concrete; but his concreteness does not interfere with his universality. He still maintains his unity, simplicity and *aseity*. His Oneness safeguards his absoluteness by nature, while his triunity safeguards his concreteness by nature.

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<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

Therefore he does not depend upon creation to be either absolute or concrete. Van Til uses what he called the “representational principle” to relate God’s being and his act in such a way that God’s absolute personal being (the archetype) forms the basis and the ground upon which he can relate to his creation by way of covenant (ectype). The distance between God and man is so great that man can only know God through God’s initiative. But in Van Til’s understanding (*contra* Barth), the Creator-creature distinction means that God is self-contained and has a being that in no way is contingent upon his acts *pro nobis*. His being is necessary while his act is contingent. This means that being precedes covenant. And as Geerhardus Vos would argue, it is the triune God, and no other, who orders creation and redemption according to his very nature.

The works of Van Til and Vos, according to Cassidy, help in a better understanding of the relation between this personal God and his interaction with us. Such relation is such that God, according to him, “remains original (archetype) as the immanent Trinity, and yet, by way of covenant, relates to us as the economic Trinity (ectype)”<sup>257</sup>. And he says this archetype/ectype relation has the advantage of maintaining both God’s contact with us and the Creator-creature distinction.

Building on the biblical theological contribution of Geerhardus Vos, especially his exegetical work on the second chapter of Hebrews where the question of why it was necessary for Son who is eternal God to take human flesh and undergo temptation, suffering and death, Cassidy maintains that the incarnation was necessary for the salvation of humankind. But it was not necessary that God bothers to save humankind. He had the freedom to either save him or let him perish. But once he decided to save him, the theology of Heb. 2:9-18 as exegeted by Vos does not permit him to do so through any other way than to become man. With reference to death, suffering, and temptation, it is therefore impossible for God to save man without himself becoming man.

In becoming man, God subjected the world to come to the Son so that nothing was left outside the control of the Son of Man (Heb. 2:8). This is the famous kingly office of the Son. But the Son did not rest on the “exalted” kingly office, He “descended” to the priestly office where Jesus Christ is said to have suffered death (vs. 9). He was made a little lower than the angels so that he might taste death on behalf of those with whom he identifies. Cassidy interprets this text this way: “he who was at one time *unable* to taste death become incarnate so that he might be

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<sup>257</sup> Ibid., p. 71.

able to taste death in and through human flesh”<sup>258</sup>. Such identification with the covenant community is one of the requirements of a priest (cf. Exod. 28: 2, 40). But one couldn’t be a priest apart from human flesh because the Old Covenant code required that a priest must be a brother drawn from Israel, particularly from the line of Aaron (cf. Exod. 40:12-15). But if the Son tasted death, it is not in his divine nature as *Logos asarkos* because God cannot die.

In order to redeem those under the law, the Son had to be born under the law (cf. Gal. 4:4). Cassidy’s interpretation of this text is that, “if the Son is to identify with humanity he must become what he is not already by nature. Only in this way can he be a sympathetic high priest identifying with the sufferings of those he has come to represent as priest-sacrifice”<sup>259</sup>. The theology of the author of the letter to the Hebrews, according to him, precludes in its entirety any idea of God in himself suffering apart from human flesh and before the incarnation. We cannot therefore talk of the divine nature, or the God-human from all eternity, suffering, according to this theology of the Hebrews. This also goes for the idea of being tempted. The Son who is above the angels became flesh so that through his flesh he can help those who are tempted. But from all eternity, prior to and apart from the incarnation, he was unable to be tempted. He can only be tempted to the end so that he can become a sympathetic high priest. The idea of a sympathetic high priest does not refer to the divine being prior to the incarnation, but, as has already been noted, is part of the creaturely realm. Priesthood is not proper to the pre-existent life of the Son; it is rather a contingent state added onto his pre-mundane divine nature.

This is where McCormack and Barth went wrong by eternalizing the priesthood of the Son. But Cassidy, in agreement with Vos, maintains that priesthood is something that is proper to his humanity alone. This means that at one time God was not a high priest. Cassidy’s argument is that we can only say that God was tempted, suffered and died *secundum quid*, not *simpliciter*. These can only be true if they happened in Jesus Christ through his human nature and never in his divine nature. The logic he adduced for this argument is convincing enough: “if he could have died, suffered, or been tempted *in his divine nature* there would have been no reason for him to take on human flesh. But the divine nature cannot die, suffer, or be tempted – neither before his incarnation nor during his incarnation”<sup>260</sup>. If we sometimes attribute the actions of dying, suffering and being tempted, in a qualified sense, to God, such attribution is not thereby made a

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., p. 73 (emphasis his).

<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 74 (emphasis his).

<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 75-76.

statement of ontic reality but remains what it is – an attribution. But the fact is that incarnation in no way affected the divine nature. This being the case, the idea of *Logos asarkos* (as the self-contained eternal Son of God in his divine nature) remains a reality. And such eternal pre-existent state must be prior to both the incarnation and the divine decision to be *Logos incarnandus*.

Cassidy concluded that both McCormack and Barth erred in at least three ways on the basis of which we cannot follow them in their Christology, doctrine of the Trinity, and doctrine of election. First, their teaching that God's act of election constitutes his triune being amounts to a denial of an antecedent being behind the acts of God. If there is no such antecedent being prior to God's act, then it means that God took into consideration fallen man before he became triune, and this implies that he is somewhat contingent to the created order. This further amounts to a denial of *aseity* of God, and once God is no longer *a se*, he is no longer sovereign and free. Secondly, McCormack's assertion that God suffers not only denies the impassibility of God the Logos but is also an affirmation that all the persons of the Godhead suffer as well. Again, his identification of the *Logos asarkos* with the *Logos ensarkos* means the eternalization of the humanity of Christ; and if Barth's teaching that Christ's humanity is sinful and fallen is to hold, then it means also that God is sinful. Thirdly, Barth and McCormack's desire to avoid Nestorianism led them to the heresies of Eutychius. McCormack's denial of the traditional doctrine of 'communication of operations' in the two natures of Jesus Christ on the basis of his fears that there was no way the divine and the human natures could work co-operatively without the former overpowering the latter, and his subsequent rejection of the two wills and two minds in Christ as has been the Church's official teaching, is a recoil back to the error of Eutychius. This is because he advances the Barthian Christology that collapses the human nature of Christ into the divine under one Subject. Of course this in effect is an aberration of the classical Chalcedonian teaching of one person in two natures without confusion or separation<sup>261</sup>. It is precisely because of his rejection of the two wills and two minds in Jesus Christ, and his substituting it rather with the God-human who is one Subject with one mind and one will that made McCormack to think that when the human nature suffers, the divine nature also suffers.

We have seen from the foregoing that whereas McCormack interpreted Barth correctly, both men derailed from the classical Chalcedonian formula. And from sound systematic-theological and biblical-theological perspectives, it is not so reasonable to hold the priority of the

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<sup>261</sup> For a deeper insight into why Barth and McCormack should not be followed in their Christology, doctrines of trinity and election, cf. J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, p. 78-81

election over the trinity as they did. Cassidy's work has opened up a new chapter in the debate which in my opinion is more important than just trying to find out which of the two opposing propositions is a correct interpretation of Barth. One should move beyond this to tackle the issue of the reasonableness of Barth's position. Barth himself seems not to have intended that the *Church Dogmatics* be taken as a conclusion. In the Foreword to the American Edition of *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, he wrote: "I also understand the *Church Dogmatics*... not as the conclusion, but as the initiation of a new exchange of views about the question of proper theology, the established knowledge of God, and the obedient service of God among and for men"<sup>262</sup>. A more proper theology in the debate in question, in my view, would entail the priority of the trinity over God's gracious decision of election than the reverse. Barth followed this up by advocating for a "theology of freedom": "What we need... is ...not...Barthianism... but... a 'theology of freedom' that looks ahead and strives forward"<sup>263</sup>. Such freedom should, for me, begin with the freedom of God. This is where he was wrong in undermining the freedom of God by tying the immanent trinity to the economic trinity in such a way that God cannot be except he is with us. Here, as elsewhere, Barth's theology is in need of correction.

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<sup>262</sup> Karl BARTH, *Evangelical Theology. An Introduction*, Grand Rapids, William B. Eerdmans, 1963, p. xi-xii.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xii.

## CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Karl Barth is unarguably one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century. His relevance today lies in the fact that “new discoveries” are still being made in his theology. It is such “new discoveries” and the uncertainty among Barthians where Barth himself would belong in the ensuing debate which, for me, has captured the real meaning of dialectical theology. If Barth had resolved his thesis and counter anti-thesis in a synthesis, perhaps his theology would have been confined to the past as a piece of a historical event that occurred in the twentieth century; and perhaps his works would have been used as mere stagnant theological manuals to be recited by theology students. But the fact that his theology is still alive and active, and that heated debate about the nature of his theology is still on-going, goes to show that Barth is still very much relevant today. The debate itself, rather than one side of the argument, is more important. This is because the debate helps one to use Barth as a spring-board, but to move beyond Barth to make “new discoveries” in theology that would help in ‘smoothing out’ the doctrines of the Church.

Of recent, attempt has been made for instance, to develop a third way in theology that is neither conservative nor liberal but rather offers fresh approaches to scripture and Christian life. This attempt has given birth to the postliberal movement, a movement that is essentially a Barthian project. Postliberal theology is an Anglo-Saxon initiative. It began as a Yale-centred movement founded by Yale Barthian theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, and spread among notable Yale-trained Barthians among who is George Hunsinger<sup>264</sup>. The postliberal movement is a project initiated by Karl Barth when he set off in his dogmatics by describing the liberal tradition of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Adolf von Harnack as a destruction of Protestant theology and the Protestant church. In his “theology of crisis”, Emile Brunner also maintained that both liberalism and orthodoxy betrayed the Reformation principles of the sovereignty and freedom of the word of God. Reinhold Niebuhr on his own part argued that fundamentalism was

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<sup>264</sup> For a concise account of the origins of postliberal theology, cf. Gary DORRIEN, *The Origins of Postliberalism. A Third Way in Theology?* in *Christian Century*, 118,20 (4-11 July 2001), p. 16-21. However, it should be noted that in his treatment of Karl Barth’s relationship to Postliberalism and Postmodernism, McCormack, sequel to his interactions with especially postliberal Yale theologians Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, and other variety of contemporary interpretations and appropriations of Barth’s theological methodology and epistemology, argued that Barth cannot be properly called the father of postliberal/nonfoundationalist or postmodern theology because he was neither any of them. He rather categorized Barth not as a foundationalist but as a “transfoundationalist”. Cf. Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *Orthodox and Modern. Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2008. But our contention here is that even if Barth could not be labelled as a postliberal theologian, postliberalism is an offshoot of his theology, just as Jesus Christ strictly speaking cannot be labelled a Christian even though Christianity evolved from his teachings.

hopelessly wrong because it took Christian myths literally, while liberal Christianity was hopelessly wrong because it failed to take Christian myths seriously.

However, it was Frei's book, *'The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative'* (1974) that propounded the postliberal argument in a more definitive manner and gave postliberalism its foundational start. Here he gave a rich survey of the ways 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century theologians overlooked the narrative character of scripture. According to him, liberals looked for the real meaning of the Bible in the eternal truths about God and humanity that it conveyed, while conservatives looked for the real meaning in the Bible's factual references. In both cases, the priority of scriptural narrative itself was overturned. Scripture no longer defined the world in which Christians lived in a normative way; rather, the Bible was turned into a source of support for modern narratives of progress or for other doctrinal norms. His essential project was therefore to emphasize the primacy of scriptural narrative for theology. William Placher, in the introduction to the selected essays of Hans Frei he co-edited with Hunsinger, wrote concerning Frei's own hermeneutical proposals that developed the category of "realistic narrative" that plays a very important role in current discussions of biblical interpretation that, "More than anyone else in the United States, he (Frei) reintroduced Karl Barth into the conversations of contemporary theology, and his own work in Christology showed him to be a creative thinker, anything but the sort of 'Barthian' that Barth himself always despised"<sup>265</sup>.

On his own part, George Lindbeck added to Frei's emphasis on the primacy of scriptural narrative for theology, an insistence on the primacy of language over experience and a theory about religion as a cultural-symbolic medium. In his book *'The Nature of Doctrine'* he argued for a "cultural-linguistic" approach to religion as against the "cognitive-propositional" approach of most conservative theologies which claim that doctrinal statements directly or literally refer to reality, and the "experiential-expressive" approach of liberal theologies which seek to ground religious language upon foundational claims about experiences of religious feeling, moral value, etc. Against these modern trends in theology, Lindbeck contends that religious traditions are historically shaped and culturally encoded, and are governed by internal rules. Doctrines are, according to him, more like the rules of grammar that govern the way we use language to describe the world; and believers can only prove the rationality or relevance of their religious

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<sup>265</sup> Hans W. FREI, *Theology and Narrative. Selected Essays*, (ed. by) George HUNSINGER and William C. PLACHER, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 3.

tradition by skilfully using its internal grammar<sup>266</sup>. This reference to postliberal theology as emanating from Barth, go to show that theological “shoots” are still springing from the root of Barth, and thus underscores the relevance of Barth even today.

Returning to our area of focus in this work, the Anglo-Saxon Barthians have also contributed immensely toward the re-discovery of Barth’s Christology by engaging in a lively debate about the relation of the Trinity to God’s gracious election in Barth’s theology. At the fore-front of the debate are the great Princeton Barthians – Bruce McCormack and George Hunsinger. McCormack adjusted Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity in the light of his latter more mature doctrine of election. In its adjusted state, the Trinity becomes three modes of being who are eternally so as a result of God’s logically prior decision to be God *pro nobis*. But it was unthinkable according to him, for Barth to go back and revise the doctrine of the trinity beginning again at the beginning, as that would entail drastic structural changes in the *Church Dogmatics*. Such structural change would see the doctrine of the Trinity being subordinated to the doctrine of election in the order of treatment. If that had happened, then Barth’s attempt to respond to theologians like Schleiermacher and many other Protestant theologians who regarded the doctrine of the Trinity as a mere theological speculation with no relevance to life, and who consequently relegated it to a mere appendix, would have been in vain. While relegating the doctrine of the Trinity to the background as just an appendix at the end of *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher had remarked that the doctrine of the trinity, as ecclesiastically framed, is not an immediate utterance concerning the Christian self-consciousness, but only a combination of several such utterances<sup>267</sup>. In response to Schleiermacher et al., Barth purposely began his theology in a Trinitarian manner. McCormack therefore tried to do the ‘unthinkable’ thing that Barth failed to do, by revising the doctrine of the trinity in the light of the doctrine of election. From the analysis of experts examined above, it seems that McCormack’s position is more consistent with Barth’s ontology and more compatible with Barth’s understanding of the doctrine of Trinity along the lines of a single Subject in three modes of being. His thesis of the priority of God’s election over the Trinity seems also more in line with Barth’s thought than the contrary position of Hunsinger which maintains an eternal priority of the Trinity over God’s decision to be God-with-us.

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<sup>266</sup> For more on Lindbeck’s “cultural- linguistic” approach to religious doctrines, cf. George A. LINDBECK, *The Nature of Doctrine. Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Philadelphia, The Westminster Press, 1984.

<sup>267</sup> Cf. Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden, London, SCM Press, 1974, p. 238.

However, the adjusted position of McCormack presents some problems that contradict the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. If we follow McCormack in his adjustment, we shall end up arriving at a God who is ontologically determined by the incarnation. To be determined by the incarnation means to be dependent on creation for his mode of being, and this means that God is no longer *totaliter aliter*. To do away with the concept of *totaliter aliter* is to posit that God is no longer a Subject who is revealed in hiddenness or hidden in revealedness. Therefore the dialectic of veiling and unveiling which McCormack propounded cannot be sustained. Discarding of the idea of *totaliter aliter* means that in Christ, God completely unveiled himself in creaturely nature without retaining any veiled divine nature in the form of a *Logos asarkos*. According to this view, *Deus revelatus* can no longer be seen as the same God who is *totaliter aliter* (absolutely hidden from us), since it contends that we cannot know a God who is not *pro nobis*. No longer will God be revealing himself in hiddenness, but rather he reveals as One who is completely determined by us. This issue of doing away with the aspect of God as *totaliter aliter* will definitely lead us to the theology of Jürgen Moltmann.

Moltmann, while attempting to retrieve the lost glory of the doctrine of the Trinity from neo-Protestantism in his presentation of his Trinitarian theology of the cross, had revived the formula of *Quod supra nos nihil ad nos* by which he means to say that we cannot say of God who he is of himself and in himself, but rather that we can only say who he is for us in the history of Christ which reaches us in our history. He argues:

“We would have to give up the distinction made in the early church and in tradition between the ‘God in himself’ and the ‘God for us’, or between ‘God in his majesty’ and ‘God veiled in the flesh of Christ’, as Luther and Melancthon put it. We would have to find the relationship of God to God in the reality of the event of the cross and therefore in our reality, and consider it there. In practice that would amount to a ‘complete reshaping of the doctrine of the Trinity’, because in that case the nature of God would have to be the human history of Christ and not a divine ‘nature’ separate from man”<sup>268</sup>.

Now, if the nature of God is not a divine nature separate from man, then the immanent trinity is subsumed in the economic trinity. Such a subsumption would imply, in my view, the assertion that the incarnation is no longer a gratuitous gift from God but a necessity. And this amounts to a limitation of God’s freedom since he cannot but be God-for-us. He is compelled by

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<sup>268</sup> Jürgen MOLTSMANN, *The Crucified God*, p. 239.

nature to be *pro nobis*. And even if we argue that God is under no obligation to do what he does, the question still is whether he could have done other than he did. And on this, McCormack and Barth seem to be saying that it doesn't seem possible that God could have done other than he did. Therefore God, in this view, depends upon creation to be God, and creation exists by necessity (maybe because of some lack in God). This view is neither compatible with God's transcendence nor with the gratuitousness of creation.

Eberhard Jüngel (whom McCormack confessed as having made him gain entrée to Barth's theology through his *God's Being is in Becoming*, a book which he said opened for him for the first time, the whole of Barth's theology in a way that made sense of the details)<sup>269</sup>, was even more emphatic when he wrote: "If one would wish to conceive of God's being as such under the category of relational being, and if one had to regard humanity as the other to which God as God is related, then God could not be conceived as God without humanity; conversely, God would then always have to be brought to speech with the concept of humanity"<sup>270</sup>. Jüngel here wants to argue, as McCormack would, that God's being for other is necessary for God but in a way that does not undermine God's freedom. He wants to argue that God can enter into relation *ad extra* with another being in such a way that his being can still exist ontically without thereby being ontologically dependent on this other being. This is because God's being *ad intra* is a being related to itself<sup>271</sup>. But it is still unclear how Jüngel claims to have clarified God's ability to relate to humanity without either being ontologically dependent on this 'other' being or binding himself to this 'other'. If God's being is in becoming, then what Jüngel succeeded in demonstrating is that God *becomes* and must *become* in order to be who he is and to relate to humanity. This is another way of saying that even if a distinction exists between the economic trinity and the immanent trinity, the later exists for the sake of the former. And if God's being is in becoming, does this not undermine the immutability in God and introduce some kind of necessity in Him where His being is viewed somewhat teleologically? Through the concept of 'becoming' one might tend to say for instance that God is loving in himself to the end that he is loving for the creature. And if the immanent trinity exists for the sake of the economic trinity, is this not another way of saying that what God does in the economy is necessary for, and constitutive of, who he is in the immanence? If creation thereby becomes a necessity in God, where then lies God's

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<sup>269</sup> Cf. B. MCCORMACK, *Orthodox and Modern. Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2008, p. 9.

<sup>270</sup> E. JÜNGEL, *God's Being is in Becoming*, p. 105.

<sup>271</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

freedom? If God's freedom does not include (as Molnar pointed out) his freedom to be without humanity, then no amount of twists and play on words will make God to be as free as Jüngel and McCormack would want us to believe.

Without expressly entering into the debate, Bourguine expresses an opinion that McCormack (in his strange logic) would have interpreted otherwise. The first of his four concluding theses in his treatment of Karl Barth's Christology is the thesis that Barth's Christology contributes to renewing the Christian concept of God. This renewed concept places the definition of God on the basis of the unique name of Jesus Christ since it is in him that God is known. By implication, God is defined on the basis of the *man* Jesus, on the basis of humanity. He not only sees nothing wrong with defining God on the basis of humanity, but even counselled that we need not try to protect God from what he called "the dizziness of contingency, the noise of history or the baseness of men". These things are what he said God purposely assumed "to the point of binding his fate to them in becoming the God who is never without man"<sup>272</sup>. Now, defining God on the basis of humanity would have implied (in McCormackian and Moltmannian logic) reducing the nature of God to the nature of man. And this would have implied that God has no separate nature apart from that of man since he is defined on the basis of man. But what Bourguine wants to say here is that it is the event of the incarnation that makes it possible for man to know God because God discloses himself in the creaturely form of the man Jesus. He went further to analyze the relationship between the Trinitarian being of God and its revelation in Jesus Christ:

"In the same way, God's Trinitarian being is thought of, not according to a pre-existent conceptual framework, but in *dependence* on its revelation in Jesus Christ. Barth interprets Trinitarian life in terms of a history in partnership, one based on the concrete history of Jesus Christ, according to a *rigorous* bond between the economic Trinity and the immanent trinity"<sup>273</sup>.

McCormack (following his logic) would have translated the word *dependence* to mean *giving rise to*, so that if the Trinitarian being is *dependent* on revelation, he would have (in)gloriously read it to mean that revelation *gave rise to* the trinity. And the word *rigorous* that Bourguine used to qualify the bond between the economic and the immanent trinity would have been substituted (in McCormackian vocabulary) with the word *constitutive* in such a way that the economic trinity constitutes the immanent trinity. In other words, God's act constitutes his being.

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<sup>272</sup> Cf. B. BOURGUINE, *The Christology of Karl Barth*, p. 205.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. (emphasis mine).

For God's act to constitute his being means that all we can know of God are his acts. If this holds, then the human nature of Christ has been eternalized and by so doing, collapsed into the divine under one Subject. This in effect is an aberration of Chalcedonian doctrine of one person in two natures without confusion or separation. But contrary to such interpretation, Bourguine uses the word *rigorous* to noetically describe how Barth explains how it is the economic trinity that gives a recognition of the immanent trinity in such a way that there is a rigorous bond between the two. The error of McCormack is to make such a noetic bond an ontic and indistinguishable one by making the economic trinity to *give rise to* the immanent trinity and thus, collapsing the human nature of Christ into the divine under one Subject, all in an attempt to be consistent with Barth's Trinitarian notion of one Subject in three modes of being. Attempts made by Iain Taylor to prove that such Barthian Trinitarian term of 'mode of being' (Seinsweise) is not an aberration of the classical orthodox Trinitarian theology of one God in three persons but in fact a classical notion of 'person'<sup>274</sup> cannot be sustained.

This collapsing of the human nature of Christ into the divine under one Subject is not a 'lapse' in the thought of McCormack as he himself described as 'lapse' Barth's occasional return to the traditional order of the trinity being prior to election. In fact, he (McCormack) went on to develop what he called a Reformed version of kenotic Christology that not only rejected the Lutheran 'Formula of Concord' with its 'communication of attributes' between the divine and human natures of Christ, but also its reformulation in the nineteenth century by Gottfried Thomasius with his distinction between 'immanent' and 'relative' divine attributes<sup>275</sup>. The 'communication of attributes' is a view that the consequence of the hypostatic union was a participation by the human nature in the attributes of the divine majesty such as omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. This means in effect that while it was assumed by the Logos, the human nature of Jesus Christ made use of the divine attributes only when it pleased him to do so. But the use made by the God-human of the divine attributes according to his human nature became unceasing with his exaltation. However, with Hegel's direct identification of the second person of the Trinity with a human being and the consequent historicization of revelation, the two-nature Christology was displaced. In seeking to rescue and preserve the two-nature Christology, Thomasius invented a new form of kenoticism that distinguishes between

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<sup>274</sup> Cf. Iain TAYLOR, *In Defence of Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 5,1 (March 2003), p. 33-46.

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *Karl Barth's Christology as a Resource for a Reformed Version of Kenoticism*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 8, 3 (July 2006), p. 243-251.

‘immanent’ attributes which are those things that are essential to God as God such as truth, holiness and love. These things exist in God without any reference to the world; and God cannot surrender them. On the contrary, the ‘relative’ divine attributes presuppose the existence of the world. These are attributes like omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence which can be surrendered by God without undermining what he is immanently and essentially as God. These relative attributes that were surrendered as a precondition to incarnation, were again taken up in the exaltation. What Thomasius hopes to achieve by this distinction is to maintain that even if God surrenders certain divine attributes in order to assume human nature, he still retains the essential attributes that makes him who he is.

McCormack however, rejected this position on the basis of the criticism levelled against it by D. M. Baillie that if the second person of the Trinity had to divest himself of any attributes in order to become incarnate (only to take those attributes up again later), then what you had was not a genuine incarnation but only a theophany<sup>276</sup>. As an alternative proposition, he could not also subscribe to the Hegelian identification of the second person of the Trinity with a human being and thereby jettisoning the two- nature Christology. His reason is not that there is anything wrong with doing away with the two-nature Christology but that he feared that such identification of the second person of the trinity with a human being will “give rise to a conception of the members of the Trinity as three distinct ‘subjects’ (each equipped with its own mind, will and energy of operation)-since God the Father and God the Son, on this view, are clearly distinct ‘subjects’”<sup>277</sup>. He feared that such a view would restrict human sufferings of Jesus to the second person of the Trinity alone, whereas he wants to insist that the entire Trinity suffered humanly. His insistence with Barth on a single subject could not allow him to accept any ‘communication of operations’. Any ‘co-operation’ within a single subject, in his thinking, can never possibly take place without the divine nature definitely overwhelming the human nature. His Reformed version of kenotic Christology does not entail any divestment of anything proper to deity. He says:

“Complete and total receptivity towards everything that comes to him in and through his human nature – *that*, I want to suggest, is the meaning of *kenosis*, and *that* is why *kenosis* entails no divestment of anything proper to deity. It is an eternal act grounded in an eternal relation which constitutes a distinct mode of being in the triune life of God”<sup>278</sup>.

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid., p. 246. Here he also cites D. M. BAILLIE, *God was in Christ*, London, Faber & Faber, 1948, pp. 96f.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid., p. 250 (emphasis is his).

If we agree with McCormack that God receives *completely* and *totally, everything* that comes to him in and through his human nature, this would definitely include suffering and death, so that God in his triunity suffers and dies. Such eternalization of the human nature of Christ (or the collapsing of the humanity into the divinity of Christ) has some other telling implication if we reason with Barth. Barth teaches that the human nature of Christ is sinful and fallen in the sense that in the incarnation the eternal Word takes to himself sinful and fallen flesh<sup>279</sup>. If this is so, then a logical implication of McCormack's collapsing of the humanity into the divinity of Christ is that we have a sinful God. And I think no sound Christian theologian will consent to this opinion.

McCormack's argument that God's being is constituted by God's act leads one to believe that essence is given in the act of electing. Such belief however is defective since even common-sense shows that actions have agents. The act of election presupposes the action of someone and not an act of no- one which becomes an action of someone upon its occurrence. There must be an agent which acts in order for an act to take place. If election is an act of God, such an act could not have pre-existed the triune "agent" of God. To argue otherwise sounds, in my opinion, like putting the cart before the horse. While agreeing that God might still have been triune without election but that the precise form it might have taken is impossible to say, McCormack aims at saying that such positing of a triune God without election is a speculative exercise. Thus he argues: "When we look away from the eternal act of self-determination in which God determined to be God-for-us, we are directing our attention to possibilities which were not yet realized and, for that very reason, are unreal. Any attempt to think about that which has no reality must inevitably land us in the realm of speculation"<sup>280</sup>. I do not however agree with him that every statement concerning God's being *in se* is an exercise in speculation. If we agree with him that the only logical existence of God prior to election in Christ is a blank existence<sup>281</sup>, then it means that election does not testify to a concrete form of divine existence. If there is no concrete existence of God prior to election, how do we for instance describe God's act toward man as loving, if election is an act of love toward man as he agreed? How can the act of election be considered loving if there were no deeper reality to which this concept of love refers? I agree rather with Justin Stratis that, "to the extent that election may be called an act of love... it must

<sup>279</sup> Cf. CD I/2, 40 and 151; cf. also J. CASSIDY, *Election and Trinity*, p. 79.

<sup>280</sup> Bruce L. MCCORMACK, *The Actuality of God. Karl Barth in Conversation with Open Theism*, in Bruce L. MCCORMACK (ed.), *Engaging the Doctrine of God. Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 2008, p. 185-244, p. 216.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*

be grounded as such in the basic reality of God's triune fellowship"<sup>282</sup>. Stratis argues that we know this not speculatively but rather by strict attendance to humanity's election in Christ as a self-evidently spontaneous and loving act. Hence he believes that counterfactual statements about the divine essence are not necessarily speculative but rather are theologically informative, precisely because they flow from consideration of the actuality of revelation as the gracious work of the personal God who bears in himself an eternal readiness for man. Therefore, Barth's insistence that God's being is in the act is, for Stratis, just a recognition that in revelation, God really invites us to know him; it does not render, as McCormack insisted, all counterfactual statements about God's being necessarily groundless and speculative.

Let us now turn to the counter proposition of Hunsinger and his traditionalists' school that God's triunity logically precedes his determination to be God-with-us in the election of Jesus Christ. As we have already noted, this proposition while sounding more reasonable and more in line with the traditional Trinitarian doctrine and with Chalcedon, proves not to be coherent and consistent with Barth's theological thought-form. This does not however mean that Hunsinger is not a true Barthian in the full sense of the word. Far from that, he only shows that with a different method of approach, one arrives at a different conclusion from looking at the same subject matter. While McCormack applied a diachronic approach that permitted him to historically traverse the life and development of Barth's thought, in such a way that he was not only able to say what Barth thought at any given historical moment but to also project what Barth ought to have said given so and so historical situation, Hunsinger's choice of a synchronic approach did not give him much room for such projection. He could not therefore register any 'critical correction' of Barth in the light of Barth's developing theology. He however registered a form of 'critical correction' in the light of the tradition of the church. Hunsinger's line of thought in the end proves to be more acceptable and more realistic and rational to hold. But the error he committed was to insist that his thought was a continuation of that of Barth. Before he insisted for instance that Barth's statement that Jesus Christ is the subject of election should not be taken *simpliciter* but rather *secundum quid*, he should have first of all realized, as Cassidy did, that Barth never spoke of Jesus Christ in any other way than as God-man in his divine-human nature. Therefore if Barth said that Jesus Christ is the subject of election, then he must have meant it to be understood literally as referring to the eternal Son as incarnate Son and not the eternal Son as

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<sup>282</sup> Justin STRATIS, *Speculating About Divinity? God's Immanent Life and Actualistic Ontology*, in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12,1 (January 2010), p. 20-32, p. 30.

such, which is the hub of Hunsinger's argument. Hunsinger though is correct to say that it should have been the eternal Son as such and not the eternal Son as incarnate who is the subject of election. But to have made his conviction that of Barth's is the mistake he made. If he had pointed out that both Barth and McCormack are wrong on the subject matter, as Cassidy latter on did, perhaps he would have wasted less energy in proving that his thought is a more faithful continuation of Barth's.

Without making our work a comparative study, I think that for anyone desirous of not just knowing Barth but of being "possessed" by the spirit of Barth, McCormack's methodology is a sure bet. But Barth is not infallible. In fact McCormack indirectly acknowledged this by offering to register a "critical correction" of his Trinitarian theology in the light of his new-found doctrine of election. To this extent therefore, one should not sheepishly follow Barth in everything he says. He set off with the intention of being as Chalcedonian as possible in his Christology, but he couldn't maintain the consistency till the end. There was just no way he could have consistently remained Chalcedonian with his insistence that Jesus Christ as God-man in his divine-human nature is the Subject of election. No amount of "dialectical strategy of juxtaposition" could have saved him from derailing. This is where Hunsinger should be commended, even though his synchronic methodological approach to the study of Barth should not be recommended.

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