reading karl barth

KENNETH OAKES

a companion
to karl barth's
epistle to the romans

Reading Karl Barth

A Guide to The Epistle to the Romans

Kenneth Oakes

CASCADE *Books* · Eugene, Oregon

READING KARL BARTH
A Guide to *The Epistle to the Romans*

Cascade Books
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401
www.wipfandstock.com
isbn 13: 978-1-61097-016-7
EISBN 13: 978-1-62189-439-1
Cataloging-in-Publication data:
Oakes, Kenneth.
Reading Karl Barth : a guide to *The Epistle to the Romans* / Kenneth Oakes.
x + 170 p. ; 23 cm. Includes bibliographical references.
ISBN 13: 978-1-61097-016-7
1. Barth, Karl, 1886–1968. 2. Barth, Karl, 1886–1968—Contributions in biblical hermeneutics. 3. Bible. N.T. Romans—Commentaries. I. Title.
BX4827.B3 O86 2011
Manufactured in the U.S.A.

To Dad and Kevin,
for all your support and encouragement
To Kendra and Ross,
for all your love, and for the old laptop I wrote this on

Preface

This book is intended for those struggling with Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, a group that includes the author of this book as well. *The Epistle to the Romans* is, incredibly enough, the first occasion in which many students, pastors, and lay-persons become introduced to the work of Karl Barth (1886–1968). It is nothing short of a miracle that some of them may actually finish the book. Yet surely the even greater miracle is that some of them keep on reading Barth.

During my undergraduate years I was briefly introduced to Karl Barth the Christian existentialist—not an untypical understanding of Barth even now—and I quickly decided this angry and bizarre Christian existentialist was hardly worth reading. I knew very little about Barth or *Romans* but I knew enough to know that I didn't like him and I didn't like his *Epistle to the Romans* either. At the time I thought that Barth was simply a grumpy and old-fashioned fundamentalist spiced up with some exhilarating, radical-sounding language (you can imagine my surprise, then, when I first heard people complain that Barth was "too liberal").

With a little hindsight I can now see that part of my reaction, or at least the part that wasn't either my own youthful impatience or the paltry version of Barth given to me, came from the fact that Barth's theological sensibilities were simply too foreign and strange to be easily assimilated and understood. In fact, I'm pretty sure that anyone raised within one of the many traditions coming from the holiness movements in the US, or in one of those early seeker-sensitive, baby-boomer, mega-churches that populated Southern California will find this book intolerably bizarre (to say nothing of Romans Catholics and Eastern Orthodox). What sense could someone raised in a pietist or holiness denomination make of Barth's remark that "there is in the world no observable human righteousness" (75)?[1] No observable form of human righteousness? Clearly Barth was just going to the wrong church. You might think that the sensibilities of Barth's *Romans* would be more at home in Reformed or Lutheran circles. Yet even here Barth is too much of a

revisionist, too free and critical towards his own Protestant and Reformed traditions and confessions; he plays too fast and loose with his doctrine of election for Reformed circles while for the Lutherans his suspect understanding of law and gospel throws into doubt his abilities to be a sure and trustworthy theological companion.

Insult is added to injury in the fact that not only are Barth's theological sensibilities in *The Epistle to the Romans* strange, but the book itself is notoriously difficult to understand. The primary aim of this companion to *The Epistle to the Romans* is to reduce the obscurity of what Barth is saying. It will not, however, mitigate the strangeness of what is actually said. The guidance and orientation through the thicket of *The Epistle to the Romans* that it offers will take a variety of forms: from summarizing ideas, to untangling difficult passages, to explaining polemic targets, to identifying recurring motifs and phrases. It is, then, intended for those somewhat unfamiliar and new to Barth. This book is, in some sense, the series of notes and comments that I wish I'd have had when first reading *Romans*. I still hope, nonetheless, that more seasoned and accomplished students of Barth will benefit from it as well. Those newer to Barth and his *Romans* might find the chapters moving through the work itself most helpful, while others might find the introductions and conclusion of greatest interest.

Some final words of gratitude are in order. This work was written in the space of several months at the Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen. For my time in Tübingen I am grateful for the help and support of Professor Christoph Schwöbel and Martin Wendte. Additional thanks are due to my father Ray, Kendra, Kevin, and Ross for all their love, generosity, time, and hospitality, and to my ever adventurous, lovely, and supportive Irene.

1. Throughout the work main-text references in parenthesis refer to Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*. Translated by Edwyn Hoskyns. London: Oxford University Press, 1968. I will sometimes refer to this work as *Romans* II, in order to distinguish it from the rather different first edition, *Romans* I. At times I will simply call it *Romans*.

PART I

Introduction

1 Background

Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* is a do-over, a retry, a stark revision of his earlier commentary by the same name.[1] There are, then, actually two *Epistle to the Romans* written by Karl Barth. The first edition, or "*Romans* I," was published in 1919, and has not yet been translated into English. Barth was a thirty-three year-old pastor at the time of its publication. The second edition, or "*Romans* II," was published in 1922, and first translated into English in 1933. While the first edition secured Barth his first teaching post, the second edition is the clear winner in the rodeo of book survival and influence. Mention "Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*" and the second edition will enter nearly everyone's mind, with the notable exception of a handful of Barth specialists or those completely unaware of Karl Barth.

The *Epistle to the Romans* is a biblical commentary written by a young Swiss *pastor*. Underneath the original title of *Romans* I was printed "Karl Barth. Pastor in Safenwil," a fact which some of its more academic reviewers pointed out.[2] Likewise, when Barth finished *Romans* II he was still a young pastor working in Safenwil. He was the son of a preacher man, and the grandson of preachers on both his paternal and maternal sides. Barth was even ordained in 1908 by his own father, Johann Friedrich ("Fritz") Barth. Long before Barth ever started teaching theology, he spent two years as an assistant pastor in Geneva (1909–11) and ten years as a pastor in Safenwil (1911–21). One could say that Barth was a second-career professional theologian, for he spent twelve years in the ministry before ever taking up his first university post (at the University of Göttingen in 1921). The feeling that Barth's writings so often read like long and repetitive sermons no doubt finds some explanation in all his years in the ministry.

We should add that *Romans* I and II are biblical commentaries written by a pastor with just the equivalent of a college degree and some successful ordination exams in hand. Barth would eventually receive a host of honorary degrees from various prestigious institutions, but he himself never completed a PhD, or a *Habilitation* (a second post-graduate degree given after the PhD). Barth the pastor had, to be sure, studied under some of the shining theologians and historians of his time. As was typical for the time, Barth spent different semesters of his university career at a variety of different places in Germany and Switzerland. He spent time under Adolf von Harnack at Berlin, with Adolf Schlatter at Tübingen, and finally finished his university studies with Adolf Jülicher, Wilhelm Herrmann, and Martin Rade at the University of Marburg.

What follows in this chapter and the next is a brief account of how a Swiss country pastor with no official education after his university degree came to write a book like *The Epistle to the Romans*.

The Young and the Restless Karl Barth

A recently ordained Barth (1908) was so enamored with studying and living in Marburg that he was reluctant to leave after his studies had officially ended. Instead of immediately entering the parish, Barth spent another year in Marburg working as an editorial assistant for Martin Rade at *Die Christliche Welt*, one of the leading journals of the "modern theology" movement. Barth's thought at this time was deeply imprinted by "the modern theology," a school primarily populated by the disciples of Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89). It is interesting that the modern school, which would soon be called not "modern" but "liberal" after Barth was done, already thought itself to be beyond both theological conservativism (or "positive theology" as it was called) and liberal theology. The modern theologians engaged with modern culture, philosophy, and historical methods, while also stressing the importance (and independence) of faith and revelation. Following Ritschl, their theologies were centered upon Jesus Christ and the kingdom, the practical and ethical force of Christianity, the experience of the believer, and the Christian community. They were, it should be noted, also firmly against "natural theology" and particularly suspicious of Aristotle's influence upon scholasticism.[3] Barth's own theology at this time was like that of his educators:

highly experiential, individualistic, centered upon the idea of faith as surrender and trust, skeptical of natural theology and traditional metaphysical accounts of God and the world, and open to historical inquiry while still insisting on the independence and priority of faith. Such was Barth's "liberal" or "pre-dialectical" theology.

Barth's extra year in Marburg was followed by two years of being an assistant pastor in Geneva. Sermon preparation, confirmation classes, and visiting members of the congregation largely replaced reviewing and preparing articles for publication. Barth did, however, still find the time to read theology and write more academic pieces. In the summer of 1911 Barth became the head pastor of Safenwil, a largely agricultural and industrial town with a population of around 1,625 inhabitants. In Safenwil Barth preached, gave confirmation classes, and was involved in the concerns and cares of his parishioners. As Safenwil was an industrial town, pastoral care quickly took the form of being involved in worker and union disputes with factory owners (who were also among his congregants). Barth's activities in these disputes earned him the nickname "the red pastor," and the ire of some of the well off in his congregation. He developed an interest in socialism at this time, but at more of a practical rather than theoretical level. Barth's early pastoral and political activities in Safenwil soon caused him to question some of the individualism within the "modern theology."

Shortly after Barth moved to Safenwil he became good friends with Eduard Thurneysen, a pastor in the nearby village of Leutwil. This friendship would prove to be a highly significant one in Barth's life, as he and Thurneysen would remain lifelong friends and close theological collaborators in this early period. Thurneysen in turn introduced the young pastor to a wide circle of friends, acquaintances, and contacts. Among these new acquaintances was Hermann Kutter, a pastor in Zürich. Kutter, along with Leonhard Ragaz, was one of the main voices of religious socialism in Switzerland. To put the matter all too simply, Kutter was the visionary of the religious socialists and stressed the need to wait and hope on God. Ragaz, by contrast, was the organizer intent on putting programs and policies into action. The tireless and active Barth

initially felt closer to Ragaz, but within several years would move closer to Kutter's position.

The first of August 1914 marked the outbreak of World War I. For several weeks Barth helped some of the farming families with their haymaking, as some of his congregants were called away to the Swiss frontier. He even spent some nights armed with a gun on guard duty. The shock and confusion of the war were compounded in October 1914 when ninety-three German intellectuals signed a document agreeing with the Kaiser's war policy. Among the signatories were some of Barth's past teachers, including Adolf von Harnack, Adolf Schlatter, and even Wilhelm Herrmann. There is a kind of myth about Barth's reaction to discovering that his former teachers had signed such a document.[4] The cruder versions of this story have Barth immediately rejecting everything about liberal theology and becoming overnight the dialectical theologian some revere and some fear. More sophisticated versions of the story of Barth and liberalism have Barth already questioning elements of his liberal upbringing as early as 1911 with the events of 1914 being a decisive factor in his increasing criticism of his nineteenth-century theological predecessors. The reactions of his former teachers shook and mystified Barth, but he would need some time to sort through his confusion.

Barth was also disappointed with the reaction of the socialists to the war. Instead of showing international support for workers the world over, the socialists had also adopted the various nationalist lines that were forming (especially the German Social Democrats). Despite his criticisms Barth still became a member of the Social Democrat Party in January of 1915. In the meantime Barth had moved from Ragaz's activist line closer to the patient and expectant Kutter, although he wanted aspects of both of their positions. Barth soon found a living and breathing example of the reconciliation of these two positions—waiting on the kingdom of God alongside activity and work for the kingdom—in the figure of Christoph Blumhardt.[5] Barth had known Blumhardt for some time and had even visited him a couple of times at Blumhardt's retreat center in Bad Boll. In April 1915, however, Blumhardt's mixture of waiting and looking for signs as well as his emphasis upon public, worldly action made a new impression

on Barth (Blumhardt was not only a pastor but a Social Democrat as well, albeit a rather free-minded one).[6]

In the year that followed Barth continued his pastoral duties (one of his first studies after his meeting with Blumhardt dealt with Christian hope) and activities among the religious socialists. In addition to preaching Barth gave a number of significant addresses on the problem of war. The addresses from this time start to show rather clearly some of the characteristic tenets of Barth's theology. In a lecture from November 1915, for instance, Barth proclaimed "the world is the world. But God is God."[7] This emphasis upon God being God was continued in an address given in January 1916, "The Righteousness of God," in which Barth contrasted the righteousness of God and the unrighteousness of all human attempts to reach God and humanity's tendency and need to construct idols.

In the summer of 1916 Barth and Thurneysen agreed that they needed some help in sorting out the questions of their theological inheritances, religious socialism, and the war, and so they decided to read. They discussed studying Kant or Hegel, but eventually decided on reading the Bible. Barth thought that Romans in particular was an important book, as he remembered being impressed by its significance in one of his own confirmation classes from 1901–2. He began to fill a small notebook with his comments and thoughts about Paul's letter. By July 1916 Barth started to write out more fully his reflections. While Barth would work on his commentary for the next two years, in February 1917 he gave a public lecture in which he discussed some of his developing ideas, "The Strange, New World of the Bible."

By June 1918 Barth had completed a first draft of his book on Romans and by August that same year he considered it finished. It was difficult to find a publisher for the book, and so *Romans* I only went to press with the generous financial assistance of his friend, the businessman Rudolf Pestalozzi; 1,000 copies of it were printed (a number that many academics now would envy). While 1919 is the official publication date of *Romans* I, it was already in print in December 1918. Barth was reading the proofs of *Romans* I when Germany was declared a republic on 9 November 1918 (effectively

ending the war), and when the armistice between Germany and the Allies was signed two days later.

The First Edition of The Epistle to the Romans (1919)

Trying to summarize *Romans* I, a biblical commentary 573 pages long and two years in the making, would be a foolish enterprise. But as it is currently unavailable in English, and forms the basis of *Romans* II, I do want to cover briefly some of its features; where angels fear to tread . . . *Romans* I is a commentary that acts like a prophetic and pastoral restatement and expansion upon what Paul has written; more specifically, it reads like a collection of expository sermons on Romans. That the work is so thoroughly homiletic shouldn't surprise us: a pastor wrote it. Just as in *Romans* II, Barth works through Romans by giving a block of Paul's text and then breaking down the blocks into manageable phrases and words to exegete (many of the work's sections are similar to those of *Romans* II). The fact that Barth is constantly restating, rephrasing, and intensifying what Paul is saying gives both works a rather different feel than the average modern commentary on Romans.

There are several exegetical tendencies and emphases in *Romans* I that deserve being mentioned. There is, for example, a continual stress on the immediate presence of God to the world and humanity, or the "real reality" of the presence of God and knowledge of God.[8] Barth had appreciated the confidence and seriousness with which Kutter and Blumhardt spoke of God and he had clearly taken a page from their playbooks on this matter. Throughout his commentary Barth speaks constantly and boldly about the God of Paul's epistle to the Romans in all his wrath, judgment, love, and faithfulness. God is indeed God and creation is creation, but creation is still God's creation. "Sin" in this work means the attempt to remove oneself from God's presence in order to establish an illusory autonomy and independence before God. Barth also tends to use organic metaphors to describe the relationship between God and the world. "Growing" is the key term here, but Barth also speaks of "roots" and the planting of "seeds." In addition to pushing for an organic understanding of God and the world, Barth also criticizes attempts to view God and the world in mechanical terms. His sense

is that we are concerned with living, active, and free subjects, and not impersonal causes and effects.

God's work in the world is to renew and transform the old world into the new; or better yet, God's work is to usher in the new creation and in the process transform the old. Here metaphors of "breaking through" or "breaking into" dominate. Jesus Christ brings with him a new world that breaks into the chaos, sin, and unrighteousness of the old world. Jesus brings new life and victory where there is death, decay, and sin (indeed, the concepts of life and new life are constant refrains throughout the work). The world's complete renewal in Christ entails a great relativizing of the human positions and distinctions of the old world, including the difference between Jew and Gentile, religious and profane, Catholic and Protestant, moralist and anti-moralist, capitalist and socialist.

Related to the notions of growth and breaking through is the so-called "process eschatology" of *Romans* I. "Process eschatology" is a handy way of characterizing how Barth handles the difference between the "already" and the "not yet" of salvation and final redemption.[9] If the world has "already" been saved in Christ, then it has "not yet" been finally redeemed and transformed. "Process" in this context does not mean continual development and progress, but more the idea that there is a movement, a growing of the hidden kingdom through the transformation of the presently existing world and its individuals. Here Barth combines the botanical images of seeds, roots, and growth with imagery of breaking through and into, of becoming. The kingdom, while hidden and different from the old age, is already under way, put into motion by Christ. A line that helpfully illuminates this kind of process eschatology can be found in Barth's exegesis of Rom 6:1. Here Barth notes that we are to "*become* what we *are* in Christ."[10] There is indeed a growing of Christ and the kingdom within the world.

A very natural question at this point is "Why did Barth revise his first edition?" Why is there a second edition of Barth's commentary on Romans at all? This important issue will be covered in the chapter dealing with Barth's prefaces to *The Epistle to the Romans* and some of the responses the two different editions generated.

It was assumed for some time that the development of Barth's theology underwent two significant "breaks" or "turns."[11] The first break, variously dated from 1911 to 1922, is Barth's move from his early liberal theology to his dialectical theology of the Word of God. The second supposed break, typically seen as happening in the early 1930s, is from his dialectical theology to a more analogical style of theology. For now I want to discuss only the first supposed break, and I will consider the second break in the following chapter.

There have been a number of difficulties in nailing down this first "break," as Barth's relationship with his nineteenth-century predecessors is fairly complex. Part of the issue here is characterizing what "theological liberalism" is. Depending on what "liberal" means Barth's break has been variously dated from Barth's move to Safenwil in 1911 and his involvement with socialism, the darkening of Barth's sermon tone and content and his talk of "waiting on God" in 1913,[12] his increasingly clear talk of God in 1914, his reaction to the political events of late 1914, or the full-fledged dialectics of *Romans* II in 1922. Barth's thought was in constant motion, and he felt at liberty to disagree with or modify elements of his theological upbringing when necessary. The different dates for Barth's break with liberalism are tracking these different changes and shifts. One of the more convincing accounts has this break happening some time in the summer of 1915 after Barth's meeting with Blumhardt. In this case Barth's increased interest in the "objectivity" of knowledge of God constitutes a break with the derivative or pseudo-knowledge of God within theological liberalism (which now also includes the "modern theology" school).[13]

There are other difficulties with this first break. On the one hand, the early "liberal" Barth never felt attracted to some of the more revisionist and extreme positions within the "liberal" camp. For instance, Barth never felt all too attracted to comparative religious study, to the idea that God is merely an ethically useful postulate, or to the more radical revisions of Christianity happening in the first search for the historical Jesus in figures like David Friedrich Strauss. On the other hand, Barth never stopped being "liberal" in some regards. He never abandoned a variety of tenets of his "liberal," modern Protestant theological upbringing: the idea that revelation is

God's *self*-revelation, an act completed by God; a christological emphasis and outlook; the sense that "natural theology" is impossible and even dangerous; a steady emphasis upon the importance of ethics, human subjectivity, and self-determination; an account of the "independence" of faith and religion from other academic disciplines; and the sense that historical-critical methods of interpreting the Bible are necessary and legitimate but limited at certain key points. It is undeniable that these features of the early Barth undergo development (particularly as regards Christology and eschatology), but it is also undeniable that these intuitions remain present in some form.[14]

In the film *The Royal Tenebaums* the writer Eli Cash (played by Owen Wilson) becomes moderately successful after the publication of his second novel, *Old Custer*. Eli explains to reporters, "Well everyone knows Custer died at Little Bighorn. What this book presupposes is . . . maybe he didn't." I think we need a book (although probably not entitled *Old Barth*) whose premise runs something like this: "Well everyone knows that Barth broke with liberalism. What this book presupposes is . . . maybe he didn't." I still consider it an open question as to whether Barth should be seen as the mighty destroyer of theological liberalism, as he is often dramatically presented, or one of its most insightful yet *internal* critics.[15] Such an understanding of Barth's relationship to nineteenth-century theology would certainly be less captivating and simple, but it would not necessarily be less true.

Further Reading

Karl Barth, "Afterword" in Christoph Blumhardt, *God in Waiting*, 189–94.
———. "Biblical Questions, Insights, and Vistas."
———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 29–31.
———. "Concluding Unscientific Postscript."
———. *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth.*
———. "The Righteousness of God."
———. "The Strange New World of the Bible."
———. *The Word in This World: Two Sermons by Karl Barth*.
———. with Eduard Thurneysen. *Come, Holy Spirit!*
———. with Eduard Thurneysen. *Revolutionary Theology in the Making.*

1. The titles of both works in German are simply *Römerbrief*, or "Letter to the Romans."

2. As in the case of Adolf Jülicher's review of *Romans* I.

3. Albrecht Ritschl, for instance, thought Schleiermacher to be dabbling in natural theology, especially as regards his use of the category of "religion," long before Karl Barth did.

4. For Barth's dramatic account of this event, see Barth, *The Humanity of God*, 14–15. This mythologization has been perceptively analyzed by Härle in his "Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen und Karl Barths Bruch mit der liberalen Theologie." Härle's article is not without its own faults, but it begins to raise the right questions.

5. A variety of works by both Blumhardts and on both Blumhardts are available for free download from Plough Press: www.plough.com/topics/Blumhardts.html. Last accessed 10 May 2011.

6. See Barth's "Afterword" to Blumhardt's *Action in Waiting*. This is actually an edited translation of Barth's 1916 review of Blumhardt's "Haus-Andachten" for *Der freie Schweizer Arbeiter*. Ragaz decided not to publish Barth's review in his *Neue Wege* as he thought it too quietist and passive.

7. Cited in Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 87. The lecture was entitled "Kriegszeit und Gottesreich," (The Time of War and the Kingdom of God).

8. Ingrid Spieckermann helpfully contrasts the "real reality" of God in *Romans* I with the "impossible possibility" of God in *Romans* II; Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis*, 82–139.

9. Beintker, *Die Dialektik in der »dialektischen Theologie« Karl Barths*, 44–45, and 109–15.

10. Barth, *Der Römerbrief: Erste Fassung 1919*, 201.

11. Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 101–2.

12. Barth, "Die Hilfe," 778.

13. Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis*, 11–82. Bruce McCormack closely follows Spieckermann's work concerning how and when Barth broke with liberalism in his *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129–35.

14. Likewise, the criticism of religion in *Romans* II was certainly a criticism of one of the central concepts for thinkers like Friedrich Schleiermacher or Herrmann. Nevertheless, this criticism has a strong precedent in Herrmann's own criticisms of "piety" as a mean of procuring God's favor or pleasing God.

15. This issue is further compounded by those wanting to see Barth as liberal so that he can be more easily dismissed, and the fact that "liberal," like "evangelical," is a fairly plastic term, especially when switching from German-speaking to English-speaking contexts.

2 A Short Guide to Reading Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*

Before we begin reading through Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* it might be helpful to provide some orientation to its motifs, terms, and theological style. Initially, however, we should consider the implications of the fact that the work is a biblical commentary.

The Epistle to the Romans as Commentary

The Epistle to the Romans is a commentary, although one could easily forget this when reading secondary works on it. Lines and passages from Barth's book are often quoted without any indication of the corresponding passage in Paul's text. Without its connection to Paul's Romans, Barth's commentary becomes something like a religious philosophy or an essay on religion. This tendency to neglect Paul's Romans when referring to Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans* leaves the reader unsure as to what the quotation is supposed to illuminate as regards Paul and where the quotation takes place in the unfolding of Paul's letter. As a commentary on Paul, Barth's text moves with Paul's. *Romans* II is always in motion, and one must follow along, and know where one is in Paul's letter, in order to understand it. Barth can thunder in relation to Rom 2:1–2, "there is no human righteousness by which men can escape the wrath of God!" (56) and can later say, when commenting on 3:27–30, that in the light of Jesus Christ "we can dare to do what otherwise we could never do—believe in others and in ourselves" (107). Negation is followed by affirmation, human unrighteousness is followed by God's righteousness, and death is followed by resurrection. It is, then, inadvisable to pick and choose lines from Barth's commentary without giving any attention to Paul's text, or to where these lines fall within the flow of both Barth's commentary and Paul's letter.

As a commentary, *The Epistle to the Romans* is not a piece of systematic theology, or a comprehensive treatment of New Testament theology. Barth is commenting upon a specific book by Paul, not developing a doctrine of creation, sin, humanity, or Christ. Barth's book is not first and foremost an exercise in Christian

doctrine; it is an explanation and illustration of Romans. There is, to be sure, a complex interplay in the *Epistle to the Romans* between Barth's own theological and philosophical ideas and Paul's Romans. Even so, this interplay should not lead us to think that there is some "fundamental problem" that Barth is trying to solve in the work, such as the problem of religion, or faith and history, or the knowledge of God. This kind of interpretative framework skews the relationship between Barth's work and Paul's Romans, for it implies that instead of being a commentary on Paul's text, *The Epistle to the Romans* merely uses the book of Romans as a kind of springboard to other more intriguing issues.

Variations on Some Themes

The *Epistle to the Romans* is a fairly repetitive text, with several ideas appearing once and again. It is worth briefly mentioning these themes here, as they may not always be clear in the overwhelming deluge of ideas encountered when first working through the text.

The first of these persistent themes is that of *resurrection*. This may not always be obvious, as it is easy to allow the traumatic, negative, and critical aspects of the text to crowd out the affirming, positive, and constructive aspects. We should remember, however, that the darker moments of the commentary are dark because there is a final light that shines over them in Christ's resurrection. Before resurrection there is sin, judgment, and death. If the cross is the putting to death of sin, then the resurrection is the putting to death of death itself, the final judgment to end all judgment. While there is a constant back and forth between death and life, judgment and affirmation, they are not equal or balanced realities. Death, judgment, and the cross exist for the sake of the new life, forgiveness, and resurrection. Adam exists for the sake of Christ. Rejection exists for the sake of election. That the positive and the new swallow up the old is, for Barth, the direct consequence of Paul's continual "how much more!" *How much more* life than death, grace than sin, Christ than Adam, election than rejection, Israel's fullness than its stumbling and falling! *How much more* resurrection than death!

The second regular theme is that of *faith*, although it is not usually human faith that Barth is most interested in. Everyday talk about

“faith” can sometimes seem to imply that faith is some kind of human achievement, capability, or state. One of Barth’s strategies in his exegesis of *Romans* II is to rid us of this idea. Barth tries to rip the roots out of any idea that “faith” is something we do or don’t do, that it is in any way a human effort. Or to put it in Paul’s terms, faith is not something we can “boast” about before God. Indeed, faith in itself cannot even justify us before God apart from God’s faithfulness. Barth often translates Paul’s *pistis*, normally translated as “faith,” as “the faithfulness of God.”[1] “Faith,” then, is primarily a reference to *God*; it doesn’t point us to our abilities, but to God and his faithfulness to his creation. Barth will, to be sure, often speak of the possibility and necessity of human faith as well, but typically not without clearing away some of these misunderstandings in the process.

The third reappearing theme is that of *witness*, sometimes expressed in similar ideas like that of sign, illustration, and parable. Each of these concepts involves something pointing away and beyond itself. There are two important aspects of a sign or a witness. On the one hand, there is the positive aspect of a sign’s *pointing* away. A sign guides you to someplace else; a witness speaks of something other than him or herself. There is genuine instruction, guidance, and orientation with signs and witnesses. On the other hand, there is the negative aspect of a sign’s pointing *away* from itself, the fact that the true reality lies not in the sign but where it points you to. When speaking of signs and witness Barth tends to stress this negative aspect. Some of the more memorable metaphors from *Romans* II are dedicated to expressing this interplay between *pointing* away and pointing *away*. Barth’s images of “empty canals,” “burnt out cinders,” and “voids,” all emphasize the emptiness of the sign and witness and the immense reality of the things they point to.

Some Slippery Terms

There are also several slippery terms in *Romans* II. We have already seen how “faith” is often taken as God’s faithfulness. Likewise, at times Barth interprets “doing the law” as meaning the relinquishing of any thought of human righteousness (64), that “revelation occurs, that God speaks” (66), or how the Gentiles simply do what they do (66).

There are, however, three slippery and counter-intuitive terms in particular that Barth bandies about fairly regularly.

The first term is that of "religion," which has a recurring role in Barth's *Romans* and yet is essentially absent from Paul's letter. Where Paul speaks of "law" Barth speaks of "religion" and "law." In fact, Barth seems to use "law" and "religion" interchangeably. He also usually interprets Paul's references to Jews and Israel to be references to "the religious," the saved, the "churched." In the process Paul's Gentiles become the heathen, pagan, and the "unchurched." (One might see in these exegetical decisions a major, maybe even *the* major failure of the work.) By "religion" Barth means anything that is supposed to enact or embody human righteousness, anything that we think might please God. "Religion" includes churchly practices, personal ethics and piety, and even faith itself. There is no boasting about our virtue, our culture, or our faith before God. Yet religion is not something we can escape; we are inevitably religious in our hopes to please and appease God somehow. At times Barth can speak positively of religion, but only insofar as religion can act as a sign and point away from humanity and to God.

The second difficult term is that of the "invisible." Throughout the text there is a enduring contrast between the "invisible" and the "visible."[2] Barth takes the New Testament contrast between faith and sight (2 Cor 5:7) with the utmost seriousness. Anything that involves faith is "invisible," for anything that involves faith cannot involve sight. Within the pilgrim's journey faith never loses this indirectness, this obscurity, its paradoxical nature. We also encounter associated concepts in the "hidden" and the "non-concrete" (or "intangible"). In swift succession Barth can call God or salvation invisible, hidden, unknowable, and non-concrete. In each instance Barth is referring to the fact that matters of faith are a matter of *faith*, and thus not of observation, perception, or direct knowledge, and that matters of faith and God are always *events*, and not natural or stable states of affairs.

The claim that God is invisible or hidden needs further explanation. God in Christ allows us to know the unknowable God, but God always remains unknowable (Barth prefers to speak of "being known" by God, rather than us knowing God). Barth's point is

not that God is unknowable and hidden because of, say, his infinity or omnipresence. Instead God *actively* reveals himself to and hides himself from humanity so that we might know that God is God; the Lord is sovereign even over knowledge about himself. Likewise, the whole of our life with Christ—our election, justification, sanctification, and being forgiven—is also hidden or invisible (Col 3:3). Even our own faith remains hidden from us, for it belongs first and foremost to God, and not to ourselves.

The third important yet slippery term is the "non-historical," or the "primal history" (*Urgeschichte*). In *Romans* I there was a contrast between the "real history" of Abraham's relationship to God and the "so-called history" of Abraham as simply a Bedouin sheik, a historical figure in the broader history of religions. In *Romans* II this contrast becomes clearer and stronger. Barth picks up the term *Urgeschichte* from Franz Overbeck but he quickly puts it to his own uses. At the most basic level the "non-historical" names an event or reality that remains inaccessible to historians (or psychologists or sociologists). Anything that is a matter of faith is invisible and thus "non-historical," impervious to our normal ways of describing history. More strongly, the "non-historical" can name what is historically impossible, such as Abraham's faith in God or anyone's faith in God. Within this world and within our history faith is an impossible event, completely outside of the regular flow of history's causes and effects. Finally, the non-historical also signifies the reality beyond history that conditions and limits what happens in history. Here the non-historical moves closer to the idea of "the eternal," or to that which has enduring significance for history. Imagery and metaphors become important at this point for the idea is difficult to express. Barth will speak of a non-historical "radiance" or "presupposition" to historical events. The non-historical affects history and yet is not a part of history itself. An important aspect of the "non-historical" is that it allows there to be a simultaneity and connection between events vastly separated in time. Distant and far off "events" like Adam's Fall and the Christ's resurrection are "non-historical" in that they can affect and be present to all times, places, and people. Even Abraham's faith is exactly the same as ours, for we are dealing with a constant situation

of human unrighteousness and divine righteousness, and thus with the non-historical.

Dialectics

Barth's theology is often called "dialectical," and *Romans* II is a prime example of such a theological and rhetorical style. The practice and concept of "dialectics" has a long, technical, and illustrious history. Barth himself never undertook extended study of dialectics; he just used them.[3] It is amusing, then, that those following in Barth's wake have studied dialectics in his works with a precision and intensity that Barth himself never devoted to the idea.

For present purposes we can think of dialectics as a practice or style of moving back and forth, making statement and counter-statement, emphasizing differences, and stressing oppositions. For an illustration we might turn to Barth's own teacher, Wilhelm Herrmann:

> God takes away our self-confidence, and yet creates within us an invincible courage; He destroys our joy in life, and yet makes us blessed; He slays us, and yet makes alive; He lets us find rest, and yet fills us with unrest; He takes away the burden of a ruined life, and yet makes human life much more difficult than it is without Him. God gives us a new existence that is whole and complete yet what we find therein is always turning into a longing for true life, and into desire to become new.[4]

Here we have a fine example of one type of point and counterpoint, a movement between opposing positions. Dialectics reaches the subject matter not by endless qualification or nuance, but by piling one maximal claim on top of an equally extreme one. Sometimes there can be a resolution or synthesis (so-called Hegelian dialectics), and sometimes we do not know how to combine two claims but we know that both are necessary (so-called "Kierkegaardian" dialectics). There is a fundamental restlessness to dialectics, and the sense that truth is always in the movement or the contrast.

Calling *Romans* II or Barth's theology "dialectical" is simple enough, but we need to know two additional things. First, what does Barth put into a dialectic relationship? Second, what kinds of dialectics are at work? To answer the first question, we find stark contrasts between Creator and creation, time and eternity, the visible and the invisible, righteousness and sin, Adam and Christ, the historical and the non-historical, and the old world and the new world (to name only a few). We also encounter the dialectics of creation

and life itself, the ebb and flow of natural processes. As for the second question, Barth actually uses different kinds of dialectics. Some of Barth's dialectics exist in reality (so-called "*Realdialektik*"). There is, for instance, a real dialectic between a righteous God and an unrighteous humanity, just as there is a real dialectic between God and the world. Other dialectical pairs solely exist in our reason or intellect ("*Logikdialektik*"). We have difficulty, for instance, in conceptually reconciling the God of mercy and the God of wrath even though we know that we are talking about one and the same God.[5]

Another helpful way of talking about Barth's dialectics is by making a distinction between "complementary paradox" and "supplementary paradox."[6] In a complementary paradox the thesis and antithesis "balance" each other out. They are equal yet opposing partners. In supplementary paradox, however, one member of the pair prevails or dominates the other, even though they are still locked in tension. There is a permanent contrast, for example, between Adam and Christ, but Christ and his righteousness take priority and are completely victorious over Adam and his sin. There is movement and priority here, but there is still an unending contrast. Likewise, grace, the new creation and the new person created in Christ, are victorious, take precedence, and actually cannot exist with sin, the old creation, and the old subject. Nevertheless, in the here and now both seem to co-exist—impossibly!—and yet one prevails over the other.

Barth's dialectics are especially noticeable in the "consistent eschatology" of *Romans* II. By "consistent eschatology" we are describing a feature (perhaps one of the most striking features) of Barth's *exegesis* of Romans. In fact, those looking for the major differences between *Romans* I and II often point to the move from a "process eschatology" in *Romans* I to the "consistent eschatology" of *Romans* II. In contrast to his earlier commentary, Barth now tends to interpret promises of new life, justification, sanctification, and the coming of the new person created by Christ as "future" or "eternal" events.[7] The metaphors of the organic and of growing have been expunged. In contrast to "becoming what we are" in Christ as in *Romans* I, we meet the sentiment that "through the slain body of

Christ we are what we are not" (234). In the here and now there are no visible, concrete, and unambiguous forms of human righteousness, justification, faith, or love. The dialectics abound when we read about salvation, justification, and new life in Barth's commentary: we have indeed received new life, but only as a promise whose fulfillment we await in hope; through faith we believe that we ("the old man") are identical to what we are not ("the new man"); in Christ's death we have been released from the law (or religion), and yet for now we have no other option than to be religious. One should keep in mind that with this contrast between a process and a consistent eschatology we are attempting to describe exegetical tendencies and decisions, and not a consistent philosophy that Barth is merely blanketing over the text. Equally, while there is a noticeable change in how Barth interprets eschatological remarks in *Romans* I and II, there are also passages in each that move beyond the merely heuristic labels "process" and "consistent eschatology."

Parables

There are also a healthy amount of different types of analogies in the *Epistle to the Romans*. These analogies usually appear under the form of "parable."[8] Like dialectics, the practice or concept of analogy has a long and intricate history. And like dialectics, the early Barth never devoted much attention to the idea of parables or analogies; he just used them.[9] What I mean by "analogy" is simply the practice of noting similarities and likenesses within ever greater dissimilarities or differences.

The main form of analogy in *The Epistle to the Romans* has been helpfully called an "analogy of the cross."[10] Our suffering, Barth notes, "is a likeness and an analogue of the death of Christ . . . and we are thereby visibly *united to him* in time" (196). Likewise, our death, sin, and negation become newly related to God in Christ; "there remains no relativity which is not related-ness, no concrete thing which does not point beyond itself, no observable reality which is not itself a parable" (275). In Christ "sin-controlled flesh becomes a parable or likeness. What is human and worldly and historical and 'natural' is shown to be what it veritably is in its relation to God the Creator—only a transparent thing, only an image, only a sign, only

something relative" (280–81). Christ and his cross take up and bear our suffering, death, sin, and negation, and in doing so Christ creates a likeness between humans and himself. In each of these examples, the analogy or correspondence between the world and God comes from God in Christ *doing* something: Christ on the cross unites us to him; God renders the world relative (related) to himself; and Christ takes up sinful flesh and makes it transparent to God. It is called an "analogy of the cross" because it is *in* the cross that these analogies happen, and it is *by* the cross that we know there are such analogies.

In addition to this analogy of the cross, there also exist parables or analogies between human speaking and acting and divine speaking and acting.[11] We must, Barth argues, speak of God in parables, and not in direct speech: "we must not forget that we are speaking in parables and *after the manner of men*" (221). Even the concept of *religion*, so heavily criticized throughout *Romans* II as a human attempt at self-justification, can be called "righteous," for "it is correlated with the will of God and parallel to it, being indeed the parable of it " (254). The love of one person for another can be a parable of love for God (452). Human self-sacrifice can be a parable of that which brings the new person created by Christ to life (161). In fact, "all human thought and action and possession—however orthodox—are no more than a parable" (333; see also 114).

As soon as one notices the use of "parable" in *Romans* II, the concept seems to be everywhere. There is a likeness or parable of the "corruptible" to the "incorruptible" (50, 77, 210, 333). The whole of the world and human history "have meaning as a parable of a wholly other world" (107). Christ's resurrection brings new life and a new future, and its future is a parable of our future (195). In Christ's resurrection all things associated with life become a parable of death and all things associated with death become a parable of life (462). Time is also a parable, for each temporal moment is a parable of the eternal "Moment" in which revelation occurs (497). Even the "no-God," the idol we take to be God, is a parable of the true God (350).

Barth's Second Break

Pining down Barth's second supposed break, from dialectical theology to analogical theology, encounters as many difficulties as

the attempt to describe his first break from liberal to dialectical theology. In this second break, as the standard account argues, Barth eventually toned down the harsh and sweeping dialectics of his earlier theology that imperiled realities like creation, time, and humanity. Barth was able to save creaturely realities from their destruction by reaching an analogical perspective that did not need to negate creation to glorify God. In his new, analogical point of view, God and the world did not need to compete for breathing room. The key elements of this break have typically been said to be Barth's 1931 book on Anselm and his idea of an analogy of faith ("*analogia fidei*") in *Church Dogmatics* I/1.[12]

This second break has been made problematic by the fact that Barth never abandoned his dialectical way of thinking even in later works, particularly the multi-volume *Church Dogmatics*. It has also been challenged by the fact that there are already "analogical moments" long before Barth's book on Anselm. As we have already seen, there is a fairly extensive use of "parable," or analogy even in *Romans* II, one of Barth's supposedly most dialectical works. There are, then, dialectics in Barth's so-called analogical period and analogical moments in his so-called dialectical period. Such realizations have made the second turn, from dialectical theology to analogical theology, more difficult to sustain.

One could argue, in fact, that the parables and analogies in Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* are actually richer and more extensive than the analogy of faith first seen in the *Church Dogmatics*. The *analogia fidei* in the earlier volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* represents the correspondence between the person who knows God and God. Faith creates a kind of analogy between the subject who knows God and the God who is known. In *Romans* II, by contrast, there are parables, analogies, and likenesses everywhere, between the corruptible and the incorruptible, the temporal "moment" and the eternal "Moment," human action and divine action, the believer and Christ; in fact, the whole world and its history can become parables.[13]

Further Reading

Karl Barth, "The Christian's Place in Society."
———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 38–165.

1. Near the end of the preface to the second edition Barth explains that he had translated, at the suggestion of Liechtenhan, *pistis* as "the faithfulness of God," when it is usually rendered by "faith." In response to his critics, Barth notes that he reduced the number of times *pistis* is translated as "faithfulness of God," to avoid monotony, but not in chapter 3 of the work.

2. "Invisible" sometimes translates *unsichtbar* (and its substantive forms) but far more often the word *unanschaulich* (and its substantive forms). The terms *unanschaulich* or *das Unschauliche* more literally mean "unperceivable." The concept of *Anschauung*, or "intuition," played a central role for Kant's philosophy of knowledge and for the modern Protestant theology that took Kant's philosophy seriously (particularly Friedrich Schleiermacher, for whom religion is an *Anschauung*). One could also translate *unanschaulich* as "unintuitable," as Hoskyns sometimes does, but it clearly remains something of a monstrosity in English.

3. Barth usually preferred simply to *use* concepts and ideas, especially philosophical ones, without much preliminary study or consideration.

4. Herrmann, *The Communion of the Christian with God*, 116–17.

5. We should note that *Romans* II is not the first time Barth dabbled in dialectics. In his 1913 "Der Glaube in der christlichen Gott" Barth explored the conceptual dialectics between thinking of God as personal and as the absolute (or the sublime). Both thoughts are necessary for religious consciousness, and yet they seem to contradict each other. Barth's conclusion is that they cannot be intellectually reconciled, but only practically, for both thoughts are united in the believer's religious experience. Despite this initial foray, dialectics largely dropped into the background of Barth's works only to resurface later. There are indeed dialectics in *Romans* I, but not to the same extent as *Romans* II. Dialectics do, however, reappear more sharply in Barth's 1919 lecture "The Christian's Place in Society," sometimes called the "Tambach Lecture" after the place it was given.

6. The origin of this way of putting the matter is Henning Schröer, *Die Denkform der Paradoxalität als theologisches Problem*. I am relying here on Beintker's account in *Die Dialektik*, 38–39.

7. Barth tends to use terms like "*futurum aeternum*" or "*futurum resurrectionis*."

8. "Parable" in German is *Gleichnis* (pl. *Gleichnisse*). *Gleichnis* often refers to Jesus' parables but it can also mean allegory, metaphor, or similarity more generally. In equating analogy and parable, I am following Michael Beintker's work *Die Dialektik*, in which he argues that "'analogy' and 'parable,' (*Gleichnis*) are interchangeable concepts" (Beintker, *Die Dialektik*, 259); and that "*Gleichnis* presupposes analogy and conditions it" (ibid., 267).

9. The concept of "parable" or "likeness," no less than that of dialectics, was also already at work in Barth's 1919 lecture "The Christian's Place in Society." In this lecture Barth called social democracy a "*Gleichnis*," or "parable," of the kingdom of God. Calling it a "parable" is somewhat different from his brasher, earlier comment that "Jesus is the social movement and the social movement is Jesus in the present" (Barth, "Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung," 386–87). The idea of "parables of the kingdom" reappears much later in Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 38–165.

10. Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis*, 129–31.

11. See the section, "Dialektik und Analogie" in Beintker, *Die Dialektik*, 245–86.

12. For the idea of an analogy of faith, or *analogia fidei*, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, 238–44.

13. Both the dialectics and the parables reappear in Barth's lectures on Ephesians from 1921–22. It is interesting, though, that while the index of the critical edition lists the instances of dialectics, the only "parables" it lists are the parables of Jesus, and not Barth's uses of *Gleichnis* to denote both similarity and difference.

3 The Prefaces

LEGEND HAS IT THAT in the early 1960s Gerhard Ebeling, a German Lutheran theologian, dedicated a whole seminar to studying only the prefaces of Barth's *Epistle to Romans*.[1] Barth was apparently not too happy about Ebeling's decision to deal more with his *method* than his actual *exegesis*. Barth always preferred exegesis to hermeneutics, meaning that he preferred discussing Scripture to talking about methods or theories of interpreting Scripture.

The six prefaces (seven if you include the preface to the English translation) provide a window into German-speaking scholarship in the first half of the twentieth century, the course of Barth's earlier career, and some of the reactions that Barth's commentary raised. Throughout the prefaces two issues in particular reoccur quite frequently: Barth's supposed indifference or even hostility to historical-critical methods of scriptural interpretation, and doubts as to whether *Romans* I and II can be called "commentaries" at all. In both cases Barth will insist that he is no enemy of historical criticism, and that *Romans* I and II are indeed meant to be commentaries and not freewheeling speculations. While the first preface encountered in the book is that of the first English translation of *Romans* II, I will consider it last so that the chronology of the prefaces is consistent.

Preface to the First Edition: Safenwil, 1918

The first preface comes from the 1919 edition, or *Romans* I; it is not the first preface of the revised 1922 *Romans* II. It seems strange that it is included at all, as it was initially intended for a rather different book.

Barth spent some time crafting this preface. He went through a variety of different drafts and asked a variety of different people for feedback.[2] These initial drafts of the first preface, along with the various prefaces of the second edition, must surely make Barth's *Romans* one of the most prefaced works in the history of literature.

The tone of the first preface is refreshing. Barth is at this point a relatively unknown Swiss pastor who has had a few articles and reviews in various journals; this is his first book. The author's naïveté

is clearest when he writes, “the reader will detect for himself” that the commentary “has been written with a joyful sense of discovery” (2). “Joyful sense of discovery” might be the last phrase one might associate with the later *Romans* II, but it is certainly revealing of Barth’s own experience when first working through Paul’s letter. Barth calls the work a “preliminary” effort, one that would need the co-operation of those better equipped for and more capable of such a project. Here is a young and new author completely unaware of the impending fierce debates and even fiercer polemics that would accompany this work and his later works.

The preface’s main idea is that Paul and all of his readers spread out across time are actually contemporaries of each other. Paul, a first-century Jewish follower of Christ, wrote for other first-century Jewish and Gentile followers of Christ. But, “as Prophet and Apostle of the Kingdom of God, he veritably speaks to all men of every age” (1). Barth is less concerned with the differences and distance between Paul’s time and our own than with what binds Paul and us together. Historical investigation into these differences can be illuminating and interesting, but they should, at the end of their course, admit that they haven’t covered anything fundamental. Paul’s problems and questions are our problems and questions, and so Paul is, in a sense, our contemporary and fellow traveler. Barth does not, however, tell us exactly what these problems and questions are. Pointing to his father, Fritz Barth, Karl notes that history is a long conversation between yesterday’s wisdom and today’s.[3]

For comments and ideas such as these Barth’s theology and exegesis have been called “anti-historical,” and placed within the context of a whole wave of anti-historicism that broke upon the shores of early twentieth-century Europe.[4] The justifiable complaint is that Barth seems rather flippant about the differences between Paul’s age and the other ages in which Paul is read. In fact, arguments about the relationship between “faith” and “history” had for some time dominated the theological scene in Germany and several of Barth’s earliest writings were dedicated to this question.[5] Even in these works from 1909–13, the “liberal” Barth was firmly against the idea that history (or philosophy, sociology, or psychology)

could serve as the basis or foundation for faith or theology. Barth was, however, still entirely open and willing to accept historical research and knowledge, even as regards the books of the Bible or the church's historical confessions. In matters of faith, disciplines like philosophy and sociology were out of their league, for they deal with transcendental and universal laws, while faith and revelation are *particular* and *contingent* events in which a free God works within a free individual. These early prejudices for the priority of "faith" over "history" from his "liberal" period could be seen as reappearing in his choice of the traditional doctrine of inspiration over historical-critical methods.[6] "Fortunately," Barth remarks, "I am not compelled to choose between the two" (1). This preference for the older doctrine of inspiration over historical methods, while still not thinking it necessary to choose between the two, is what makes Barth a genuinely "modern theologian," and neither a "positive," nor a flat-out "liberal."

Authors of future works should note how *not* to end the preface of your first book. The first preface's closing lines—"should I be mistaken in this hope of a new, questioning investigation of the Biblical Message, well, this book must—wait. The Epistle to the Romans waits also"—alienated more than a few of its readers. In fact, the first lines of his second preface address the complaints that these very lines elicited. By suggesting that his book's true audience perhaps did not yet exist Barth seemed a little too cocky and self-sure in what he had written (perhaps a not unusual sin for authors and their first books).

Preface to the Second Edition: Safenwil, 1921

The second preface bears an enigmatic epitaph: "neither did I go up into Jerusalem . . . but I went into Arabia" (Gal 1:17). With these lines all sense of "joyous discovery" seems to have been replaced with the musings of an outsider. In fact, Barth spends most of this preface responding to criticisms from the academic establishment regarding *Romans* I, including the criticisms of those who had once been his teachers.

The preface to the second edition comes from September 1921, at the very end of Barth's pastorate in Safenwil (the Barths moved to Göttingen in October 1921). When a new edition of his *Romans* was

due, Barth decided around October 1920 that the first was inadequate and so he rewrote his commentary in the space of eleven months. Much had happened in the two intervening years after the publication of *Romans* I and Barth's decision to revise his commentary. There had been continuing social upheavals following the end of World War I, there were strikes (the most important of which was the general *Landesstreik* in Switzerland in 1919), rampant inflation in Germany, and political struggles, along with a bit of warfare, between conservatives, socialists, and communists throughout Europe.[7]

The relationship between these two editions has been an issue of scholarly interest for some time now. Particular attention has been paid to what led to Barth's changes of mind and the potential causes and influences behind these changes. Unfortunately for scholars pondering such matters, Barth himself brushes aside any question of discussing the relationship between the two works. However, he does, thankfully, offer some hints as to where one might look for potential influences.

Barth lists several influences that contributed to his growing sense that *Romans* I needed radical revision. He first mentions his continued study of Paul. Having finished *Romans* I, Barth studied Acts, 1 Cor 15, and gave a series of sermons on Ephesians.[8] In 1920 Barth studied Colossians, the Psalms, and delivered some sermons on 2 Corinthians. For his second influence, Barth lists the critical historian Franz Overbeck. In 1920 Barth and his friend Thurneysen had published a small pamphlet on Overbeck.[9] What Barth found provocative and interesting about Overbeck were his critical questions to modern day Christianity, especially Christian theology, and his understanding of history, particularly his distinction between *Geschichte* and *Urgeschichte* or "history" and "primal history."

The third factor Barth mentions is actually a group of individuals: Plato and Kant (through the mediation of Barth's younger brother Heinrich, who was a philosopher), Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky (with the help of Thurneysen). Barth had always respected and spoke highly of Plato, but Kant in particular had deeply moved the young Barth. In fact, Barth used to quote Plato and Kant to the students in his confirmation classes from 1909–21. In November 1920

Barth attended a lecture given by his brother Heinrich Barth on Plato, Socrates, and the wisdom of death. At this time Heinrich was offering a fairly innovative rereading of both Plato and Kant with a focus on the notion of the "Origin" of knowledge that throws all thought and subjectivity into question. In fact, one could see Heinrich's thought at this time as a kind of philosophical equivalent to Karl's theology, although both were quite independent thinkers. In particular Karl picked up from Heinrich a greater emphasis upon the otherness of God.[10] Kierkegaard was once thought to be one of the primary influences upon Barth's thought, especially back when Barth was considered by many to be a "Christian existentialist." More recent research, however, has limited Kierkegaard's influence to Barth's use of certain phrases, like "the moment" or "infinite qualitative distinction," or certain motifs, such as the hiddenness of God in Jesus Christ or the importance of "indirect communication." For his fourth and final influence, Barth mentions the reviews he read of *Romans* I. In fact, it was the positive reviews that made Barth question himself the most, for they seemed to be missing the point. (A similar sentiment will reappear in the preface to the fifth edition.)

Immediately after charting these influences, Barth offers us an interesting line that typically goes unnoticed: "more important, however, are those fundamental matters which are common to both editions" (4). What are these "fundamental matters" present in both editions? Perhaps an answer can be gleaned as Barth moves through the criticisms of *Romans* I and responds to them in turn. It is important to remember that when Barth responds to questions and complaints, he is referring to the reception of *Romans* I (and not *Romans* II!). We are gaining an insight into how *Romans* I was received by his contemporaries, and most especially by professional biblical scholars and theologians.[11]

There seem to be two fundamental matters common to both editions. First, Barth admits, against the protestations of Adolf Jülicher and Eberhard Vischer, that he is writing theology as a theologian.[12] *Romans* I and II are exegetical works but they are also theological. They are dealing not simply with a first-century religious text, but with Paul's questions and concerns about God and humanity. Second, one of Ragaz's friends had criticized *Romans* I

with a great one-liner, “simplicity is the mark of divinity” (a phrase from Blumhardt). Barth’s equally quick response is that his text never intended to be divine. Barth realizes, and rightly so, that *Romans* I and II are difficult and convoluted texts that challenge and strain readers.

Most of what follows is Barth’s defense of his commentary before the criticisms of those trained in historical-critical methods of biblical scholarship. Their general consensus is that the commentary simply is not a piece of authentic and acceptable biblical scholarship. Instead, Barth’s commentary belongs within the realm of “pastoral theology” or “practical theology,” disciplines apparently as maligned then as now. To the accusation that he is against historical-critical methods, Barth clarifies that they are “necessary and justified” (6). But he returns the favor by relegating these methods to the status of preliminaries. The issue is not only what Paul said in Greek, or the oral and textual histories of the different parts of each letter or Gospel, but reaching “the actual meaning” of the epistle. Once again Barth invokes the image of a conversation whereby the distinction between yesterday and today becomes irrelevant. Criticism of the text is best done from the standard of the subject matter itself (in this case God), rather than from some external standard, like those involved in historical or sociological research. Undertaking this line of criticism means knowing Paul and Romans so well that Paul and Romans themselves disappear before the subject matter. Barth appeals to his own struggles as a preacher proclaiming the realities in Scripture from the pulpit and asks whether the historians have fulfilled their responsibilities when at the end of their multi-volume works a pastoral theology type is asked to provide a supplementary piece on how to handle the Bible in sermons.

There is also Barth’s famous reply to a Swiss reviewer’s accusation that Barth himself has a system and a method despite all his anti-systematic gestures. He notes, “My reply is that, if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the ‘infinite qualitative distinction’ between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: ‘God is in heaven, and thou art on earth’” (10). While the negative significance of this quotation has often been noted, Barth

also states that there is a positive meaning in it as well. We also encounter this famous remark regarding the relationship between theology and philosophy: “The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy. Philosophers name this *krisis* of human perception—the Prime Cause: the Bible beholds at the same crossroads—the figure of Jesus Christ” (10). The specific philosophy that Barth most likely has in mind is, however, critical, skeptical philosophy, one that throws into crisis human pretensions to knowledge (and that stresses the importance of ethics).[13]

With these two comments Barth has described the situation in which he reads and interprets Romans. Both Paul and Barth are on earth, and God is in heaven. The same crisis, questions, and problems confront Paul and Barth. To treat the epistle seriously, as his interlocutors wish to do, means for Barth the assumption that Paul really is speaking about Jesus Christ, and that God is God. Certainly, Barth concedes, he has not interpreted the epistle perfectly, but he asks whether or not these assumptions are well founded, and if they are then what difference they would make to biblical interpretation.

Paul Wernle raises an issue that would repeat itself in many different ways in subsequent years, particularly in the figure of Rudolf Bultmann.[14] Wernle askes Barth about what interpreters should do with the “relics” of Paul’s past era and the scandal they present to modern minds. Barth’s response is to question what an interpretation of Paul could possibly be without all of the uncomfortable points and the intellectual scandals. Taking Paul seriously is difficult and not even one single verse from Paul allows for easy interpretation.

Barth then mentions that he is concerned not with the “whole” gospel, but with the “veritable” gospel. With this distinction Barth is signaling that his goal is correspondence, fidelity to these particular texts and their content, the “veritable” gospel, and not necessarily their coherence within some larger doctrinal framework, the “whole” gospel. He is not using Scripture to build a system, or trying to derive one from Paul’s letter. He is interested in expressing, amplifying, and

illustrating Paul, not in systematizing him. In this way Barth's approach has a precedent in Martin Luther and his 1535 commentary on Galatians. One of the more striking rhetorical features of both commentaries is their dependence upon repetition. While repeating an idea once and again surely makes for an editorial sin, it is also one of the surest signs of a preacher turned writer.

Adolf von Harnack's recently published book *Marcion* allowed for Barth to be called by a new name: a "Marcionite." Certain members of the academic establishment had already called Barth a "gnostic" and a "pneumatic." Now Barth could be compared to the second-century heretic Marcion (ca. 85–160).[15] For Harnack himself being labeled a Marcionite might not be all that bad of a thing, but from others, however, it was certainly meant as a criticism. Barth notes, "I wish to plead for a careful examination of these arguments before I be praised or blamed hastily as though I were a Marcionite" (13).[16]

The Preface to the Third Edition: Göttingen, 1922

It is only with the third preface from July 1922 that we finally read about responses to *Romans* II, and not *Romans* I. Barth is now an honorary professor of Reformed theology at the University of Göttingen. This post was created with the financial assistance and efforts of a group of American Presbyterians. That there was such a post in Reformed theology at all in Göttingen was the product of a long series of negotiations by the Reformed Church in Germany.

The tone of the third preface is less tense than the second. Barth begins with some rather wistful lines on the passing of time, and explains that he has not seen it necessary to rewrite his commentary, at least not yet. He also explains that the second preface has been included, but he does not "regard its repetition as of very great importance, certainly not the repetition of the polemic contained in it" (16). After gratefully acknowledging the criticisms and reviews of Rudolf Bultmann, Adolf Schlatter, and Kolfhaus, Barth spends most of his time responding to Bultmann.[17]

Barth returns to the issue of historical criticism and scriptural interpretation when dealing with Bultmann's criticisms. Both Barth and Bultmann agree that "criticism" must begin from the standpoint of Scripture itself. Beyond this point, however, disagreements arise. Bultmann thinks, at least as Barth presents it, that the interpreter can

then turn around and criticize Paul for failing to remain faithful to his subject; many spirits speak in the New Testament, and not all of them are the Spirit of Christ. Barth ups the ante: “But I must go farther than he does and say that there are in the Epistle no words at all which are not words of those ‘other spirits’ which he calls Jewish or Popular Christian or Hellenistic or whatever else they may be” (16). It is not the case that the Spirit of Christ stands alongside other spirits, and that we can identify this Spirit and extract the others. In fact, the whole is nothing but the speaking of other spirits that the Spirit of Christ throws into crisis. Everything is letter in contrast to the Spirit, and so the problem is to understand the whole as it relates to the Spirit.

Barth thinks that a decision must be made at this point. This either-or is first characterized as loyalty. Can loyalty to one’s author stop at some point? Or must we follow Paul the whole way? If we are not completely loyal to Paul, then the commentary becomes “about” Paul and no longer “with” Paul.[18] The interpreter is unlikely to be able to disclose the Spirit of Christ with equal ability at every place. Nevertheless, the interpreter knows that the fault lies with the interpreter, and not with Paul himself. The interpreter will not “rest content until paradoxically he has seen the whole in the fragments, and has displayed the fragments in the context of the veritable subject matter, so that all the other spirits are seen in some way or other to serve the Spirit of Christ” (17).

When the interpreter is unable to see the true subject matter in Paul, then the commentary becomes *about* Paul, and no longer *with* Paul. Dividing the spirits from the Spirit in Paul means writing about Paul, and not with him. Barth calls such a position “irresponsible” and thinks it represents the standpoint of a spectator of the epistle, and not a participant in the realities it talks about (18). Barth thinks that Bultmann is asking him to write *with* Paul, but only momentarily, for then Barth is supposed to turn around and write *on* Paul. Barth sees in Bultmann’s request a return to the older positions of “relics” and “uncomfortable points” in Paul’s thought, for we are most tempted to write about Paul at precisely these points. Barth does not mention his earlier response to Wernle, but Barth uses some of the same terms present in his response to Wernle.

Both Bultmann and Schlatter see in Barth's *practice*, or the way he actually did exegesis, a kind of return to the doctrine of verbal inspiration. Barth admits that his exegesis and the way he approaches the text has "certain affinities" (18) to this doctrine, and he uses a spirit/letter distinction to pinpoint these affinities. On the one hand, Barth thinks such a doctrine, as Calvin offered it, to be fruitful and salutary. (We should also note that the end of this preface has an appropriately dialectical passage from Calvin's commentary on Hebrews.) It assumes that the spirit of the text will speak through the letter to our own spirits. Practically speaking it recommends the kind of absolute loyalty or faithfulness to Paul that Barth thinks is necessary for exegesis. On the other hand, criticism of the letter from the spirit is necessary. The text itself can be expanded, abbreviated, or paraphrased so that the spirit within the letter can be expressed. This flexibility with the text is why Barth's practice only has "certain affinities" to the older doctrine. In bringing out the spirit of the letter, however, we should never suppose that we could occupy the viewpoint of the Spirit of Christ. We should be content if, despite hearing other spirits, we can at least hear something of the Spirit. This back and forth between the letter and the spirit of text, loyalty to Paul while moving beyond him to the subject matter itself, is summed up well in Barth's recommendation that "we must to see beyond Paul. This can only be done, however, if, with utter loyalty and with a desperate earnestness, we endeavour to penetrate his meaning" (19).

Preface to the Fourth Edition: Göttingen, 1924

In February 1924 Barth is still teaching at the University of Göttingen. He now has several years of teaching under his belt and will soon begin his first lectures in systematic theology. His collection of essays entitled *The Word of God and the Word of Man* and his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, were just published, and he has become more familiar with historical Protestant thought.

In the very first line of the preface Barth notes that the book needs to be rewritten. He admits this only two years after *Romans* II came out. He has not had the opportunity to revise the work, and he still doesn't see clearly enough through the difficult passages that would

need to become more prominent in a newly written commentary (unfortunately he doesn't say *which* verses these are). Barth notes in passing that Jülicher has written a second review, and brings up two newer voices to the conversation surrounding *Romans* II.

Reviewers from the Dutch Reformed church apparently found *Romans* II too negative and warned readers that the work might prove different from and offensive to their spiritual sensibilities. This is a rather ominous beginning to what will become a rocky relationship. Barth certainly counted Dutch pastors and theologians among his friends, and yet Barth would continually irritate and be irritated by certain Dutch Reformed theologians throughout his career. These theologians greeted with horror Barth's rather too cavalier and revisionist attitudes towards traditional post-Reformation dogmatics.[19] While Barth could tolerate their criticisms of himself, even he had his limits. In the preface to *Church Dogmatics* III/4 (1951), Barth notes:

> That the Neo-Calvinists in the Netherlands are not among my well-wishers is something that I have been forced to recognize at all stages of my path so far. Let us not blame them for this, nor for accusing me of being a "monist," which they recently proceeded to do. But it is going too far that in their attacks, obviously to offend me all the more, they so far forget themselves as to use unrepeatable disparagement of W. A. Mozart. In so doing they have, of course, shown themselves to be men of stupid, cold and stony hearts to whom we need not listen.[20]

There was certainly not much love in this relationship.

Barth shows more interest in two Roman Catholic reviewers: Erich Przywara and Josef Engert. Przywara in particular was one of the first Roman Catholics to deal with and criticize Barth's work. He saw in Barth a true renaissance of Protestantism (and Luther in particular)—an ambiguous compliment coming from Przywara—and hence an opponent worthy to be engaged. The relationship between Barth and Przywara would grow throughout the later 1920s, culminating in Przywara's visit to Karl Barth's seminar in 1929.[21] It ended rather abruptly in 1932 when the analogy of being, one of Przywara's central ideas, was famously called by Barth, "the invention of the antichrist."[22] Engert's enthusiasm is less equivocal; he declares Barth's work to be in agreement with Aquinas, the Council of Trent, and the Roman Catholic Catechism. Barth was pleased with this newfound interest and cautions his Protestant

contemporaries against dismissing Roman Catholicism too quickly. Barth had been exposed to Roman Catholic theology at this point, most notably through attending Erik Peterson's seminar on Thomas Aquinas in winter 1923–24, but his own engagement with Roman Catholic theology was still a couple years away.

Preface to the Fifth Edition: Münster, 1926

By the time of the fifth preface Barth is at Münster, a traditionally Roman Catholic city with a strong Roman Catholic theology faculty. Barth moved to Münster in October 1925 and by February 1926 is lecturing on the fourth and final part of his systematic theology, the Gospel of John (with some help from Bultmann), and holding a seminar on Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The fifth preface, my own personal favorite, shows Barth at his most reflective and thoughtful, filled with worrying and wondering. The success of *Romans* II and in turn "Barthianism" has given Barth pause. Barth has become fashionable when he was trying to be provocative and critical. Maybe Barth was simply giving expression to what was in the air at the time; "who knows whether we are not being moved, just when we imagine that we are moving others?" (22). Perhaps Barth is simply a servant of public opinion, and perhaps merely offered "a rehash, resurrected out of Nietzsche and Kierkegaard and Cohen" (22). In any case, one can sense Barth's slight distaste at having become the author of a "bestseller." But the fairest of flowers must fade, and Barth muses that one day his own must fade as well.

There is, however, another interpretation of the book's success that Barth mentions. Despite the book's shortcomings, perhaps it genuinely brought to light something about Paul's Romans, and what Paul's Romans is about. Perhaps the book has made an indent in the internal and external afflictions and trials of the Protestant church. He quotes a poem by a pastor, and remarks that he wishes he could be such a "hound of God," and, by implication, not merely a creature "full of noisy, catchy phrases" (24).

The Preface to the Sixth Edition: Münster, 1928

Barth is still at Münster by the time of his sixth and last preface from 1928. A year earlier his *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* ("Christian Dogmatics in Outline") was published.[23] This work was Barth's first

published systematic theology, and was a reworking of his earlier theology lectures at Göttingen and Münster. He draws attention to this publication apparently in the hopes of redirecting some of the focus on *Romans* II to his more recent work. At this time Barth's interest in Roman Catholicism is in full swing,[24] and he is beginning to sense the more serious differences between himself and the other members of the "dialectical theology" circle (particularly Friedrich Gogarten).

Barth again distances himself from *Romans* II, but not entirely. He would not retract any of the substance of what he said: what was hard to hear then should still be hard to hear now. He would, however, express the same thing differently, noting, "A great deal of the scaffolding of the book was due to my own particular situation at the time and also to the general situation. This would have to be pulled down" (25). There are also aspects of Paul's Romans that he had missed, but again he does not tell us exactly what.

Barth quotes a recent article that wonders whether Karl Barth is already becoming a thing of the past and fading out of fashion (already in 1928!). He responds, "Yes, no doubt! Dead men ride fast but successful theologians ride faster (cf. the Preface to the fifth edition)" (26). Tales of his coming irrelevance do not hurt Barth, for even he does not treat "time" and "history" so lightly that he cannot realize that all things, even Karl Barth, must come to an end.

Preface to the English Edition: Bonn, 1932

Barth wrote the preface to the English edition in the same year he published *Church Dogmatics* I/1. One year before he had published a work on Anselm, and in a year's time he will publish his pamphlet *Theological Existence Today*, a criticism of several ecclesial developments within the new Nazi regime. Barth is now at the University of Bonn, having moved there in 1930. Bonn will be the last German university at which Barth will teach. In 1935 he will be removed from his post by the Nazis and will promptly take up a post in Basel, where he will remain for the rest of his career.

As a whole the preface seems rather bent on clearing up misunderstandings, or at least potential misunderstandings, that his English-speaking readers might have. There is also the customary

distancing of the book from its now older author. Barth makes four main points.

First, he notes the time that has passed since the book was written: eleven years since the second edition, and fourteen years since the first. It was written by "a young country pastor," as Barth puts it, and one can almost "hear the sound of the guns booming away in the north" (v). He admits, "when, however, I look back at the book, it seems to have been written by another man to meet a situation belonging to a past epoch" (vi). He also warns his readers (with some weariness?) that most likely he has already heard and thought about any criticisms of the work that one could think up. The *Epistle to the Romans*, then, remains at best and at most an introduction to Barth's thought.

Second, he expresses gratitude that his work is not unknown in England and America. He immediately turns around, however, and asks his readers not to interpret *Romans* II with any pre-conceived notions about "dialectical theology," the "theology of crisis," or "Barthianism." Barth singles out Emil Brunner, whose works were better known and received than Barth's in English-speaking circles. He instructs his readers "not to look at me simply through the spectacles of Emil Brunner, not to conform me to his pattern, and, above all, not to think of me as the representative of a particular 'Theological School'" (vii). These are prescient words, for Barth's pamphlet war with Brunner—*Nature and Grace* and *No!*—was a mere two years away, and had been in the making for quite some time before 1934.[25]

Third, Barth passes on the advice of Hoskyns, the translator, that the book is best read *as a whole*. (Any advice a translator gives you is worth your attention, as translators tend to know books better than even their authors.) Paul's letter to the Romans itself cannot be read in parts or split into different fragments, for Paul's argument moves and develops throughout each chapter. Likewise, Barth's commentary should be read as a whole and he mentions that a great deal of criticism or unwarranted sympathy could have been avoided if the whole thing had actually been read from the very start.

Fourth, Barth stresses that he wrote a *commentary*, not a philosophy or free-floating series of reflections on Paul that may or

may not have any real relation to Paul; “in writing this book, I set out neither to compose a free fantasia upon the theme of religion, nor to evolve a philosophy of it. My sole aim was to interpret Scripture” (ix). He also asks his readers not to think that Paul’s work is being interpreted “spiritually,” and thus that his work fails to be a real commentary with real exegesis. Barth relates that he indeed felt bound to Paul and the words of Paul when writing *Romans* II. He offers his readers a clue into how to criticize the book appropriately: on the basis of exegesis, on the grounds of Scripture itself; criticisms from philosophical, ethical, or religious outlooks are of little use to him. The purpose of the book was also not to start some new theological movement or some “New Theology” (x). The purpose of the book was to write about Paul’s Romans and the concerns of Paul’s Romans.

Further Reading

Karl Barth. “The Concept of the Church.”
———. “Roman Catholicism: A Question to the Protestant Church.”
———. “Unsettled Questions for Theology Today.”

1. Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 34.

2. These have been translated by Burnett and given a historical background in his *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 265–92.

3. Barth will also use this idea in the beginning of his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*.

4. This was one of the main charges of the so-called “Munich school” regarding Barth’s theology. For an overview of this school of Barth interpretation see Holtmann, *Karl Barth als Theologe der Neuzeit*.

5. Among other works see Barth’s “Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit” and “Glaube und Geschichte.”

6. It should be noted, however, that the early Barth had some negative things to say about the Reformers’ doctrine of inspiration, so this remark represents both continuity and discontinuity with the liberal Barth.

7. Bruce McCormack helpfully describes some of these events; see McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 184–203.

8. Barth dealt with Ephesians in his confirmation classes in early 1918, gave a series of sermons on Ephesians in the summer of 1919, and had dictated a small “clarification” (*Erklärung*), as opposed to an “interpretation,” of Ephesians in early 1920. See Karl Barth “Epheserbrief 1919/1920.”

9. Barth and Thurneysen, *Zur inneren Lage des Christentums*. The volume contained Barth’s review of Overbeck’s work and a sermon by Thurneysen. For Barth’s piece, see “Unsetteld Questions for Theology Today.”

10. One of the best accounts of Heinrich’s influence upon Karl’s thought is Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis*, 105–6, and 112–22.

11. Here see Burnett, *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis*, 14–23

12. Jülicher had actually been Barth’s teacher at Marburg, and at one point Barth had secured the seat next to the esteemed Professor of New Testament and Church History in

his seminar.

13. From Barth's earliest writings in 1909 to about the middle of the 1920s Barth thought that there could be a correspondence, or parallelism (not an identity) between critical philosophy and modern Protestant theology. Following his teacher Herrmann, even the liberal Barth thought that philosophy could not serve as a basis for theology. While Barth's thoughts on this relationship (including this correspondence model) changed fairly often throughout his career, this notion of theology's independence from foundations other than God and revelation would only grow stronger, and sometimes to surprising ends. Barth later argued that in theology's complete independence from philosophical foundations (although he admitted that theologies always assume some kind of philosophy) theology was still free and even obliged to deal with philosophy and philosophers. In an interview given in 1965, three years before his death, Barth noted: "We must integrate philosophy into our research with being integrated by it" (Karl Barth, "Interview von Henri-Charles Tauxe," 573). For the translation of this interview, originally in French, into German, see ibid., 197–202.

14. Wernle taught church history, historical theology, and New Testament at Basel. He had also been Thurneysen's teacher at one point. Both Thurneysen and Barth found Wernle an interesting and intelligent conversation partner during Barth's time at Safenwil.

15. Marcion of Sinope held that the creator god of the Old Testament was a vengeful, tribal deity of the Jews completely different from the loving and merciful Heavenly Father of Jesus Christ. He had, then, a strong opposition between the law of the Old Testament and the gospel of the New Testament. He was the first to put forward a New Testament canon, prompting others to soon put forward alternative canons of Scriptures.

16. For some of Barth's judgments regarding Marcion and Harnack, see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 74; and for Marcion see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/1, 334–40.

17. Barth had also studied under Schlatter while at Tübingen. He was less than impressed and thought that Schlatter had a gift for ducking the real and more interesting problems. For both Schlatter's and Bultmann's reviews see Moltmann, ed., *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, vol. 1, 119–42.

18. Apparently Barth soon found this contrast not entirely correct or necessary, as Barth's lectures on Ephesians from the winter semester of 1921/1922 could arguably be seen as more commenting *on* Paul than *with* Paul. Nevertheless, even the Ephesians lectures do not lose the self-involving or "existential" import of what Paul is actually saying about God and the world.

19. These tendencies can still constitute a sore point among more confessional-minded groups of Reformed theologians, among whom it remains undecided whether Barth even deserves the label "Reformed," to say nothing of whether Schleiermacher might be counted as Reformed.

20. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III/4, xiii.

21. For the relationship between Barth and Przywara, see the helpful work by Marga, *Karl Barth's Dialogue with Roman Catholicism in Göttingen and Munster*.

22. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* I/1, xiii.

23. This work has not yet been translated into English.

24. As is evident in works like "The Concept of the Church" and "Roman Catholicism: A Question to the Protestant Church." He also read the first book of Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* in the winter semester of 1928–29 with Erich Przywara visiting the seminar in February 1929.

25. Barth and Brunner, *Natural Theology*.

PART II

Barth on Romans 1—16

4 The Gospel andthe Night (Rom 1)

Romans 1:1–17: Introduction

The "veritable Gospel" is on full display and in full force from the very beginning of the commentary. In these first seventeen verses we see a bright constellation of themes that will shine throughout Paul's epistle and Barth's commentary: the gospel, Jesus Christ, grace, apostleship, revelation and history, resurrection, and faith. We can also get a glimpse of the rhetorical style Barth will use throughout the commentary: bold, sweeping, maximal, and suggestive.

From the outset the main theme is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, an event that is both impossible and unthinkable. The resurrection of Jesus is the supreme miracle, for the dead rise. The resurrection makes no sense either to our common sense or to our scientific accounts of the world. The resurrection is not the resuscitation of a dead body, but the glorification and transformation of the body by God. This event also makes no sense in what we regard as the march of history. Barth can even brashly declare that the resurrection does not take place within history at all! The resurrection of Jesus Christ does not belong to the normal, observable course of things, or to the natural realm of ceaseless forces, attractions, and material. The resurrection "did not happen" insofar as it lies outside the standard methods and procedures for writing history (or the work of disciplines like psychology or sociology). But an even stronger point is being made as well: the resurrection lies outside the possibilities of time and space. It is literally impossible, and cannot be said to have "occurred" in the normal sense of "occurred."

Two worlds meet in Jesus Christ: eternity meets time, the unknown meets the known, and the new world comes into the old. In Jesus Christ the unknown God makes himself known and present. In

this meeting difference is also present and revealed. In Jesus the difference between time and eternity, the visible and invisible, humanity of God, also becomes visible. In this meeting of the eternal and temporal in Jesus Christ there is no mixing or confusion of the two: the world remains the world, and God remains God. There comes a steady train of quite dramatic images to illustrate this point: “The effulgence, or, rather, the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell, the void by which the point on the line of intersection makes itself known in the concrete world of history, is not—even though it be named the Life of Jesus—that other world which touches our world in Him. In so far as our world is touched in Jesus by the other world, it ceases to be capable of direct observation as history, time, or thing” (29). Barth is trying to describe (perhaps unsuccessfully) that in Jesus Christ (a) God and the world, time and eternity meet; (b) they remain, however, entirely different and unmixed; (c) there are, nevertheless, aftereffects and consequences of this meeting in the world and in time; but (d) these consequences are “negative” or “empty” for they always point away from themselves to God and the eternal. In Jesus, “there is here no merging or fusion of God and man, no exaltation of humanity to divinity, no overflowing of God into human nature” (30).

The life of Jesus is observable and historical, but as soon as our world is touched by the other world in Jesus Christ, it is longer knowable and observable as history or an event in time. This is because we encounter a divine declaration and action in Jesus Christ. Jesus is declared to be the Son of God, according to the Holy Spirit, and he is resurrected from the dead. At this point the person Jesus ceases to be an observable historical event and becomes the revelation of God; “Resurrection is the revelation: the disclosing of Jesus as the Christ, the appearing of God, and the apprehending of God in Jesus” (30). Resurrection is revelation, and like revelation it can only be “known” in and by faith. Apart from this declaration Jesus is just like any other person within history.

We have already seen the many and colorful names Barth will use for God: origin, homeland, beginning and end, the secret long known and spoken. These names and titles are best interpreted loosely and in a non-technical way.[1] One should not place on them too much

importance at the expense of the actions that are taking place within the drama of Romans. We will encounter throughout the text a perpetual rhythm of describing God as both near and far, both present and distant, both known and unknown, as the one who dwells in light unapproachable (1 Tim 6:16) and the one who takes on the likeness of human flesh (Phil 2:6–10). God is the unknown, for God cannot be known through nature or in the souls of the pious (36); God can only be known inasmuch as God makes himself known.[2]

The ideas of "revelation" and "apostleship" become clearer when we consider both Paul's calling and his message. No less impossible than the resurrection is Paul's receiving of grace and apostleship, his being called and commissioned to preach the gospel of the resurrection, a message that is "new, unprecedented, joyful and good" (28). The power of the resurrection, its "proof," can be seen in the faith that is alive in Rome. Just as the door of the tomb was opened for the Word, so the doors of Rome have been opened for the Word, and in turn for the Word's servant, Paul. Paul's message is Christ crucified. Paul does not preach himself but the gospel of the crucified one who was resurrected. There is both a negative and positive aspect here. Paul does not and cannot have any independent significance in and of himself; his importance and the meaning of his apostleship are wholly negative. Paul is a witness and so he points away from himself. All witnesses point away from themselves, their virtues, communities, ideas, and point towards God; "the activity of the community is related to the Gospel only in so far as it is no more than a crater formed by the explosion of a shell and seeks to be no more than a void in which the Gospel reveals itself" (36). There is an irreducible difference between God and the world, and part of the gospel is hearing and accepting this difference.

Just as Paul is not ashamed of the gospel, so there is no need for anxiety or apologetics. Apologetics (in the sense of moral, political, historical, or cosmological arguments for Christianity) judge God and God's acts according to the standards and concerns of the old world that is now passing away.[3] Apologetics attempt to make visible, known, and direct what is invisible, unknown, and indirect. Faith and revelation, as acts of the infinitely different God, are

“incommunicable,” meaning that they cannot be simply passed from one individual to another.

There is also the theme of *waiting*. Barth will often use the rather striking metaphor of a prisoner who then becomes the watchman. We wait in expectation for the return of Jesus Christ and for the continuing transformation of the world by God. The current time is a time of suffering, for sin and death still linger after Jesus Christ’s victory over them. In this time, however, the prisoner can become the watchman. The resurrection “seals us in,” seals us into our humanity, our suffering, and our condition as creatures and as creatures of God. Yet the resurrection also provides an “exit,” not from being creatures, but a hope of release from our present suffering in a world of sin and death. It is an exit, but it an exit that we must *wait* for; it is a matter of *hope*. Instead of possession and self-sufficiency, what we have is deprivation and hope.

The gospel requires faith. The resurrection, the power of God unto salvation, is so new and unexpected that it can only appear to us as a contradiction. A choice between faith and being scandalized is demanded at this point. Other things that might surround faith, “depth of feeling, strength of conviction, advance in perception and in moral things” (39), are simply things of this world; they are negative matters that point towards the positive. This choice is first presented to “the Jew,” by which Barth means the religious, the churched, but it fundamentally concerns everyone universally (both the Jew and the Greek).

The gospel reveals the righteousness and faithfulness of God. When we think of God apart from the resurrection we are actually thinking of the “No-God,” the *Nicht-Gott*. This No-God does not resurrect, does not redeem creation, does not claim to be God among the gods, and does not judge the unrighteousness and evil of humanity. The world’s protest against the No-God is entirely justified. In Christ God speaks and reveals himself and punishes the No-God of our imaginations. In Christ God is announced as the Redeemer and also as the Creator, the meaning of everything: “He acknowledges Himself to be our God by creating and maintaining the distance by which we are separated from Him; he displays His mercy by inaugurating His *krisis* and bringing us under judgement. He

guarantees our salvation by willing to be God and known as God—in Christ; He justifies us by justifying Himself" (41).

God's own righteousness is the meeting of God's faithfulness to humanity and humanity's faithfulness to God. God's righteousness and faithfulness create, engender, and include human faithfulness. Nevertheless, human faithfulness remains nothing in and of itself; it has zero positive significance. The "theme" of the epistle (42) is this asymmetric meeting, where God reveals his righteousness, and where the righteous person lives.

Nightfall

1:18–21: THE CAUSE

Before resurrection there was death. Before the gospel of forgiveness there was sin. With verses 1:18–21 we move back into the night of sin in order to see its cause.

"The wrath of God is the righteousness of God—apart from and without Christ" (43). Outside of faith and Christ the righteousness of God is too unbearable, just as thinking of God without the resurrection of Jesus Christ is really thinking about the No-God. In one way or another this righteousness is denied, rebelled against, and so God's righteousness becomes God's wrath.[4] The wrath of God is the judgment that meets those who do not love the Judge; it is a protest against the evil, violence, and corruption of the world that we believe ourselves to be innocent of; it is the revenge of the limits, boundaries, and barriers of our creaturely finitude that we do not accept and so become prisoners. In each example, the righteousness of God towards creation becomes a form of God's wrath; wrath is righteousness that is not received. We are then given what we asked for: the barrier becomes a prison, joyful waiting becomes surrender, and contradiction is no longer is a matter of hope but of melancholy opposition. The healthy and good negation, "you are not God," becomes negation. Even our (false) ideas about God become a form of God's wrath: "That which we, apart from faith in the resurrection, name 'God', is also a final consequence of the divine wrath" (43). A "naked" or "unclothed" God, a God without the crucified and resurrected Jesus, is a form of God's wrath (imagining and fearing only a wrathful God is itself a form of God's wrath). The "known God," the God we can deduce from nature, logic, or religion

is the God of wrath, for he is not the God who resurrects Jesus Christ.

Apart from and without Christ our relationship to God is inverted and corrupted. Barth gives some characteristics of this relationship. There is the impulse and the habit of assigning God a place, even the highest place, within *our* world. There is thinking that God might need something *we* can provide and that we and God are in a relationship that *we* can control. Equally, we think we can communicate directly, by sight, and we think we can draw God unto ourselves. We can even storm the supra-sensible, transcendent realm and place God as some highest thing or value. Such is our righteousness. This logic of inversion is clearest in the statement that "this secret identification of ourselves with God carries with it our isolation from him" (45).

Verses 1:19–21 shows that there is a tragedy to this situation, for it is neither inevitable nor natural. The truth of the resurrection, that humanity is limited, put into crisis, and established by God, is a known truth. The triviality of human existence, its questionable character, points beyond itself to a righteous God who pronounces a "No" over humanity ("you are *not* God"). We can know that we do not know God. There is a correspondence or similarity (not an identity) between Plato's invisible origin beyond our world, and the fear of the Lord in Job, Solomon, and the prophets. Both recognize the invisibility of our origin, our God, and how feeble our attempts to speak of the unknown God are. What can be clearly seen by mere observation upon our condition—God's invisibility—agrees with what we can see in the gospel: God's everlasting power and divinity. Recognizing God's power and divinity means recognizing that we can know nothing of God. The difference between God and the world, between time and eternity, has long been known. Clearly seen is God's power and work against the No-God of the world; clearly seen is God's true divinity asserting itself amongst the other gods and idols. The wrath of God did not need to be revealed to those who accept the righteousness, judgment, and difference of God from the world.

Tragic though it may be, the knowledge of God's righteousness and of his difference from creation, reachable through the

questionability of human life and the world, was not taken advantage of. God becomes a *thing*, even an eternal and transcendent thing, but a thing among other things nonetheless. God ceases to be the unknown, invisible God and becomes a known god of our own making. We are then left at the mercy of the gods and powers of the world. Reason itself becomes "vain," heartless, and our "unbroken" thinking can no longer handle knowing the concrete world.

The world no longer knows the unknown God. The "No" of God has become a word of negation and wrath, not of righteousness. This is the cause of the night in which we cannot see clearly, and the cause for the breaking forth of God's wrath.

1:22–32: The Effects

Barth begins to outline the "operation" or the effects of nightfall with 1:22–32 and Paul's litany of the consequences of the nightfall.

There is a wisdom of the night, of a world without paradox, without eternity, without an unknown God, and without the divine "No." Such a world seems more comforting, secure, and suitable for daily life. But this "wisdom" cannot be maintained, for the darkening of the mind and heart (1:21) becomes a darkening of action and practice as well. Within this world of the night the unknown God has not disappeared, but has been replaced. The glory of God is given to any manner of worldly things. In the night what was once clear and bright can no longer be seen. Gone are the "crevasse, the polar zone, the desert barrier" (49) that separate God from the world, the incorruptible from the corruptible, what is at the origin from what is relative and derivative.

In Paul's discussion of the corruptible and the incorruptible we encounter the notion of "parable," or *Gleichnis*. Here Barth speaks of a parable, or likeness, between the corruptible and the incorruptible. On the very same page Barth can refer to both the parable of the corruptible to the incorruptible and the infinite qualitative distinction (50). The combination of parable with absolute difference is not contradictory or incoherent. In fact, it is this joining of likeness to endless difference that is the practice of analogy. All that passes to corruption can *only* be a parable or a likeness of the incorruptible. "Fetishism" arises when the corruptible ceases to be a parable. In fetishism the corruptible is no longer like the incorruptible, but the

incorruptible becomes like the corruptible. The direction of the parable is reversed. God now appears in the “likeness of corruptible man,” interpreted by Barth to mean that God becomes “Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland” (50). This confusion becomes its own form of punishment, for when family, state, church, and nation are made into gods then there is “no higher power to protect them from what they have set on high” (51). Having chosen the known god rather than the unknown God, humans are left to experience the god of their own choice and manufacturing.

The loss of the glory of God means the loss of the glory of humanity: “When God has been deprived of His glory, men are also deprived of theirs” (51). One need not choose between the glory of God and the glory of humanity. One need not assume that the glory of God means the misery of humanity, or that the glory of humanity means the misery of God. The two glories are bound together; God’s glory includes his work of glorifying his creatures.

There is an exchange of glories, an exchange of God’s truth for a lie, the creature becomes worshipped, and life becomes completely erotic.[5] Knowledge of the unknown God, a memory of him, and a relic of his presence, still remain. Even the gods themselves, the deified things, reveal the secret of the unknown God; gods are still praised and thought to exist even after the unknown God has become forgotten. But even this faint, dim knowledge can and has become completely erased. This is when the final disintegration of the world sets in (1:28–31), knowing that death is where all of this leads (1:32). The operation or effect of wandering in the night is death.

1. Hans Anton Drewes has shown that the “origin” language, while suggestive of Heinrich Barth, comes from Hermann Kutter. See Drewes, *Das Unmittelbare bei Hermann Kutter*.

2. Even the so-called “liberal” Barth, and his liberal teachers before him, such as Ritschl and Herrmann, would agree with this claim.

3. Barth’s dislike of apologetics, and implying that apologetics are a kind of being ashamed of the gospel, is one of the more controversial aspects of his thought. It is, nevertheless, a highly consistent one throughout his theological career. Barth would have heard a similar anti-apologetic standpoint from his teacher Herrmann (although Herrmann himself was inconsistent on this point). Years later, when Barth had moved far beyond Herrmann, he could speak appreciatively of this aspect of Herrmann’s thought, and also realize how Herrmann himself could be an apologist at times.

4. The notion of God’s wrath, an idea neglected by a large swathe of nineteenth-century liberal theology, first emerges in Barth’s sermons from 1913.

5. The idea of the erotic will become important in Barth’s discussion of Rom 12.

5 Unrighteousness Abounds (Rom 2)

Romans 2:1–13: The Judge

THIS CHAPTER BEGINS WITH a prologue, a long series of questions. Each question subtly asks about the possibility of escaping God's wrath and judgment. Is there really no way of knowing and honoring the unknown God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Is it really impossible to possess some type of righteousness before God? Is there no distinction between those few humble and godly people we know (and most likely are), and that other, teeming mass of poor unfortunate souls?

What immediately follows this short, probing prologue is Rom 2:1–2 and the rhetorical purpose of this list of questions becomes clear: Barth is actively performing Paul's trap. These questions entertain the possibility that there is some escape from God's judgment, that there is some vestige of human righteousness that might please God. And it goes without saying that this lucky or hard-working group probably includes us or at least me. It is those imagined or specific others who receive God's wrath and judgment.

In Rom 2:1–2 Paul (and then Barth) accuses the accuser. With this literary trap Paul (and Barth) is after one of the more difficult and deeper forms of human righteousness: the practice of judging and assigning righteousness or unrighteousness to others and to ourselves. The question of this section, then, is *who* is the true judge and *who* are the judged?

This habit of usurping the place of the Judge needs to be identified and extracted. We have seen that those who do not know the unknown God cannot please God (1:18–21). But neither can those who actually know the unknown God. Barth, like Paul, switches to the second person. Barth uses "du" (you) throughout these passages in order to denote familiarity or intimacy (Hoskyns switches to the obsolete "thou," which at one point was also used to denote familiarity). These distinctions between the righteous and the unrighteous, and the very act of making of these distinctions, are forms of the "righteousness of men." But such a judging between the righteous and the unrighteous is an exercise in fantasy. More

strongly, there is no pristine or perfect era within history, and there is no perfect epoch within church history (look at the disciples both before and after Jesus' resurrection) or religious history.

Righteousness, or lack of it, cannot be used to differentiate one person from another. It also cannot be used to determine one's own standing before God. Not only are none righteousness, not one (3:10), but faith is never visible, historical, and empirical. Faith is not something that we can see in ourselves or in another that would allow us to make such judgments. Faith is not an achievement. In fact, the more one thinks and presents faith as something pleasing to and appeasing of God, the more faith loses any value before God. Given such a bleak picture, we might ask how it is possible that there are believers at all. The answer is, simply, that it is *not* possible. Faith is a *miracle*, an impossibility, an act of repentance that no one can muster up on their own. In fact, Barth defines faith not in terms of human intellectual or moral efforts, but in terms of *God*: faith is the forbearance and long-suffering of God. Every claim of righteousness before God, including that of faith, mires one more deeply in unrighteousness. Misunderstanding this reality leads to "the 'religious' life" (60), a convenient way of deciding and judging between the righteous and the unrighteous.

The character of the Judge—the title of the section—becomes clearer in verses 6–11. We return to a question from the prologue: who is the one that renders, reckons, and judges? If it cannot be me, you, them, or us, then it has to be God. Barth discusses two miracles. There is the miracle of God's giving of eternal life, that seeking God can really mean finding him. This possibility cannot be embodied or made concrete, but can only remain a matter of promise. In this case there is no distinction between Gentile and Jew; God is who he is, and he judges as he judges. There are no claims to pre-eminence or security before the Judge. There is also the "other terrible miracle" (62) of the wrath that awaits the unrighteous. Even the most fervent devotion, the greatest obedience, and the utmost humility can still be forms of human unrighteousness. The acquitting of oneself or the condemnation of that phantasmal "other" that embodies everything sinful are ways of replacing the Judge. But God always remains Judge: "The Judge will

never deprive Himself of his right to judge even the righteous. He judges; He Himself and He only" (63).

Where, then, does the true righteousness of humanity come from? It comes from revelation, the giving of the law, and the divine election that engenders faith. But understanding these things means acknowledging that they cannot provide any superiority of one person over another. What about Paul's distinction between the hearers of the law and the doers of the law (2:12–13)? Are there people who not only hear but also do the law? Even here Barth eliminates any chance of human judging and boasting. By the "hearers of the law," Barth means those who experience and know revelation and God. Salvation does not necessarily come to them. By the "doers of the law" Barth means those who *will be* (emphasis on the future tense) accounted or reckoned righteous by God. Their doing the law does not secure their righteousness, for it comes only from the declaration of God. The future tense destroys the last remaining form of visible, concrete, human righteousness. Righteousness means the surrendering and renunciation of any claim to righteousness. With both the hearers and the doers of the law the Judge remains the Judge.

Romans 2:14–29: The Judgment

In Rom 2:14–29 we meet with two strange pieces of information, two new and surprising events.

The first new piece of information begins with 2:14–16, as those who are asleep are pronounced awake, the unrighteous are declared the righteous. First, however, Barth describes those who have the law with a series of dramatic turns of phrase. The law is an "impress" of revelation within history, a "heap of cinders," a "burnt-out crater," a "dry canal" of things long since passed (65). The ones who have the law live in these emptied out places. The Gentiles do not live in these places for they lack any impress of revelation. Yet they do the law! But what does "to do the law" mean? Barth answer is not that "doing the law" is following a set of practices. His answer is a reference to God: "To do the law means that revelation occurs, that God speaks" (66). Gentiles can be reckoned as God-fearers and become God-fearers without any observable or concrete change. In fact, the skepticism of the Gentiles towards religion, their simple

merriment, can be a parable (*Gleichnis*) of the closeness of the kingdom of God, just as their protests, confusion, and restlessness can be signposts to God. The Gentiles are a law unto themselves because the living water of God can make new canals. The work that justifies the Gentiles has no positive or concrete form. If it did, their work would simply be another form of human righteousness. Their righteousness is created and recognized only by God. Here too we are confronted by the invisibility of God's rendering, and the fact that "the rendering of God—depends upon—nothing at all!" (68).

Where does this knowledge that the ungodly will be reckoned as godly come from? The answer is Jesus Christ and his resurrection. God judges all of humanity, and the "secrets of men," in Jesus Christ. In Christ the just and unjust, the righteous and unrighteous, have been judged and given access to the Father (69). All live under one threat and by one promise. In contrast to the secrets of men, there is also the secret of God, for God himself is Judge and his judgments over humanity are unknowable.

The second strange piece of information begins with 2:17–23. Those who are awake are pronounced asleep, the righteous are declared unrighteous. Paul (and Barth) again switch into talking about "you." You know the law, glory in God, understand the excellent things, guide and teach others. But do you have any less reason to fear God's wrath? What is the source of your righteousness? What would you be without God? The world has deep insight. It refuses to admit the moral or religious superiority of the righteous. *These* are the elect? If they are then I don't want to be. Breaking the law means your circumcision becomes uncircumcision, your faith become unbelief, and your righteousness becomes unrighteousness. Everything is rendered relative and insecure.

Barth describes verses 2:26–29 as the appearance of a "final possibility." We know that human righteousness is an illusion; there is no visible and concrete righteousness. Righteousness cannot be found in one's inner, personal piety, ethics, in having the law, or doing religion. All of these things, even the supposedly "interior" or "inner" things, are visible, historical, and concrete. There is no escape from the judgment of unrighteousness. But God may nevertheless create a new and transformed humanity. God has not

even recognized human faith, but has shut all under unbelief in order to have mercy upon all (11:32). Apart from anything observable, concrete, and achievable, God does the impossible: God creates a new person, a new world. The impossible happens and the unknown God appears and brings with him a new creation.

This chapter closes by asking about this Judge. Isn't this God simply unjust and unfair? Barth responds by asking about our concepts of justice, fairness, and truth. What use are they when speaking about *God*? God's righteousness and justice enlighten and reveal, which means that we could not have guessed what God is up to, and that God's acts are contrary to what we would expect (hence the need for enlightenment and revelation). There exists, then, the possibility of salvation and of escaping God's wrath, to return to the prologue. But this possibility requires that every single possibility of escape is demolished and denied. This destruction and negation cannot be our own, for that would again be a form of human righteousness. God is the one who seals off all exits and prevents all escapes. Yet, significantly, this negation and demolition brings a new beginning, a fresh world. After this breaking down of human righteousness one is able "to go forth into the fresh air and to love the undiscoverable God" (76). Such a thing happens, in Jesus Christ. So is the Judge and so is his judgment.

Further Reading

Karl Barth, "The Judge Judged in Our Place." In *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 211–83.

6 The Twofold Righteousness of God (Rom 3)

In chapter three we are introduced to the twofold righteousness of God: the law and Jesus Christ (the first two sections), and to the idea of "by faith alone" (the third section).

Romans 3:1–20: The Law

Barth again offers a prologue. In it we encounter one of those statements that makes it seem as if the world and time itself are melting: "the judgment of God is the end of history" (77). Before we panic too much, we should understand what Barth means by "history." We can see it in the first paragraph: a long tale of power struggles in which different forms of human righteousness try to gain advantage and prestige over others. Before God, however, all of this history is rendered relative, flattened out. The Judge not only speaks, but transforms and restores. He links together the righteousness of humanity and his own righteousness. The Judge is the Redeemer and the Creator. The end of history, judgment, negation, is a "crimson thread" that runs throughout history (an image also used in *Romans* I to speak about so-called history and real history). When the corruptible is recognized as that which decays and passes away, it can become the parable (*Gleichnis*) of the incorruptible (77). God can become known as the unknown God, not a metaphysical thing, a logic principle, or a bizarre and aloof stranger. He can become known not as the biggest and best thing beside or within creation, but as "the eternal, pure Origin of all things. As their non-existence, He is their true being. God is love" (76). Judgment does not destroy every impress or stamp of revelation within history (although we now know that every such impress cannot lead to boasting). Judgment affirms and establishes these impresses.

So is there or is there not any advantage within this flattened history? (3:1–4) Or to speak more in Paul's language, what advantage does the Jew have? What is the worth of circumcision? The answer to all of these questions is, "much in every way." Behind these

questions Barth sees a broader one concerning the world of events and the eternal context of these, events, a question, about God and the world. Understanding the relationship between God and world means understanding that God is no longer God when he becomes a thing within our world and history (hence the language of “origin,” “context,” and “presupposition”). It is when God becomes not a thing but our very Origin that the whole world gains its significance from the unknown God, and that every imprint of revelation is a witness to revelation. Judgment does not only sweep and destroy: “Judgment is not annihilation; by it all things are established. Cleansing is not a process of emptying: it is an act of fulfillment” (79). In other words, God is faithful.

The Jews have much advantage for they have received the “oracles of God” (3:2), signs of the incomprehensible truth that while the world cannot be redeemed, it has been. The highly dubious group of “the righteous” still performs a divine service. The righteous, for all their ambiguity, still display their dependence upon God. They still witness to the fact that the unknown God can be known. The oracles of God can be found in Moses, John the Baptist, Plato, or socialism, as each is a kind of “open road” to knowledge. The faithfulness of God may be doubted, rejected, or misused, but that does not mean it is absent: “The utter godlessness of the course of history does not alter the fact that it is marked everywhere by peculiar impressions of revelation” (80). God is true even though every person is a liar (Ps 116:10–14)! These oracles operate beyond the course of history, even their inadequacies witness to God, and when they are made visible they probably look like despair (with a reference to Ps 51). God remains faithful, but “the Jew” can only and ever receive, not possess, this advantage.

In 3:5–8 we encounter the “according to human logic” that appears throughout Paul’s letter. If even human sin points to the righteousness of God, then is not God some egotist who secretly needs our sin to look better? (81) If the glory of divine truth shines brighter because of human falsehood, then why does God still judge falsehood? (83). Should we do more evil so that God can cause more good to come out of it? Each of these questions is a matter of reasoning, of linking causes and effects, “according to human logic.”

These objections and questions refer to the No-God, the God of the known world, God "according to human logic." They repress the most important fact: God is not a cause within a sequence of other causes and effects. Our responsibilities cannot be shirked by these clever questions. The world cannot add to or take away from God's glory. Barth does not "solve" the "problem" of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. He simply poses hard questions to both those that fear that God's sovereignty removes human responsibility, and those that secretly desire this to be case.

The faithfulness of God does not allow us to excuse ourselves (3:9–18). We are not deprived of our security simply to receive another one. All are under sin. The word "humanity" means unredeemed, sinful humanity; the word "history" means death and finitude; and the word "I" means judgment. But none of this is new and shocking, for it was written long ago (here Barth ties in the idea of history to the biblical teaching of the vanity of human life). The theme of Job, Psalms, and Isaiah is not humanity in itself, but humanity in relationship to God. Neither do Job, Psalms, and Isaiah deny human greatness and achievements; it is simply that humanity in itself is not their concern. Their criticism is all embracing and total, and not just a criticism of *this* action or *that* practice. It is all embracing because its origin is an all embracing affirmation.

Those "under the law" at the very least have an impress or memory of revelation (3:19–20). Their piety, actions, and religion, even in their misuse, point to God. Barth again stresses the negative character of faith: a void, something we can never possess. Barth sees the list of harsh judgments in 3:10–18 as the voice of religion and the law. The Jew has every advantage here, for those who are misusing the law can still hear it say that only God is just. Their advantage is that even at the very heights of human achievement they know that the entire world is guilty. Their advantage is the knowledge that there is no advantage before God. Barth's commentary on 3:19–20 is filled with references to the Psalms and to Job to stress that all of these things were known long ago.

What advantage, then, does the Jew have? (90). The Jew has "the law," an impress, a stamp, a photographic negative of revelation in realities like experience, piety, and religion. Those that have the law

know that they are judged. When this takes place, when history realizes its own inadequacy, then we can see that there are advantages in history. When we realize that the impress of revelation is simply that, a pointer beyond, then it can participate in revelation. “The whole course of this world participates in true existence when its non-existence is recognized” (91). The law makes known the complete separation of God and humanity, which then allows us to see the positive relation between God and humanity. The law allows God to be known as God, as the unknown God who justifies the ungodly, as the God who quickens the dead and calls into being the things that are not, as the God from whom springs hope against hope.

Romans 3:21–26: Jesus

Barth summarizes what we have covered in Rom 1:18 to 3:20 as the world realizing that it is the world, that time is time, humanity is humanity, and history is history. But where does this crisis and knowledge of this crisis come from? Paul’s “but now” (a refrain for these next sections) points us to time beyond time, a place without a place: the new heavens and the new earth (Rev 21:1).

We know that God speaks where there is law, but now we also know that God speaks where there is no law, “apart from the law.” God is free to speak where he wills. The righteousness of God means that God justifies himself by justifying humanity and his own creation. God’s righteousness is his declaring humanity to be his own. It is his forgiveness. Although Barth at this point has not studied the Reformers intensively, he does identify righteousness as forensic (*justitia forensis*, *justitia aliena*), as an external declaration over the individual. Justification is God *declaring* and *naming* us his own. The one who redeems is the same as the one who creates, and so this declaration and nomination are creative, productive, and effective. The righteousness of God is resurrection.

As for where this knowledge comes, we have an answer in Paul’s “has been manifested.” God has spoken and revealed himself. The mercy of God triumphs, and there is a positive relationship between God and humanity—this is the epistle’s theme! The law and prophets spoke of this righteousness; Abraham saw it, and so did Job and the Psalmist. There is even a witness to the unknown God in ignorant

and superstitious worship (Acts 17:22–23), or even among “certain poets” in Rome (Acts 27:28). “Wherever there is an impress of revelation—and does anything whatsoever lack this mark—there is a witness to the unknown God, even if there be no more than an ignorant and superstitious worship of the most terrible kind” (95).

The righteousness of God has been revealed in his faithfulness in Jesus Christ. It is through the one particular man Jesus Christ that we know that God is everywhere: “In Jesus we have discovered and recognized the truth that God is found everywhere and that, both before and after Jesus, men have been discovered by Him. In Him we have found the standard by which all discovery of God and all being discovered by Him is made known as such” (97). Jesus is the one who allows us to see that God is everywhere, to see that God’s righteousness works apart from the law; he is the “standard” of every “discovery” of God. “Jesus is everywhere”—it is we who are able to say this.[1] Jesus is the Christ, the expression of God’s faithfulness as found in the law and the prophets. Jesus places himself under judgment, takes the form of a slave, and accepts death and the cross. Jesus sacrifices all claims of his own before his Father, all achievements, and efforts. In Christ we can see that God’s faithfulness extends even to the depths of hell. Jesus is the fulfillment of the law and prophets, or religion, inasmuch as he represents their negation; “all human activity is a cry for forgiveness; and it is precisely this that is proclaimed by Jesus and that concretely appears in Him” (96–97).

Jesus is all of these things—negation and fulfillment, the faithfulness of God—to those who believe. But our seeing remains indirect and revelation, always remains a paradox, no matter how universal and objective it is. The faithfulness of God in Jesus is a truth hidden to psychology, cosmology, and history. Even human faith belongs to God and is a form of God’s faithfulness. “Faith is the faithfulness of God, ever secreted in and beyond all human ideas and affirmations about Him, and beyond every positive religious achievement” (98). It cannot be communicated or passed on by tradition (Matt 26:17).[2] There are no prerequisites or avenues to faith; “Faith is its own initiation, its own presupposition” (99). Faith is impossible for everyone and that is what makes it possible for all.

With 3:22b–24 we reach what is for Luther the kernel of Paul's Romans and of Scripture: there is no distinction in Christ. God's righteousness is universal. Barth notes, "the words *there is no distinction* need to be repeated and listened to again and again" (100). Jesus removes barriers and announces the union of one person with another. Yet this union amongst people is based on the separation, the unbridgeable gap that exists between humanity and God. These distinctions are gone because all have sinned. Barth closely identifies "God justifies" with "God declares." God declares and creates the forgiveness of sin, the entrance of a new creation, and a righteousness beyond all human righteousness. God's grace is free, for those who receive it do not deserve it, and God may give grace whenever and wherever. But God's declaring and his gift of grace remain hidden, invisible, and negative. They are matters of belief, hope, and expectation.

Jesus is like the covering of propitiation, the mercy seat (*kapporeth*) within the Old Testament, the covering laid over the oracles of God (3:25–26). Barth focuses on the aspect of covering. Jesus brings and displays the kingdom of God. The nearness of God in Jesus and the kingdom make faith a necessity. Yet there is covering here too. Jesus Christ, and the atonement and redemption he brings, are "covered," hidden, and paradoxical. They are matters of faith. Nevertheless, because of Jesus we know that forgiveness and healing are everywhere, and that the faithfulness of God is at work where and when he pleases. This one man tells us of God's universal love and faithfulness. In the light of Jesus "we can dare to do what otherwise we could never do—to believe in ourselves and in all men" (107).

Romans 3:27–30: By Faith Alone

It is worth noticing Barth's translation of 3:27–28. Barth translates *nomou pisteos*, or "law of faith," as "law of the faithfulness of God," most likely to shore up Paul's attempt to remove all reasons for "boasting" before God.

In Jesus we learn that God alone is righteous, and God alone makes and declares humanity righteous. Humanity's righteousness is always derivative and continuously dependent upon God alone. A significant claim follows: "From this pre-supposition it is possible to

adopt a critical attitude to the law, to religion, to human experience, to history, to the inevitability of the world as it is, in fact, to every concrete human position" (107). With this criticism in hand we can admit that the world and history truly do seem meaningless in and of themselves. Yet at the same time the world and history gain meaning as they are related to God. All of these realities subjected to judgment and criticism are still a parable (*Gleichnis*), witness, and reminder of a wholly other world, a wholly other humanity, and even a wholly other God. In and of themselves they are in fact meaningless, but in relation to God they gain new meaning. Only one thing remains meaningless: the confusion between Creator and creation.

All boasting has been excluded because of the faithfulness of God and Jesus Christ. This exclusion means that there is simply no other ground—religion, the law, experience of God—that will make one righteous and pleasing towards God. "There is no limit to the possibilities of the righteousness of men" (109), there is no form it will not take, including forms of self-affirmation (presumption) or self-denial (despair). We cannot even view the acceptance of the divine negation and expectation of divine affirmation as an achievement, a heroic posture before God. Barth is careful to remove faith from the realm of works. Faith is not an achievement or effort, even of a negative kind, such as loud or quiet confessions of our weakness, brokenness, and poverty before God. Faith is not a thing in its own right, a thing mediating between God and humanity. Human faith is perpetually related to divine action, as when Barth equates the "law of the faithfulness of God" and the "law of faith."

The move from the viewpoint of religion to the viewpoint of Jesus has drastically changed the reckoning or judging that takes place between God and humanity. "Religion" is those human attempts to gain favor with God (including faith), or the idea that blessings are a sign of God's approval. God is the one who renders and reckons, speaks and creates. God creates what he reckons for his word is creative. The "Moment" in which God does this also belongs to him, and not to history, nature, or the one to whom God gives. This Moment marks something new, something that must be continually refreshed by God. The forgiven one is condemned, the one brought

to life must die, and an end must occur before a new beginning is started. This movement from death to life, from condemnation to forgiveness, is the movement of the faithfulness of God in Christ. The righteousness brought in Jesus' blood exists and is effective "apart from the works of the law," and so "the cross stands, and must always stand, between us and God. The cross is the bridge which creates a chasm and the promise which sounds a warning. We can never escape the paradox of faith, nor can it ever be removed" (112).

God is not only the God of the "Jews," meaning "the religious" (3:29–30). God would then be a religious God and the epistle's theme would not be resurrection, redemption, or righteousness. All are guilty before God (3:19) and all have fallen short of God's glory (3:23). If God were a thing within the course of experience or history, or if God created and was pleased by concrete things, then all the vestments, cultic practices, and works of religion would be affirmed, and God would only be the God of the religious. The paradox of faith is not that *our faith* is sufficient for us, but that *God's faithfulness* is sufficient.

There is a separation and a union within Christ: "In Jesus is to be found the frame of reference for the co-ordinates of eternal truth, by which, on the one hand, things which normally repel one another are held together; and by which things which normally are mutually attracted are distinguished" (114). God and humanity can be unified only when they are completely separated. Part of this separation is the realization that all law, all human being, acting, doing, are at most signposts, parables, possibilities, and hopes. All of these seemingly positive, substantial realities are actually deprivations and dissatisfactions that signify longing. They are nothing more than so many voids. But they are voids that point to an ever-greater fullness. In Christ persons are united to each other, and yet Barth stresses that particularities, individuality, and personality are not destroyed but established. What is lost is only chaotic, independent existence. Both Jew and Gentile *will* (emphasis upon the future) be justified. Where faith is, there even more so is the faithfulness of God. The advantage lies at the place where boasting has stopped.

1. Even the younger, "liberal" Barth would make such a claim. In a confirmation course from 1911, when Barth was in Geneva, he told his confirmands: "Jesus is, for us, not lesser,

but greater, when we recognize him *everywhere*." Karl Barth, "Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion," 74.

2. Faith as a secret, something hidden, which cannot be passed on, sounds much like Søren Kierkegaard (whom Barth quotes), but Barth would have learned something very similar about the incommunicability of faith from Herrmann: "We are all at one in the conviction that the inner life of religion is a secret in the soul and cannot be handed over from one to another. No human being can so help another by the information he may give him that the latter shall be put in possession of what is best in religion. Every individual must experience it for himself as a gift from above." Herrmann, *Communion*, 19.

7 The Light of History within History (Rom 4)

Romans 3:31—4:8: Faith Is Miracle

BARTH'S COMMENTARY ON THE question "do we make the law of none effect through faith?" is rather suggestive and difficult to follow. It seems, though, that Barth is asking whether God's faithfulness, revelation, and the coming world completely erase what has come before. In other words, do the world, humanity, religion, and the law completely disappear before God's judgment, negation, and criticism? What is important for Barth is that all these events—judgment, faith, resurrection, negation—are not events like other ones, only weirder and more powerful. The resurrection is not one bizarre event alongside other events. Barth is after something like universal significance and so these events are more like presuppositions, contexts, backgrounds in which particular events can take place. These events may judge and negate what comes before, but they also establish, direct, and affirm. Likewise, the otherness of God "is adequately protected only when it is quite strictly the Origin and Fulfillment of human existence, its final affirmation" (115). So too must faith be the answer to every question. Barth's overall strategy in this chapter is well summed in his argument that Moses and Christ do not exist side by side, but *Moses must be included within Christ, and thus law within faith*.

Barth interprets Paul's "no, we establish the law" to show how life, history, and humanity are not destroyed by God's judgment but *redeemed*; that in God's transcendence and otherness lies God's immanence and presence. The denial of the divinity of history, religion, and humanity allows us to grasp the significance of each one. After clearing away misunderstandings we can see how "history itself bears witness to resurrection, the concrete world to its non-concrete presupposition, and human life to the paradox of faith which is its inalienable foundation" (116). Faith does not overwhelm the law, Scripture, and religion, but is their meaning. Faith is miracle, beginning, and creation.

With Paul's question regarding Abraham's justification we enter chapter 4 of Paul's Romans. Abraham serves as a test case for whether revelation destroys or establishes the law. If there is no relationship or linkage between Abraham and Jesus, then law and revelation become two isolated events separated by time, and one will simply negate or cancel out the other. Likewise, in Abraham's relationship to Christ our own relationship to Christ is being considered as well. The stakes are high: "Jesus would not be the Christ if in the end figures like Abraham, Jeremiah, Socrates, Grünewald, Luther, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky remained at some historical distance from him or contrasted with him, and were not understood in their essential unity, simultaneity, and togetherness in him."[1] Is Jesus the light of all history? Is Jesus the light of the Old Testament, religious history in general, and the light for which the world hopes? The Old Testament does not only come before Christ, it lives in him (Barth references Jesus' claim "Before Abraham was, I am" from John 8:58). This argument needs support.

The "Voice of History," or Abraham's visible work, shows him to be a righteous man. Perhaps, then, there is an escape from judgment? Maybe there is a direct and observable pleasing of God? Is there a mixture of the divine and human within history? Abraham does, to be sure, have much to boast about, but "not before God." All of Abraham's works, and thus his visible history, bear no relationship to God's reckoning. Abraham "believed," which Barth will contrast with Abraham "did," or Abraham "saw." Abraham had faith, and this is the "hidden source of all his well-known *works*" (121). Belief is faith in the impossible, a paradox, and a miracle: "He who says 'God,' says 'miracle'" (120). Without the "line of death," without judgment and the law, we might be tempted to think of Abraham's faith as a kind of psychological achievement or effort on his part. It is only with and after God's judgment that we can see the true significance of Abraham's faith.

The key word here is "reckoning." Abraham's works, what he does, merit no rewards and are unimportant. Only what Abraham does *not* do, namely faith, is of any significance. A different way of seeing human value (one seen in both Genesis and Dostoevsky!) is presented to us. The Book of Life is concerned with precisely that:

life! It is not concerned with debts owed but with the grace that might be given. God justifies the ungodly, and so “before God, Abraham’s righteousness and unrighteousness is merely ungodliness (i.18)” (123).

With 4:6–8 Barth sees Paul using the Psalms as a commentary upon the figures of the Old Testament. In Ps 33:1–5 David is considering the relationship between God and humanity apart from the law. We are looking at an invisible relationship not bound up with visible works and signs, but with believing in the new creation of God, the miracle that God’s reckoning brings. Barth does not mince words: both Abraham and the figure in the Psalms are witnesses of the resurrection. Both of them live within Christ, whose life is present throughout and to history.

Romans 4:9–12: Faith is Beginning

Religion is concrete and visible; righteousness, however, is not a thing in history. The righteousness of faith, then, cannot be analyzed like other things. It cannot be identified with religious experience, is not subject to psychological analysis, and cannot be traced within a more general religious history. All of these realities, however, might bear witness: “we establish the law!” Beyond the law and history there is the free God. Within Paul’s question about blessings falling on the circumcised and uncircumcised, Barth sees a question about concrete religion and the free righteousness of God. Can religion see that what is most important about the blessing given to the uncircumcised, to those outside of visible religion, is God’s relationship to humanity, and not the reverse? Does it realize that this relationship is the beginning (the subsection’s title), and is presupposed by the concrete reality of religion? Can religion itself understand that God is free to start new beginnings?

We return to Abraham and to the idea of reckoning. Both the voice of the law (as seen in the last chapter), and the voice of history (the title of this chapter) point us toward the word “reckon.” Abraham’s righteousness cannot lie in his own righteousness or circumcision, for he was reckoned righteous before his circumcision. Abraham’s calling by God and his faith are pure beginnings. His following this call, his faith, is invisible by religious and historical standards, because it is God’s work. Religion itself can be aware that it is not the true presupposition.

With 4:11–12 Barth fastens upon Abraham's circumcision as being a sign, a witness, something which points beyond itself. The significance of Abraham's circumcision is that it points to revelation and the reality of God's righteousness. Circumcision as a historical, concrete, religious reality can reflect the miracle of faith. Like all signs and witnesses, religion—or in this case circumcision—is misunderstood when it no longer serves to signify something else. God's electing and deciding come before any sign. By extension religion and the church do not have positive content or independent significance. They too are only (but they still are!) tokens and signs and so they must be understood negatively, indirectly, and in relation to their origin and goal. (Matthias Grünewald's Isenheim Altarpiece and John the Baptist are exemplary in this regard.) Barth even notes that Jews must become Gentiles, the churched the secular, and the religious the irreligious. He also warns, appropriately, that this way of speaking is dangerous, for although the negative is closer to the truth than the positive, the minus has no preeminence over the plus. Perhaps a better way of tackling this thought is through the image of a pilgrim in the world. It is with the poverty of pilgrims that we learn that "God must not be sought as though He sat enthroned upon the summit of religious attainment. He is to be found on the plain where men suffer and sin" (132).

Romans 4:13–17a: Faith is Creation

We return to Abraham, although the focus now is the promise to his descendents, Israel. Barth poses two questions. First, in addition to receiving God's blessing, is Israel also the mediator of God's blessing to the world? Second, will Israel always continue to receive this promise? But the real question for Barth is whether she participates in this promise through the law or through the righteousness of faith. Barth again denies that the significance of Israel and the law are positive. The law testifies and bears witness to a creative power far beyond it (faith is creation!). This promise is not handed over to Israel. Once again Barth denies that this makes the law of no effect; the recognition of the God behind the law establishes the law. Israel's history has significance only as it points to the "non-historical," God's promising and blessing. Abraham and his descendants are what they are, not because of the law, but

because of faith. If Abraham and his descendents are righteous because of the law, then faith is made of no effect. Faith is neither a visible state of being or acting, nor an observable set of practices. So too is it with the promise. God's promise to Abraham can be neither seen nor described: "The grace of redemption, like the grace of creation, is no concrete thing amongst other things" (135). The knowledge of grace must be dialectical, for grace is not a visible thing within the world and grace means life from death.

The law considered *in itself* is an obstacle. It belongs to the world, and when taken in and of itself works wrath. "Law" here basically means the practice of religion without forgiveness and without faith. To God religion is arrogance and to humanity religion is an illusion. The deservedly harsh criticism of religion can also be an illusion if this criticism does not point beyond itself as well, if this criticism believes itself able to provide security or self-justification. The end of verse 4:15 sounds a new note and offers a new hope: where there is no law there is no transgression. There can be "justification" of religious and anti-religious behavior. This justification, however, is dependent upon God's "Nevertheless" towards human sin, upon God's offering of forgiveness in the face of religious and anti-religious behavior alike. Neither the religious nor the anti-religious can claim to have received or possess this "Nevertheless," this forgiveness, but they can at least acknowledge that it is a divine possibility.

Law, history, and Israel's religion are the context in which we may live and wait, but these realities do not have the power to bring the promise to fruition. Indeed, the law works against Abraham's receiving of the promise. Abraham is who he is "according to grace," because of the divine reckoning and calling. Likewise law, history, and religion are what they are because of grace. We must speak of Christ to speak of Abraham, for Abraham is the father of us all according to grace, according to faith. We are heirs of God's promise to him by grace, and not according to any moral or historical status. Historically Abraham is the father of one nation. Non-historically, in Christ, Abraham is the father of many nations. One does not deny or negate the other. "Plain history" is not overthrown or denied when

the “secret of history” is revealed (139). We do not negate the law but establish it.

Romans 4:17b–25: On the Value of History

It is appropriate, then, that Barth entitles this last section “Concerning the Value of History.” Here Barth considers Paul’s claim that Abraham is the father of us all, which is surely a rather strange historical claim. Barth speaks of a “non-historical radiance” that shines out from historical events and personalities. This “radiance” removes the separation of historical distance, the temporal isolation of one event or person from another. With this radiance we can see what is common to all historical events, what links these disparate times and places together. The language becomes uncanny here: the “non-historical,” the “Primal History,” that which “conditions all history” (Barth offers two quotations from Nietzsche to illustrate these ideas). While not fully developed here, Barth ties this non-history to the phrase “before God,” as Abraham is the father of us all “before God.” That Abraham is, historically, a father of one nation, should not direct us to the concrete and visible, but to the invisible, to the Abraham that lives before God.

Faith is a “ground of knowledge” and a “creative power” within history even as it is non-historical. Faith should be distinguished from either mythology or mysticism. The issue is not multiplying worlds and levels of reality: we are not positing another world on top of this one. The issue is death, and what we see as being dead and what we see as being alive. Faith sees life where the world sees death, and it sees death where the world sees life. This faith is impossible, just as is the resurrection. By faith Abraham nears these impossibilities. Barth calls faith itself a “non-historical” and “impossible factor” that conditions and determines history (141). Others have also seen this situation: “A similar faith appears on the borderland of the philosophy of Plato, of the art of Grünewald and Dostoevsky, and of the religion of Luther” (141). Abraham’s faith is in the God who quickens the dead and calls into being those who were not, the impossible God who transforms even life and death. This God and this faith are the non-historical radiance that can shine out in history.

Abraham's faith is non-historical, invisible, a faith before God and hidden from others. It was a reckoned and created faith. But this faith, Abraham's blessing from God, was not only for his own sake, but for our sake too. It is this "for our sake also" (4:23–25) that means so much for Barth and the value of history. This short yet highly significant phrase means that the past, present, and future are not separated, mute times that have no bearing on each other. There is a "simultaneity," a shared reality, that makes the past able to speak and the present able to hear; it dissolves and fulfills time. This simultaneity is the "non-historical, invisible, and incomprehensible" (145). Abraham's faith was reckoned righteous and his situation before God is the same as ours. It is the non-historical background that makes history significant for us. Abraham can say nothing to us apart from the non-historical. Without the non-historical and invisible, Abraham becomes an irrelevant, safely distant Bedouin sheik tending to his flock thousands of years ago (and who may or may not have existed).

Barth offers some provocations for the students and professors of history, noting "in times of spiritual poverty, historical analysis is a method we are bound to adopt" (147), or again, "in so far as we, all of us, do not believe, there remains for us all, among other possible possibilities, the method of critical analysis which is concerned with the Abraham who does not and cannot concern us" (148). Barth adds that he does not want to simply disparage historical methods—indeed, such methods can serve as a helpful step in grasping the non-historical. Historical methods can show us that Abraham really is of no real historical concern and that thus his significance is non-historical. We are contemporaries of Abraham, for resurrection and the knowledge of God are just as impossible for him as they are for us.

1. My translation of the German. *Der Römerbrief 1922*, 93.

8 The New Human Being, the Coming World (Rom 5)

Romans 5:1–11: The New Human Being

ANY TREATMENT OF JUSTIFICATION by faith needs a consideration of the "we" that the epistle talks about: the new human beings. Faith requires that a new subject and a new world are created. But we cannot move too quickly here. This new human being, this "we," is what I am currently not. In faith, though, I become identical to the new subject. We can only believe that we are new human beings, and we can only believe that we believe it is so. The difference between faith and unbelief cannot be assessed historically or psychologically, for "as far as we can see, our hands our empty" (150). Even when peace with God is reestablished in faith, the world remains the world, humanity remains humanity, and God remains God. The necessity of faith is never removed, and neither is the paradox that in faith I am what I am not. In Christ, then, there is both separation and union. Faith provides peace inasmuch as it retains its status as hope, as a waiting upon God. It is neither a psychological experience nor an emotional stirring, for faith itself is invisible and non-historical.

With verse 5:2 we see that this gospel is a matter of both expectation and paradox, both of which can be seen in Paul's "I live, yet not I." We glory in the hope of God's glory. With Rom 5:3–5 we see that this hope involves glorifying in suffering and tribulation. Faith and Christianity cannot guarantee happiness or security, and yet peace remains (Barth alludes to 2 Cor 4 and 7). We know that we do not know, and yet we can see the invisible: "the righteousness of God in His wrath, the risen Christ in the crucified One, life in death, the 'Yes' in the 'No'" (156). Suffering under death becomes God's own action and the means by which he edifies his own people. The prisoner becomes the watchman; darkness becomes light (Ps 139:12). Tribulation makes us patient and creates hope within us. And yet just as with faith, hope is not a human work, not something created by human effort; *hope is the creative and redeeming action of the Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit is also the creating and redeeming God. The

Holy Spirit is also invisible, and his work lies beyond psychological analysis or introspection. The Holy Spirit sheds abroad love and through him "the creature can love the Creator; the condemned man, his Judge; the vanquished and slain man, his enemy; the victim, the priest who sacrifices it" (158). Like faith and hope, love is impossible, and yet the Holy Spirit gives love so that creation may love the Creator who first loved creation.

The new person lives in peace, hope, love, faith, and by the Holy Spirit. This new life has its beginning in the death and resurrection of Christ, which is the basis of faith (5:6). Barth follows Paul's focus on Christ's death, arguing that no part of Jesus' life can have significance apart from his death. Christ's teaching, his personality, his love, his announcement of the coming kingdom, and so on, cannot be understood apart from his death for the unrighteous. Barth even criticizes the traditional doctrine of Christ's *munus triplex*, or threefold office as Priest, Prophet, and King (a doctrine Barth will put to great use in *Church Dogmatics* IV) for obscuring the importance of Christ's death; "Everything else shines in the light of Christ's death" (159). Yet Christ's death includes a "for us." His death lets us see things anew. We see in his death our own, we see in his death the invisible God, and in his death we see the identity and paradox of God's wrath and his mercy. This new life is not our possession or achievement. It is not a matter of religious experience, for religion itself is one of the things that made Christ's death necessary. Christ has done this work apart from the "we" of Romans, indeed *despite* the "we." This atonement is invisible and is valid for people in all times and places. It is truly a vicarious satisfaction, as offered not by us but *for us*. The weak and the godless die with Christ, and with this death comes new creation.

Human self-sacrifice for others can at most be a *parable* of Christ's death, for his death ushers in new life and effects atonement (5:7–8). In Christ's death we perceive God's absolute otherness and his union with us. The death of Christ reveals both God's wrath against sin and his mercy towards his creatures. God loved and loves and will love us apart from us, despite ourselves, apart from any ability, work, or competence on our part—while we were yet sinners. Love of God springs from Christ's death, his blood (5:9–11).

Just as with faith and hope in God, loving God is impossible and requires the creation of a new subject. Our love for God is something that we can only believe in faith: we can believe that we love. There always remains the difference and the identity between the old subject who cannot love and the new subject who must love, “I and not I, but Christ in me” (163; Gal 2:20). This new love is not my own, but is that of the new person, who I am only in faith. This new being has not reached a higher religious consciousness or overcome the distance between the here and now and the coming world. Everything we can see, be, and do remains in the old world. Yet in the light of Christ there is new creation, a new subject, and a new predicate! But my identity with this new subject always remains indirect, invisible, a matter of faith and of dialectics. It is a matter of hope.

Romans 5:12–21: The New World

With 5:12 the scope widens from the new subject to the new world. Barth’s translation of the original Greek is interesting too, as he has edited the passage somewhat in order to render it clearer.

Barth moves through 5:12 very slowly, exegeting it phrase by phrase, or even simply one word at a time (“therefore,” “death,” and “sin” for instance). Paul’s “therefore” in verse 12 marks the threshold between the old subject and the new subject, the old world and the new world. From “the new” we can see “the old.” Both are necessary. There is no discovery of one’s being in Christ without recognizing one’s having been in Adam. Likewise, there is no recognition of one’s having been in Adam without there already being reconciliation and assurance in Christ. Nevertheless, there is a movement and priority here. Adam and Christ are thus not equally significant. Jesus Christ is related to and contrasted with Adam as Adam’s goal and purpose. Christ is not simply a second Adam, Adam as he would have been had Adam been obedient, but the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45). Their relationship, then, is dialectical; both terms are necessary, in opposition, and in motion.

Barth proposes that what follows is a kind of thought experiment. If we reverse the presuppositions of the concrete realities of the first old world (soon to be named death and sin), then we can perceive and discuss the new world. The old world of death and sin is to be

considered next, but not for the sake of itself. The old world has no independent significance, for it has been put to death in Christ. We are considering the old for the sake of the new.

The first concrete, visible reality of the old world is death, “the supreme law of this world” (166). Death is the dark cloth that enshrouds the whole of our life. It is a reminder of the wrath and judgment under which the world stands. If there is salvation, if there is a new world, then it must be a salvation from death. The second reality of the old world is sin. Barth offers several definitions of sin: it is a sovereign power (5:21), a robbing of God, a crossing of the line between God and humanity, a forgetting of that which distinguishes Creator and creator, devotion to idols. Sin is invisible and non-historical. Its concrete and historical form is, however, death. Sin in its concrete form, death, is the spreading in time of the non-historical original Fall. Barth warns against considering sin before we consider the cross. To focus initially on sin might lead to the temptation of thinking that reconciliation with God is something we can affect. But when we consider sin in the light of the cross, it takes on the notion of being “inherited,” as something larger, more powerful, and around long before ourselves.

First, sin entered the world. There is no part, area, or aspect of our existence and the world we live in that is free of sin. Sin—humanity’s desire to be like God—is transferred to and reflected within the world outside of humanity. The world is a world of powers, thrones, dominions, and principalities all striving to be like God and to be independent of God. In this world there is no redemption. Redemption can only come from redemption (just as revelation only comes through revelation). Second, through sin death entered the world. Death has two aspects to it. It is indeed the law of this world, and yet it witnesses to a Lawgiver. It is a sign of wrath and judgment as well as a sign of the coming of salvation and faith. Death is the visibility of invisible sin, and it is also the visibility of the invisible righteousness of God.

All of this happened “through one man,” Adam. But who is Adam? Barth’s interpretation is that we cannot understand Adam and his Fall without understanding Christ and his righteousness. It is not the *historical* relationship of Adam to Christ that interests us, but the

non-historical, invisible relationship of Adam to Christ (just as with Abraham and Christ). Even more strongly, Barth states, “Adam has no existence on the plane of history and of psychological analysis” (171). Apart from Christ Adam has no significance, importance, or existence (which means that there cannot be a doctrine of Adam separate from a doctrine of Christ). Adam exists only as he is put to death in Christ. Death follows Adam’s sin, but at this point we are coming against the limits of the non-historical, in which our natural and more literal-minded questions make no sense. We cannot know what Adam was *before* he became mortal, or what Christ was *after* he was raised from the dead. Both of these are within the realm of the *non-historical*. Thus, “the entrance of sin into the world through Adam is in no strict sense an historical or psychological happening” (171). Barth even guesses that the doctrine of original sin, as a historical and psychological falsification of what is non-historical, wouldn’t have pleased Paul!

The sin of Adam, like the righteousness of Christ, is “timeless and transcendent” (171). The Fall does not happen because of Adam’s sin, but sin was the first apparent effect of the Fall. The doctrine of predestination both explains and leaves unexplained the Fall and the presence of sin in humanity. Barth thinks that the Reformed doctrine of supralapsarianism makes sense at this point, supralapsarianism being the much maligned doctrine that contends that the “objects” of God’s election and rejection are not *sinful* humans, but simply *humans* as such, considered prior to any decreeing (or permitting) of the Fall. *After* their election in Christ humans are condemned in Adam, just as light makes shadows emerge. Only as Adam does what we all do can we name “Adam” that person whose sin marked the entrance of death.

“Death passed unto all.” With this phrase we move from the non-historical background of Adam to the visible foreground. Everyone does what Adam did and suffers like Adam. First comes sin and *then* death. We know that the “then” is really a “therefore”: first comes sin and *therefore* death comes. We cannot, however, *see* the causal connection between the two. Death is the visible fact of sin, an invisible operation of the old world.

What has been said in 5:12 is explored further in verses 13 and 14 but with the addition of the law. Sin is not one action or event, but the background of every action and event. Sin is the Fall that happened as soon as human life emerged. Like death, law is a visible factor. It is a concrete and tangible reminder of God, an afterglow of revelation's light. Law and religion are signs of divine election and calling, for the visible law allows invisible sin to be brought to light. Yet sin works even upon our use and understanding of the law. What was once supposed to reveal sin has become a way of justifying oneself before God, of appeasing God. Sin then breaks out in the form of being religious, in the form of religiosity. In the time before the giving of the law, death and thus the sway of sin still existed, even if sin wasn't visible: "the visible sovereignty of death points backwards to the invisible sovereignty of sin, even when sin issued in no single concrete and visible action" (175).

Adam is a figure of one to come, an image and foretaste of Jesus Christ. As the paradigmatic sinner, Adam has an invisible and non-historical relationship to Christ, otherwise we could not know what it would mean to call Adam a "sinner." Adam is a sinner only in relationship to Christ's righteousness and obedience. Adam and Christ are separated but they are also united. Adam represents sin, death, and the "No" of rejection, while Christ represents righteousness, life, and election. Both Adam and Christ, however, come from one divine predestination, a decision that declares that there is a movement from Adam to Christ, a victory of Christ over Adam,

Barth divides verses 5:15–17 into two considerations. Once again, note Barth's translation and editing of these verses. Barth is clearly emphasizing Paul's "how much more": *how much more* the gift than the trespass! *How much more* Christ than Adam! *How much more* grace than sin! The first consideration (from 5:15) deals with two different origins: the Fall and grace. They are different and yet similar in that each represents a relationship to God. By "Fall" we mean the relationship to God in which God is robbed of his divinity and abandoned by humanity. In this one man an invisible, negative relationship between God and sin was made concrete and visible. In Adam, God utters his "No" and attacks humanity. The world of

humanity becomes a world of inevitable death and inescapable judgment. By contrast, there is the relation of humanity to God in Christ. In this one man an invisible, positive relationship between God and humanity was made concrete and visible. This relationship is characterized by righteousness, obedience, and grace. In Jesus Christ, God utters his "Yes" to his Son and to humanity.

The second consideration (5:16–17) deals with what Adam and Christ give and bring us. Adam brings sin, while Christ brings the grace of God. Both gifts come from a decision made by God, are invisible, and have consequences, or an "operation." But in one God rejects and in the other God elects. Barth describes the world of death as one of mechanical necessity, fate, causality, any concept that signals bondage and imprisonment. Life, however, comes through Christ. Through Christ's death, and the death of death in him, humanity is transferred to the coming world. In Christ there is a rebellion against the invisible law of sin that is visible in death. Instead of historical causality and necessity, Christ brings a law of independence and freedom, the law of life (5:18). How much more life than death!

With 5:18–19 we return from the digression (note Barth's own summaries of 5:13–14 and 15–17), and continue the contrast between Adam and Christ started in 5:12. Adam is significant for us not as a historical person, but in his non-historical relationship to God in Christ. Likewise his action is significant for us, not at the level of history, but at the level of the context for the whole of history: "this fallen state is the consequence of no single historical act: it is the unavoidable pre-supposition of all human history, and, in the last analysis, proceeds from the secret of divine displeasure and rejection" (181). Adam throws light upon humanity for everyone is in Adam. Adam is the old, fallen subject, "the many," who are subject to judgment, negation, and put to death. Adam represents divine rejection. Christ is the new subject, the new person from the coming world. God's justification and election of Christ are also invisible and non-historical, for we cannot observe or determine them from history, but only from "the secret of divine predestination" (181). In Christ "the many" are given life, or better yet, *all* are given life: "all are renewed and clothed with righteousness, all are become a new subject, and

are therefore set at liberty and placed under the affirmation of God" (182). Christ's reign is no less expansive and universal than the reign of Adam: how much more! But from where we stand now, this relationship is a matter of hope.

Barth interprets 5:20–21 as emphasizing what was said in 5:18–19, and we return to the concept of the law (as we did with 5:13–14 in relationship to 5:12). Sin becomes visible where there is law. Even when sin remains invisible, though, there is still death. Law is not a third thing in addition to the Fall and righteousness, to being "in Adam" and "in Christ." The law is where humanity becomes conscious that a change or transformation from one world to another is needed. But is not Moses located between Adam and Christ? Does not Moses represent the chance of being religious? Is there not visible, historical religion? Barth answers "Yes" and then "No." There is a subjective side, a personal side to one's relationship with God, and religious people certainly do exist. He notes that "Religion is the ability of men to receive and to retain an impress of God's revelation; it is the capacity to reproduce and give visible expression to the transformation of the old into the new man—so that it becomes a conscious human expression and a conscious creative human activity" (183–84). *But*, law is a human possibility, one that belongs to the old world, a reality that exists within a world within the sway of sin and death. Even the subjective side of our relationship to God lives under the law of death. "No more can be said positively about religion than that in its purest and most tenacious achievements mankind reaches, and indeed must reach, its highest pinnacle of human possibility" (185), but it still is a human possibility, and cannot mean attaining righteousness. Law makes visible the invisible effects of sin, the invisible possibility of religion, the Fall. Law makes trespass and sin abound. The religious stand under judgment, even more so for their misuse of religion.

Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more! The final and highest possibility of humanity, religion itself, has been called *sin*. There is no positive or negative way of moving oneself from Adam to Christ. Yet we cannot ignore religion, for sin abounds in religion so that grace can abound "much more": "Grace is grace, where the possibility and reality of religion in the full bloom of its power is

earnestly accepted—and then offered up as a sacrifice" (186). Yet grace happens elsewhere too; we should not dare to presume that grace is limited only to where we can see visible religion and law in action. Sin reigned in death so that grace may reign in righteousness and life. Religion firmly belongs within "the reign of sin unto death." The old world is a place from which we have no means of escape, including religion. This point was emphasized so that we could see the grace given through Jesus Christ. Grace comes to the sinner, righteousness to the unrighteousness, life to the dead. The "how much more," the "abounds exceedingly," is grace, not religion. The "how much more" cannot be said from the viewpoint of religion or the law, from the old world of sin and death. This message of grace comes from the new subject, the new world, from the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Further Reading

Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam*.

———. "The Election of Jesus Christ." In *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 94–194.

———. "God with Us." In *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 3–21.

———. "The Three Forms of the Doctrine of Reconciliation." In *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 128–54.

9 Grace, Resurrection, and Obedience (Rom 6)

Romans 6:1–11:The Power of the Resurrection

Once again Barth begins with a summary of the previous chapter. We have seen Adam and Christ, sin and righteousness, and we have seen how Adam and sin are dissolved by Christ and God's righteousness (5:15–17). We have seen how where sin abounds grace abounds all the more (5:20). These premises offer the temptation to conclude that one should sin all the more so that grace may abound yet further. We might take this connection between God and humanity to be a causal, certain one instead of a matter of divine freedom. We might apply the same "human logic" of cause and effect encountered earlier (3:3–5). Here again Paul's response is "God forbid!" for such a conclusion is forbidden by nothing less than the resurrection itself.

Barth interprets "living in sin" (6:2) as humanity's impulse to raise itself to God and to lower God in the process. Grace is God's forgiving of sin and his treating us as if we were new human beings. Dying to sin means that the very roots of sin are ripped out, that the light of the future world has overcome the old world. Grace and sin cannot co-exist; there is no relationship between them because grace excludes sin. Baptism is a sign of this dying to sin. It is a concrete, visible event within the world of religion. Its concrete and visible character should not worry us, though, for sin and redemption also belong to the concrete world for those who believe. Baptism is a sign, a sacrament, something which directs us towards God. Just as our faith is enclosed within the faithfulness of God, so too is the religious act of baptism enclosed within the divine act to which it witnesses. Certainly the practice of baptism has counterparts and precedents within the wider world of religious history. God is free, however, to gather up such practices for his own purposes. From the perspective of the gospel, and only from it, can we see how Judaism and paganism witness to God.

Baptism speaks of the death of the old subject, and this claim is not a matter of doctrine or theory. Death itself is not grace. The negation of the individual recommended in other philosophies and religions is not itself grace. These are relative negations for they belong within the world of human achievement and effort. What gives baptism its force and its importance is that Christ was raised by the Father. The new life that comes from Christ's resurrection in baptism means that sin is rendered impossible. The resurrection is our future, a parable of eternity. Jesus' resurrection is non-historical as it is the work of God and belongs to him. It was not one event in time alongside other events. Likewise, new life is not one event among other events. New life means the assurance of citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20). As a life hidden with Christ (Col 3:3) it remains beyond the individual and the world. The individual truly dies to sin. The sign of baptism points to an invisible relationship to God. It does not point us to a spiritual experience or a moral achievement. There is a visible and actual uniting to Christ in the world, particularly in suffering, but it remains within the realm of human ambiguity and questionability. Conformity to Jesus is not a human status, an act, or an experience. Neither the historian nor the psychologist can understand and handle it. Conformity to Christ and new life are "ours" only as they are ours *in the future*, in eternity.

Barth opens his commentary on 6:6–7 with the counter-position that we actually can know our likeness to Christ and our being conformed to him. He immediately dismisses this claim as the reappearance of the old subject. In Christ I understand myself to be the old subject. Yet knowing that I am the old subject means that I have already been placed somewhere else. This knowledge that I am the old subject presupposes that I have been made anew. In Christ I see the religious subject, the old subject, as the highest human possibility. I then see the old subject put to death with Christ. In Christ I see the new subject, who I am, in faith. While this perspective from the new subject upon the old is a vantage point, it is not a stable place. Barth gives us five observations. First, I cannot escape the "No" addressed to the old subject of sin. Second, there is no possibility for me to escape from my identity with the old subject. Third, I must assent to the old subject being put to death on the cross. Fourth, there is an

unbridgeable distance put between myself and the old subject and I must face the strange possibility that my new identity is actually not myself. Fifth, my identification with the new subject illuminates this whole "process," which is not actually a process in time, but more a list of what must be the case from the perspective of the new subject created in Christ.

Sin has a body that is visible and historical. As long as I live in the body I live in sin. My body must be done away with; "as the new man, I live no longer in it: as determined by time and things and men, I exist no longer" (199). My body awaits the new body, new life. Since I am no longer identified with my body, but with a future one, my bondage to sin has ended. Grace takes away humanity's own possibilities, and relates the visible person to their invisible identity in God. This is a wholly forensic justification, a declaration outside of the individual that demolishes the old and brings in the new. Though visibly one cannot escape sin, in relationship to the new being no guilt is reckoned.

Dying with Christ is a negation of the old subject (6:8–11) and of the possibility of sinning (6:8–11). But this negation comes from a "positive impossibility" (201), an affirmation, a "Yes." This positive impossibility is a matter of belief, of faith. What is believed is that Christ died in our place and that we are identical with the new creation seen in the resurrection. We believe that we live with Christ—this belief is the positive impossibility that excludes the possibility of sin. It is only in faith that we can know that Christ was raised from the dead. It is faith that imbues the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth with universal significance. The resurrection is the non-historical event to which all of history points. It is not one event beside others, or even a natural or supernatural event within the realm of human or cosmic possibilities. Death and doubt rule over all historical events. Historically considered, Christianity is surely more than a dubious phenomenon. Indeed, the history of Christianity is rather small and insignificant among the larger and longer sway of great civilizations or the countless ages of natural history. But the resurrection does not belong to history. The new life of Christ, the crucified one, is outside the realm of death and decay. By faith we take such a life to be our own, or a life that will be our own. Visibly I am one with the dying

Christ, but invisibly I am one with the risen Christ. The movement from death to resurrection, from sin to grace, is irrevocable. Christ dies no longer but lives eternally. Living with Christ means that sin is no longer a possibility or a viable option. Barth notices the change from the indicative to the imperative in Paul's "reckon yourselves to be dead to sin" and comments, "the positive impossibility of being both in sin and under grace actually has existence—well! let it exist. The forgiveness of sin is valid—well! accept it as valid" (206–7). Grace overturns any balance or equilibrium. The power of the resurrection means the old has been left behind, even if we must still wait, hope, and act as if it were true.

Romans 6:12–23: The Power of Obedience

Grace is an indicative that contains within itself an imperative, a call, and a command (6:12–14). The new life has come; you have been moved from death to life (indicative), *so* be dead to sin and live by faith and grace (imperative). Yet sin abounds, and its impossibility continues to exist as long as I am not identical with the new subject, as long as I remain in a mortal body of sin. Sin's very existence has been questioned and attacked in Christ and so I can no longer recognize its power or possibility. Yet this body of sin continues, and has become a battlefield in which I participate. The lusts and needs of the body remain: hunger, sleep, sex, self-expression, creativity, even the need for religion. Nevertheless, we are to present our "members"—which Barth takes as our whole biological existence—not to sin but to God. The power of obedience, an invisible power, is supposed to transform our visible existence. As grace is the power of the resurrection, grace is also the power of obedience. We know that we have died with Christ and been raised to new life. The law, or religion, cannot save us from sin; neither can our efforts make us obedient. The visible practices of piety or moral struggle can at most be parables, signs, but they themselves are not the power of obedience; "the power of obedience which says 'Yes' to God and 'No' to sin does not exist in any concrete fashion" (213). Sin abounds all the more where religion is present. Yet grace implies neither pessimism nor optimism.

Should we continue to sin now that we are under grace, and not the law? (6:15–16). Resignation might follow the realization that our life

in God is invisible and impossible. If grace means that God does everything and that we should do nothing, then there seems to be three alternatives: (a) we do nothing and the body of sin continues to reign; (b) we become active and religious "doers," and in the process let sin abound; (c) we go back and forth between the first two options. God forbid that grace means any of these options! Thinking of grace in this way means that we are thinking of grace in terms of human possibilities. Instead, Barth clarifies, "Grace, then, means neither that men can or ought to do nothing. Grace means that God does something. Nor does grace mean that God does 'everything.' Grace means that God does some quite definite thing, not a thing here and a thing there, but something quite definite in me. Grace means that God forgives men their sin" (215). It is hard for us to speak of grace. We cannot talk about it well as long as we are obsessed with what we can and can't do, what we ought to do or ought not to do. Grace cannot be identified with either human activity or passivity; grace is an unobservable truth that lies beyond acting and not-acting. Grace means surrendering all that we can or can't do to God's work against sin, which includes the sin within us. We cannot escape the attack of grace and the fact that God makes us his servants. Sin and grace are real and exclude each other. Grace cannot exist alongside sin. Being in Christ cannot mean still being in Adam.

Paul's appeal in 6:17–19, that his readers and listeners present themselves as servants to righteousness, can only come after Paul's encomium—"Thanks be to God!"—for obedience is not a human possibility. The gospel is exhortation, pastoral address. It is spoken under the presupposition that its recipients are already surrounded by God's grace and the power of obedience that comes from new life. The address includes the call to think and believe and act under the presupposition that grace is true and that there really is new life. As a matter of grace, the power of obedience is a matter of belief, of faith; it dares to think of grace as true and effective even though it cannot see grace or its effects. Baptism, as a concrete, visible, historical practice within the history of religion is a reminder, a sign, of what is existential, original, and invisible. It is a sign of God's forgiveness, death and resurrection, grace, and new being. Being

freed from sin, one is made a servant to righteousness. This movement is irreversible. It is also not a mechanical process that simply befalls one. Conversion means that people are converted, "they have themselves personally effected it—in the power of the resurrection" (219–20). Being obedient and righteousness are not possibilities but necessities for those under grace.

In Rom 6:19 Paul notes that he is speaking "after the manner of men," in view of the weakness of the flesh. Barth notes the difficulties in following after Paul and describing the reality of divine forgiveness. Statements like "you are" and "you stand" are made. The danger in this language is that grace becomes a "thing" that some have and others have not. Grace is unobservable and is no one's property. Barth defends this language (which he links with "romanticism," not "existentialism") because of the immediacy and reality of divine forgiveness. He is using "parables drawn from human immediacy" (220) to get across the idea that "Men must not be permitted to remain spectators, otherwise they will be unable to apprehend their con-version which God effects" (220). Knowledge of God cannot be an objective knowledge about a thing within the universe that entails no personal involvement or investment.

We are speaking in parables, in "the manner of men," and what is heard must be heard in faith. Yet you still stand under the command of grace! Grace determines your body. It is not a thing amongst other things, but it is an invisible force and pressure that desires concretion. Grace stretches out, it moves, and makes restless. It creates new beings that are servants of righteousness. It demands a different way of being. "All of this is expressed as though the answer to the demand were a human possibility!" (222). The gospel and its exhortation act as though the world were not the world and humans were not humans. Grace grasps the whole of one's existence. As the *futurum resurrectionis*, glorification is not an event in time, but the waiting that all human time must undergo. Grace creates a state of affairs that human language has difficulty expressing, and yet even "the limitations inherent in such language only serve . . . to emphasize as clearly as possible the divine imperative" (223). Grace demands, in direct address and plain speech, what humanity cannot do. It speaks "after the manner of men." Speaking of grace means

making grandiose statements that are justifiably doubted, statements like the ones Barth has been making all along, like “sin is impossible” or “grace and sin cannot co-exist.” Yet in the light of the resurrection and of Paul’s text, how can we otherwise put it?

Death is the fruit of the servants of sin; life is the fruit of the sanctification of the servants of God (6:20–23). Grace means the transition from death to life. The power of obedience means the death of sin. The gospel is a disturbance, a shattering. To make a “religion” out of the gospel is to betray it (Schleiermacher and modern Protestantism are judged harshly here). What is the fruit of those who seem to wander in twilight between good and evil, sin and grace? God in Jesus Christ breaks through this mist and offers clear knowledge where there is only haze. There is sin and grace, death and life. Revelation and grace bring life out of death, obedience out of sin. All is tested and judged. From revelation we can see differences clearly: the difference between sin and obedience, the fruits of death and of life. There is an evil that humanity should not do, and a good that humanity should do. Sanctification means that there is a “good” that should be thought and performed, and that “there are purposes and works, alliances and movements, which have their beginning and end in life, which are alive even in their middle part, for they are not altogether obscured, even in the world of time and things and men which is under the dominion of death” (228). Christ is the criterion of the testing, and while some things may perish and others survive transformed (remember, “we establish the law!”), eternal life belongs to Christ and in Christ. The knowledge of God allows distinctions to be made, but in the very moment when the difference between servants of sin and servants of God emerges, the criterion, Christ, dissolves these differences.

10 The Freedom of God and Religion (Rom 7)

Romans 7:1–6: The Boundaries of Religion

The title of this chapter is “Freedom.” But whose freedom is this and what kind of freedom is it? The chapter’s prologue reveals this freedom to be God’s, and that it is his freedom to offer grace to humanity. (This chapter could have just as easily been called “Religion: An Analysis,” for it is about the interplay between God’s freedom and human religion.) The prologue speaks of grace, obedience, and resurrection, of the appearance of the new person in Christ. The new person is not a visible subject, but neither is it an imagined second person. The new human being is the existential, unobservable me. The Christian is subjected to pressure as Christ claims, decides, and promises. Barth returns to his consideration of Abraham in Rom 4. Through Abraham’s example we learned that grace is the freedom of God, and that it is a miracle, beginning, and creation. These claims can be substantiated through facing the final and highest human possibility, that of religion. This encounter between God’s freedom, faith, and religion has been some time in the making.[1] What has come before in Romans has prepared us for this last encounter, for we will soon learn that religion is a limited, human possibility that by its very inability can display God’s freedom to offer grace to humans.

Whereas Paul speaks to those who know the law, Barth speaks to those who know religion (7:1). As long as one lives, one is under the law (for Paul), or religion (for Barth). Religion is everywhere. It is a sign of a lost relationship with God. Memory of this relationship evokes all manner of actions, things, and experiences. Despite some previous comments he has made, Barth notes that it is not necessary to dissociate grace from the experience of it in religion, morality, dogma, and church. We cannot escape religion: it the sphere in which we move as long as we live. We may change one religion for another (even to what we would not usually call a “religion”) but we will never be without it. Religion is the final and

highest of human possibilities. It is also the most limited and dangerous one at that, for religion points beyond itself to a new and higher order. Beyond religion we encounter God's freedom and the impossibility of grace.

The religious person has a twofold significance, and serves both a positive and a negative function. "He is at once positive, in that he bears noble witness to the relation which exists between God and man; and negative, in that in him human nature is confronted by the reality of God" (231). The frontier of religion (the section's title) is the frontier of humanity, for religion, or law, is at work as long as one lives; I cannot escape being religious. God's "Yes" does not come to the one that still lives, but to the new person. Religion, then, must be limited and dealt with so that justification may follow. We must see the frontier of religion.

Paul focuses on this "as long as one lives" in 7:2–4 and explains it by using an analogy of a husband and a wife bound together by law. The wife is bound to the husband for as long as he lives, but if the husband dies then she is free from the obligation of the law. The law itself can recognize that death means change. Death ends the law's obligations and demands. There is no middle ground here: there is *either* being under the law *or* being outside of it, being alive *or* dead. In Christ we are under grace, and in Christ's body we are made dead. Every aspect of us is put to death in Christ's body, including our religion: "all human possibilities, including the possibility of religion, have been offered and surrendered to God on Golgotha" (233). Christ, who was born under the law (Gal 4:4), Christ according to the flesh, submitted to the law and did the law. In the death of "Christ according-to-the-law," the last possibility of human piety and belief, is dissolved and thus established, for Jesus Christ, in spite of his life and work, gave honor and glory to God alone. From the perspective of the cross we can see that law and religion have been removed. As long as we live we are joined to Christ's "living" human body, Christ according to the flesh (meaning the world of visible religion and human achievement). In the slain body of Christ, however, we become what we are not. We live no more, we are dead to the law and religion, and the road to another life opens. We are no longer joined to the living body of Christ, religion, and human effort, but to

Christ who was raised from the dead. We are set free for Christ. Christ's dissolving of religion allows us to see the power of obedience that is the power of resurrection. It lets us see God's freedom beyond all religious possibility.

While we were in the flesh, the law brought more fruit unto death, but released from the law we serve righteousness (7:5–6). "Being in the flesh" means that we live a life full of passion and action, politics, aesthetics, and ethics, even in the form of religion. Sin, its passion, and its fruit come from "the vitality of mortality" that the law does not and cannot stop. Instead, the law becomes another instance and opportunity for this vitality of mortality to play itself out. Ludwig Feuerbach was right to argue that religion animates sinful passion. Religion is actually the crowning of sinful passion, its highest achievement. Religion (like certain tacky teenage romances) gives to human passions the air and feeling of eternity; it acts just like a drug in its rushes of pleasurable emotion. But is there any human emotion more fleeting than the emotions and passions of religion (whether in worship, high-school camps and adults retreats, epiphanies, promises to oneself or God)? Passions die and passions lead to death. The law works wrath (4:15). This is the frontier of religion.

Barth disagrees with Ernst Kühl that being removed from the law is a reference to baptism, for being under grace is not one type of action amidst other types of behaviors (still, being under grace might be "woven" into religion). Being discharged from the law is a matter of God's freedom and revelation. God limits and does away with religion so that we may be "finally liberated from the coils of our humanity, in which, as religious men, we are bound and throttled" (237). But are we saying too much too boldly? Are we again speaking "after the manner of men" (6:19)? If we think this transformation is something visible and concrete, something we can do and see, then we have returned to religion. Just as we earlier spoke of the impossible possibility of sanctification (6:12–23), here we are speaking of that which we cannot speak, and hearing what we cannot hear. In fact, we are not the ones speaking at all, for "Christ is the end of the law, the frontier of religion" (238).

The frontier of religion is death. We can no sooner rid ourselves of religion than we could rid ourselves of our humanity. Is not the desire

for life even the most visible and certain aspect of religion? “But religion must die” (238). Dying to the law, to religion, to the flesh is the invisible work of God’s freedom. After this death comes newness of spirit and the command of grace (7:22); the imperative (“you must”) follows the indicative (“you are”). This cannot mean serving God in some new and better way, or some new form of piety; newness of spirit lies beyond older and newer forms of religion. (Barth notes that we have been considering the negative truth of religion, but religion also has a positive aspect, for in religion the Spirit groans for us.)

Romans 7:7–13: The Significance of Religion

We turn to the meaning or significance of religion with Paul’s question: “Is the law itself sin?” (7:7a). Religion is the meeting of two worlds: those under sin and those under grace. But religion decisively and always remains within the world of sin. The issue here is the encounter between the final visible thing, religion, and the first invisibility, grace. Religion and law do not put into effect God’s grace or promises to humanity. Religion and law are concrete, observable, and direct, while grace is the very presupposition, context, or field of things: invisible yet real, hidden but effective. There is no bridge from religion and law, from the last human possibility, to grace, the first divine possibility. What, then, is the meaning of the religion, this concrete reality that separates humanity from God?

Is the law itself sin? It might appear so, for both seem to separate humanity from God. The only proper response to this question, though, is “God forbid!” We have come close to this way of understanding religion and the law (4:15; 5:20; 6:14–15; 7:5). We cannot avoid sinning by escaping from religion, for religion is already the highest possibility available to us. Attempts to do away with religion mire us more deeply into religion, into attempts at human justification. Religion surrounds and permeates us “as long as one lives.” There is a temptation to identify law and sin, but this equation forgets that “it is precisely in religion that men perceive themselves to be bounded as men of the world by that which is divine. Religion compels us to the perception that God is not to be found in religion” (242). Religion tells us to stop and wait, so that God might encounter us. We can neither escape from religion nor can we simply identify religion and sin.

What, then, is religion, if it is not sin? Law (religion) is where sin becomes visible; I did not know about coveting until the law told me not to covet (7:7b). Law allows sin to be known and seen. It questions humanity and put humanity into crisis. We can only be sinners in relation to election, vocation, remembrance, in dependence upon God. Without the law sin remains invisible and non-historical. The situation is the same with righteousness, faith, and obedience; they too are invisible and non-historical. “Between these two observable realities are set observable law and observable religion” (243). A kind of crisis lies underneath all religion, for religion creates and makes clear divides and contrasts. Comparative religion thinks that religion reaches its highest form in the prophets. But the prophets only make sense against the background of religious rebellion against God, of making God a thing in the world (or even a thing in some transcendent realm) with whom we can relate as we would with other things. The highest achievements of humanity are in fact criminal acts, an insight that even comparative religion can make. In religion, sin abounds (5:20).

The sinfulness that invisibly permeates all of my being, doing, and thinking is not a self-evident truth. My need for the dissolving of this sinfulness is also not self-evident. Religion questions my supposedly natural desires and needs; it takes away innocence and brings knowledge. “When eternity confronts human finite existence, it renders that finite existence sinful. When human finite existence is confronted by the eternity of God, it becomes sin” (245–46). This horrific understanding of God and the world applies, however, only to the actions of a humanity already fallen out of relationship with God and not to the relationship between eternity and finitude as such. As for the question, “what is the meaning of religion?” we now have our first answer: “our whole concrete and observable existence is sinful. Through religion we perceive that men have rebelled against God” (246). Beyond religion, though, there is God’s freedom, and this freedom is to be considered next.

With Rom 7:8–11 we return to the origin and spreading of sin, to the story of the Fall. It is difficult to avoid myth when speaking about this origin and propagation. In these pages Barth offers us a kind of retelling of the Garden of Eden in terms of coveting and the law. Sin

is the possibility that the union between God and humanity can be destroyed. God is not the first cause of sin, but God is its final truth. Humanity can separate itself from God, can grab hold of the shadow of the divine glory, and can make itself God. This separation and the knowledge of its possibility is sin. Sin, then, makes its home in what is relative, independent, separated (not in what is eternal and non-concrete), and so it makes its home in creation. Originally, however, the world was one with its Creator, and holiness was its natural and characteristic feature. There was no coveting and humanity did not know it was humanity, for God concealed this separation from them. What happens next is that Eve and Adam become aware of their separation from God (even Eve's worship of God speaks of their separation). They begin to know themselves as different from God. Previously their relationship to God was direct and spontaneous, now it is a reflexive, distant, indirect one. They became like God, knowing good and evil. They touched what bound and tied them to God (in an act of coveting?) and realized that they were separate from God. The difference between the invisible and the visible, dependence and independence forms the basis of opposition to God, and this difference itself emerges through the divine commandment, through the possibility of religion. Religion is not sin, but it creates the occasion for sin.

Paul's "I was alive" does not refer to a historical time but to the non-historical. Barth again clarifies, "there is no question here of contrasting a particular epoch in the life of a single individual, or of a group, or indeed of all mankind, with some other epoch, past or future. The passages refer to that timeless age to which all men belong" (249). We are speaking in parables about past innocence lost. Only where there is separation between creation and God can sin be named; "The creation is not questionable, unless it be thought of as mere Nature, independent of God." Religion makes clearer the separation between God and humanity. Originally and invisibly, the creature lives happily unaware of this opposition between God and itself. While sin removes us from our original relationship with God, it does not destroy our relationship to God, or rather God's relationship with us: "Out of this relationship, which never has been, and never will be, an event in history, we issue, and towards it we move. Nor

can sin destroy this primal union, for it is the act and work of God alone" (249). Words like gospel, forgiveness, resurrection, and love offer both disturbance and promise; they point us to a time and place where there is no religion, no law.

The commandment arrived and sin burst into life (the time before the commandment is beyond our knowledge). Humanity became like God, knowing good and evil, knowing God to be other, and so the possibility of religion, of adoring and pleasing God, arrived. Unity with God was broken and now we only know the world of time, things, and death. Woe is me, for I am undone (Isa 6:5).

The Fall's final paradox is that our supreme possibility to understand death, to know good and evil, to know God as God and creation as creation, is identical with the capacity that destroys our direct union with God. We cannot help being religious, of knowing that God is God and the world is the world. The commandment tells us about this distinction. Yet the paradox of religion is that when we turn to God we betray him, for it is "we" who are doing the turning, it is our effort to please God: "What is our action, our taking up of a position, but the supreme betrayal of the true pre-supposition? What is our undertaking of a visible relationship, our scaling of the summit of human possibility, but our completest separation from the true invisible relationship?" (252). Religion is not an easy peace with God or attunement to the great beyond. Religion is terror. The commandment is an occasion for sin, for religion emerges from it. We now have a second answer to our question about the meaning of religion: "religion is that human necessity in which the power exercised over men by sin is clearly demonstrated" (253). Again we need to consider God's freedom.

Paul pronounces the law holy, and the commandment holy, righteous, and good (7:12–13). We can, then, never simply equate the law and religion with sin. In religion, the highest human capacity, every other human possibility is bathed in the divine light. Religion still tells us of God and righteousness: "Placed outside the region of divinity, religion, nevertheless, represents divinity as its delegate or impress or negative" (254). Within the sphere of human activity religion is holy (it points us to God), righteous (a parable of God's will), and good (for it concretely bears witness to what has been

lost). Abandoning religion will always mean taking up some lesser possibility or reality. Let us, therefore, be nothing but religious!

Did what is good become death to me? This question is an honest one, just like the earlier "is the law sin?" (7:7). Barth sees behind this question the implicit longing to escape religion, and thus escape death. God forbid! There is no option but to bear the full brunt of the paradox. We are led to the possibility of religion once the commandment makes us aware of who we are and where we are. Sin is the air we breathe and the water we drink. We cannot escape it, especially through the possibility of religion: "so deeply does it [sin] penetrate every human capacity that the attempt to elude it by taking up with religion entangles us more surely in its guilt and plunges us into the destiny of death" (256). Here we reach the final meaning of religion: "in the inexorable reality (viii. 7b–11) of this supreme human possibility sin is shown forth as the power which reigns within the closed circle of humanity" (257). But the power of this highest possibility is limited by God and the freedom of God alone. Religion too has its boundaries.

Romans 7:14–25: The Reality of Religion

We can understand religion when we understand how serious and extensive is sin's reign. Once we see how sin abounds in religion, we might be able to see how much more grace abounds (5:20). But before we move on to the goal of our reflections we need to make sure that religion has been properly grasped. We have established that religion cannot provide a theoretical answer to the problem of sin (his apparent interpretation of 7:1–13), but we need to make sure that it is equally incapable of providing a practical one. We cannot make religion into something trivial and harmless, or even something romantic and enticing (again note the criticism of Schleiermacher). While religion cannot bring *life* it can bring *truth*. Religion is a misfortune and suffering that must be endured, and it does not offer a practical solution to the problem of sin.

There are two pieces of evidence against religion providing a practical solution to the problem of sin. The first is found in 7:14–17. The religious person comes from the realm of the Spirit, but also knows that anyone living under sin cannot fulfill the law. A new creation is necessary, for I do what I hate, and I cannot do what I

want. I should not be tempted to think, however, that religious self-hatred and self-loathing is a way of attaining harmony with God. Attacking myself is simply the old subject attacking the old subject. Religion means disunity, brokenness. I do what I don't want to.

The second piece of evidence is found in 7:18–20 and the realization that I cannot do the good that I want to do. I know that I am flesh and that flesh is worldliness. The person bemoaning this situation is not the pagan, but the religious. It is from the Spirit and God's freedom that we know these things, not from some pessimistic view of the world. I do not do the good that I want, but I do evil. (Barth notes that the history of the church and Christianity is a vast graveyard of good will and intention and the doing of evil.) I am no more justified by my desire to do the good than I am by my desire to avoid evil (7:16–17). We are not speaking about two people, one who wills with good intentions and one who happens to do evil, as if the first person was free of sin. No, we are speaking about *one* sinful, unified subject who wills and does sinfully. The conclusion from the evidence is that religion means disruption, discord, and the absence of peace (7:21–23). By the same law I am able both to will the good and able to see my failure, my evil. Those who want peace of mind are right to avoid religion. Religion comes disguised as an intimate friend but it is actually the enemy. "Religion is the *krisis* of culture and of barbarism. Apart from God, it is the most dangerous enemy a man has on this side of the grave" (268).

The two last verses of this chapter return us to the beginning: the religious, who are under the law for as long they live (7:1). The final reality of religion is seen in Paul's "O wretched man that I am!" (How distant Barth thinks we are from nineteenth-century conceptions of religion!) We have seen what humanity is. We have also seen that Jesus Christ, the new man, stands beyond all human possibilities; he is what I am not, and through him I am what I am not. With this cry of wretchedness Paul is not describing his life before his conversion, he is describing the whole course of his existence. Such is the cry and situation of the religious, of the person who knows the law. Such is the person who has been broken by God and cannot forget God. Barth closes by asking, "Do we now understand the meaning of the Grace of God and of His Freedom?" (270).

Further Reading

Karl Barth, “The Revelation of God as the Abolition of Religion.” In *Church Dogmatics* I/2, 280–361. Reprinted with introduction as Karl Barth, *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*.

1. Barth offers a long list of the preparatory passages: Rom 2:1–13, 14–29; 3:1–20, 27–30, 31; 4:9–12, 13–17; 5:13, 20; and 6:14, 15.

11 The Holy Spirit (Rom 8)

Romans 8:1–10: The Decision

WHAT HAVE WE ACTUALLY been talking about? Sin or righteousness? Religion or freedom? Death or life? Where does our knowledge of these things come from? Where does the person who knows these things come from? Knowing that human religion is just human religion is itself an impossibility, for humanity cannot see itself as humanity. Simply asking these sorts of questions presupposes that something foreign, different, and new has already arrived. The origin of this knowledge, and the person who knows these things, is the new creation and the new person. These questions, then, presuppose the Holy Spirit who makes things new: "The Spirit is the 'Yes' from which proceeds the negative knowledge which men have of themselves. As negation, the Spirit is the frontier and meaning and reality of human life: as affirmation, the Spirit is the new, transfigured reality which lies beyond this frontier" (272). In the Spirit I recognize new creation and that I am what I am not. In the Holy Spirit I see that I have been made new in Jesus Christ.

The negation of sin is not a possibility within this world. The doing away with sin is a once and for all event that takes place beyond all specific, individual events (as in the opening of Barth's exposition of Rom 4, this is not an event alongside others, but the context or presupposition of particular, concrete events). The new possibility, the new law, the new life is the Spirit. Barth offers three clarifications about the Spirit: we speak about, we have, and we reckon with the Spirit. We who speak about the Spirit cannot express the Spirit, but we cannot be silent either. We hope that the Spirit himself speaks with or without words when we speak and when we remain silent. We must be careful when we say "we" "have" the Spirit. This statement is true as long as "we" means "not we" and "have" means "do not have." Yet it is more dangerous to deny our having the Spirit than it is to fall back into religion. We reckon that the Spirit is active and at work and we know that the Spirit is not a thing amongst other things. Yet we treat the Spirit as if the Spirit were a thing, the third Person of the Trinity, to whom we can pray and listen. We know that

our behavior should follow the Spirit, and yet we know that we are inadequate to do so. Nevertheless, we choose these religious possibilities of speaking about, having, and reckoning with the Spirit, for although we know religious behavior cannot justify us, we are more fearful of sinning against the Spirit. We do not know what we mean when we say that the Spirit speaks and acts, but we do know that the Spirit liberates and gives life. The law of the Spirit of life takes precedence over the laws of sin and death. The law of the Spirit renders these other laws relative, meaning that it puts them into new relationships: "there remains no relativity which is not related-ness, no concrete thing which does not point beyond itself, no observable reality which is not itself a parable" (275). The Spirit relates and makes parables of all concrete and observable things.

The commentary on Rom 8:3–4 (note again Barth's translation) lasts several pages. The law (or religion) can expose sin, but cannot destroy it. Religion is concrete and visible, it is "on this side," it is flesh and grass and so it will wither away. "God sends his own Son," a kind of refrain in this section, are words of freedom that religion cannot sing. Here we are dealing with both the particularity and the existence of the divine. On the one hand, in Jesus God's existence is illuminated by the particular. In Jesus, and the scandal of historical particularity, we see that Christianity is not a form of rationalism, that God and his eternity are not stable ideas that we can easily and directly affirm. "God's personality" (one of Ritschl's favorite terms) means that he is unique and particular. On the other hand, that Jesus is the Christ means that the particularity of God is illuminated by his existence. Here we contradict historicism and psychologizing, for we encounter an eternal revelation that cannot be treated historically, dissolved into myth, or handled pragmatically. Here we encounter God's love. Jesus the Christ bears witness to the fact that God is as eternal and omnipotent as he is unique and particular.

To elaborate upon "God sent his Son" Barth offers a small reflection upon the creed, but warns his readers, "let no orthodox person rejoice" (277). Jesus Christ is "begotten not made," and thus contrasted with every other creature; he is "born of the Virgin Mary" and so we cannot give divinity or eternity to anything we can observe; he is "very God and very Man," what guarantees our

original union with God. God sends him into the temporal world, into nature, into history, into flesh (even sin-controlled flesh). God sends him not to change the world by a moral revolution, art, science, or rationality, but to announce the coming resurrection of flesh and the new creation. We know that we have spoken well of Jesus Christ if we offend every form of human investigation.

As Christ is sent on account of sin, speaking and preaching in negations and paradoxes is necessary. The Word of God transforms everything—history, nature, and the world—and thus it throws into question all of our possible starting points; the mission of the Son "fits into no human reckoning and composes no harmonious picture" and lies "upon the edge and periphery of what is rational: in fact, we can only conceive of it as inconceivable" (278). Christ is sent in the likeness of sin-controlled flesh. Jesus Christ is not a direct manifestation of divinity within the world, for then Jesus would be simply another thing within its midst. Barth picks up on the "incognito" theme (from Kierkegaard), whereby God hides himself in Jesus Christ. The life of Jesus, including his sinlessness, his death, and his resurrection, is open to all manner of interpretation. Nothing in Jesus' life remains free of historical ambiguity. Blasphemy is not the danger at this point. The danger is not being scandalized by Jesus.

The Son was sent in the likeness of human, sinful flesh, to speak a death sentence over sin amidst flesh. In Christ sin-controlled flesh becomes a parable or likeness. All that is human, worldly, historical, and natural becomes a sign and an image, related to its Creator. Being a sign, a witness, or an image does not deprive the world of value or existence, but actually gives it more importance and significance (remember, "we establish the law!"). The detachment of the world from God is done away with in Christ. The flesh has been deprived of its independence because Christ, God himself, has taken it up and related it to himself. The doing away of death and sin in the flesh occurs in the increasing passivity of Jesus (5:6–8; 6:8). The incognito increases and Jesus is divested of all the predicates of divinity. If this did not happen, we would not be able to see the relativity, the parabolic nature of flesh. The purpose of the sending of the Son is the creation of the new person. The Son of God is the

decision, the victory of God, the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17) that transfigures and transforms humanity, and that fulfills the righteousness of the law in us by destroying the death sentence over us.

The title of the subsection, “The Decision,” becomes clearer in Rom 8:5–9. Spirit is the decision and pleasure of God for humanity and of humanity for God. Spirit means election, belonging to Christ. The possibility of living after the flesh no longer exists. “Flesh” means the decision in time in which God is against the world and the world against God. We ourselves cannot decide between Spirit and flesh. Neither can we assign some people to the Spirit and others to the flesh. In the flesh we are rejected and in the Spirit we are elected. The unity of these decisions for rejection and election is not in a balance. There is a precedence and priority of election over rejection.

“Christ in you” is not a subjective state, but an objective status. It is an objective status given by God: “Men achieve this status neither by a process of logical deduction, nor by aesthetic intuition, nor by a moral act of the will, nor by means of some religious experience” (285). It is a matter of looking at the faithfulness of God in Christ, a work done apart from us and despite us. Knowing that Christ is in us is not a matter of our own perception or introspection. Christ is the eternal decision that flesh is flesh and the world the world. We recognize the eternal condemnation and decision against sin because of the life of the Spirit that already shines forth; “in fact, men can apprehend their unredeemed condition only because they stand already within realm of redemption; they know themselves to be sinners only because they are already righteous; they perceive their death only because they are alive” (286). Death and sin have been condemned in Christ and life and righteousness have been established. Both rejection and election are joined together and united but one has priority over the other, for the Spirit is victorious.

Romans 8:11–27: The Truth

The Spirit is the truth. There is no neutral, detached, objective observation of the truth, for it is what observes us. Truth creates the objectivity of the ones who perceive it, and so it cannot become “subjectivized.” Christ in us is the truth. He is the Spirit within us. But who, more precisely, is this Spirit that is within us? It is the Spirit that

raised Jesus from the dead. The contrast between death and the life of the Spirit is known only in the light of the resurrection, and by this same light the contrast is dissolved. The resurrection of the body does not refer to one moment in time—it is not past, present, or future. The Spirit—the Origin—within me takes away my predicates and my features, even my identity with "the old man," and thus the Spirit takes away my very identity with myself, "the old man." Nothing can withstand and survive this disruption. Physical death can only be a parable of that final negation in which flesh and blood, the corruptible and the mortal, put on the incorruptible and immortal. The indwelling of the free, self-moving Spirit takes away our relation to this world and relates us to God, to the new world.

"To live after the flesh" (8:12–13) takes many different forms: the activities of the pious and the impious, moral and religious earnestness and laziness. All human vitality, however great or insignificant, is a living after the flesh, and so is a living in the world of death. By the Spirit we must mortify and cease the deeds of the body, of human vitality. This mortification does not mean that we merely switch to a negative morality (which could at most be a parable) instead of a positive one. Genuine insecurity is not a human achievement. Only the Spirit can truly mortify the flesh.

Barth begins his discussion of 8:14–17 with a quotation from Luther (how admirable is this passage from Paul, how full of comfort!). This forceful criticism of the flesh is the introduction of the Spirit. The Spirit mortifies activity and inactivity, doing and waiting, so that the Spirit can re-orientate and re-late them. The Spirit leads us to the knowledge that we are children of God. To be called a "son of God" is to receive a negative title, a descriptor of what I am not. To be called a "son of God" points to what Christ is in me. Another honest question arises: are we only left with things and realities outside, external to us? More dialectics follow as Barth answers this question: as religious people in this world, the answer is "yes"; as new creation in Christ, the answer is "no." The newness of the Spirit dissolves and unifies. The Spirit overcomes old contrasts: "men stand no longer over against God, as trembling, banished strangers, subjected, as bond-servants, to an external and heteronymous law. . . . Now they are Sons, hearing the voice of the their Father, forgetting the

otherness of God but first forgetting their own otherness" (297). The Spirit of Sonship is my invisible, existential, and real self.

The Truth bears witness for us. The Spirit speaks for us when we cannot speak. The fact that we are children of God can only be seen *existentially*, and not psychologically, sociologically, historically, or scientifically. Like Abraham we stand as heirs of the promise, of the new creation, and of new life. "As His Sons, being what we are not, we stand at His side, participating in His Victory: and our present existence looks forward to this glory, which is already ours" (301). We have said too much and too little. We have said too much when it comes to the hope and expectation that we have now. Yet we have said too little when it comes to the fulfillment of this promise. Truth is not what we say about God, but what God enacts and decides. We endure in pain in this present time, but we suffer and wait with Christ as joint-heirs, in the Spirit, so that we may also be glorified with him.

To exegete Rom 8:18–25 Barth turns, not inappropriately, to Luther and Nietzsche (although Calvin makes an appearance as well). Paul does not reduce, minimize, or overlook suffering in order to make consolation easier to offer. To receive consolation we must realize that none is to be had. "To overlook suffering is to overlook Christ" (305). But what place does suffering have in our being children of God? God himself poses the question and answers it. The secret and mystery of our suffering is that "God wills to be God, and is God; in His will and in His being God He requires to be known and loved" (305). Creation waits for the children of God to appear. All created and temporal things bear within themselves the eternal, invisible, and divine future. Nature and history provide no relief. All things waste away in bondage to corruption (Barth's own examples are microbes, dinosaurs, and theology professors). Creation in all its beauty and horror, its brilliance and infamy, cries out, "but we are deaf and do not hear" (308).

Vanity and worthlessness is neither the original nor the final constitution of the universe. The creature is not subject to vanity willingly; God subjects creation to vanity. "The suffering, by which the whole created world of men and of things is controlled, is His, His action, His question, and His answer" (309). As vanity and suffering are God's then the creature is allowed to hope. All of creation groans

in pain. Every created thing has an eternal existence in an eternal future. But creation is not the only reality that suffers and waits. We too suffer as we wait for our adoption, the redemption of our body. We live before the resurrection and in front of the cross, as God's prisoners, in hope. Hope that is seen is no longer hope: "Direct communication from God is no divine communication. If Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ. Spirit which does not at every moment point from death to the new life is not the Holy Spirit" (314).[1] Redemption only meets us in hope. "The groaning of the creation and our own groaning is naught but the impress and seal of the Spirit: our cry, *Abba*, *Father*, is naught but the echo of the divine Word" (315).

Romans 8:28–39: Love

With Rom 8:28–30 we move onto what has been called the "*ordo salutis*," the order of salvation, or "the golden chain" (although sometimes this refers only to 8:29–30). Barth, as one might guess at this point, does not follow the typical way of interpreting this passage, as he does not consider it a description of the process by which God elects individuals.

What we know is suffering. In this regard Barth prefers honest and secular research and philosophy as opposed to their semi-theological alternatives. He prefers a confessed ignorance of God over a pseudo-theological knowledge of God. Love for God is not constituted by certain visible practices. It might be in our prayers or our silence, our religion or our antipathy to religion, but it cannot be identified with any particular form of action. Barth invokes Job as an example of love for God, a love that occurs within questioning, doubting, and the sense of abandonment: "I know that my redeemer lives" (Job 19:25). Love is the more excellent way (1 Cor 13:13), an act of God. Love is a humiliation, a desire, a peace, a waiting. Love includes a not-knowing, a deprivation. Everything must work together so creatures that love God can exist. The love of God is the affirmation—Jesus Christ, the resurrection, life—that stands beyond two negations: that God stands in light inaccessible and that all flesh is as grass.[2]

Who are the ones that love God? Those whom God calls according to his purposes. As should be clear from Barth's exegetical tendencies so far, those called by God are not these identifiable people or those specific people. Additionally, we could not say that "the called" are definitely *not* those people. In fact, the answer cannot be a definite number. The love of God is not an observable quality so we are in no place to decide (as in Rom 2 and the figure of the Judge). "Rightly understood, there are no Christians: there is only the eternal opportunity of becoming Christians—an opportunity at once accessible and inaccessible to all men" (321). The love of God, like faith, is not observable, an achievement, or a property.

What distinguishes the ones that love God is the divine call, not necessarily their own sense of calling. The love of God shed abroad in human hearts can never be a settled fact, as appeal to one's calling may imply. Those who are called are foreordained to bear the Son's image and witness to both the death of Jesus and his resurrection (Phil 3:10). Conformed to the Son, those who love God are conformed to his suffering and death. Accompanying the Son in his trial and crucifixion means accepting reconciliation with God in the form of being inescapably condemned (1 Cor 5:19–20). We are not developing some kind of negative or pessimistic worldview here. No self-imposed negation, martyrdom, or suffering will prove of any worth here.

God's call and God's conforming people to the image of his Son takes place anew every moment. In every moment God is deciding and electing (for God is Judge). These are genuine occurrences and actions, but God's love is not a thing beside other things: "Predestination means the recognition that love towards God is an occurrence, a being and having and doing of men, which takes place in no moment in time, which is beyond time, which has its origin at every moment in God himself, and which must therefore be sought and found only in Him" (324).[3] The person who loves God will never ask, "Is it me?" "Is it you?" or "Is it them?" These kinds of questions were the ones asked by the apostles at the Lord's Supper. The Lord knows his own; their calling is the decision and truth of the Spirit. Knowledge of God is eternal and invisible and to be sharply

distinguished from human knowledge of God here and now (1 Cor 8:2; 2 Cor 4:18). Assurance is first found in God himself, and in God people might have assurance, or at least the assurance that God brings sinners unto himself. In the living, existing, and doing of those whom God calls, foreordains, and knows, God creates and discovers the new human person, the new creation that is called to love God in return. Things do work together for those who love God, for those that love can bear all things, believe in all things, hope for all things, and endure all things (325). Love remains the more excellent way.

If God is for us who can be against us? There is an audacity to these words, an overcoming of the old contrasts that divide us from God. “If God is with us” is the summary of everything we can say about redemption and fulfillment. But we know that God is for us only in that God did not spare his own Son, but delivered him up (Barth uses imagery both of Christ standing in our place and of our being submerged and condemned with Christ). Paul’s logic of abundance continues, for how will God not also give us all things? “If God has delivered us up with Him to the judgement that threatens all, how should He not also with Him give us all things, and thus secure that all things should work together for our good (viii.28)?” (327).

Barth’s commentary on Paul’s bold and beautiful closing of this chapter (8:33–39) tries to return the significance and power of “God for us” to God. Before God we stand accused and condemned, loveless before the God of infinite love. Who is the “us” in “God for *us*”? Certainly it is not humanity in this world. Yet Jesus Christ stands where I cannot stand; he has been raised and now intercedes on my behalf. “And so it is that I know that no man and no thing can separate me from the wholly incomprehensible love of God which is in Jesus Christ” (329). Even all these “monstrous” contrasts that Barth has been waving around, contrasts between the visible and invisible, ignorance and knowledge, death and life, human and divine, in God these are at peace, reconciled, and resolved. Likewise, in Christ the love of God and the love of humanity meet and are one: “For the love of God in Jesus Christ is the oneness of God’s love towards men and the love of men towards God. In his love our love celebrates its victory” (329). Once we say this we realize that we cannot attain or achieve this. If Spirit is truth, then Jesus is love.

Further Reading

Karl Barth. “The Promise of the Spirit.” In *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, 274–366.

1. The remark, “If Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ,” is one of the more well known lines from *Romans* II, and rightly so. However, it typically is taken out of context and thereby loses connection with the Trinitarian material around it (the proceeding line about God and the subsequent line about the Spirit) and the Pauline passage to which it refers.

2. That these are the two negations Barth means is clearer in the original German.

3. As Barth thinks election and reprobation happen in every moment, he disagrees with the far more traditional view of predestination as an eternal, set, pre-determining of some to election and others to damnation. Likewise, as regards using Rom 8:28–30 as providing a so-called “order of salvation,” Barth writes of “the secret of predestination to blessedness, which Augustine and the Reformers represented in mythological form as though it were a scheme of cause and effect.” In doing this they were “thereby robbing it of its significance” (324).

12 The Church's Suffering (Rom 9)

Romans 9:1–5: Solidarity

The opening of this chapter sees Barth in rhapsody, employing all his wonderful and terrifying names of God. God is, for instance, "the pure and absolute boundary and beginning," who is different than everything we name God; "the First and the Last, and, consequently, the Unknown" (330–31). In the gospel the hidden God has revealed himself while remaining the hidden God.

In contrast to the gospel of Jesus Christ there is "Israel," by which Barth means "church," and thus the world of religion. When we contrast gospel and church we are speaking about the ideal and perfect church—religion in its purest form. We are not dealing with corrupted religion so that we might imagine that the contrast between gospel and church could be avoided. No, the church is related to the gospel as the last human possibility is related to God, just as religion was related to grace. The church is where the invisible is made visible and known; it is where the "beyond" is made into a thing contrasted with the world here, and thus a part of it. The church is where the attempt to humanize the divine takes place. There is a comprehensive and inevitable contrast between the church and the gospel. This contrast is not about creating divisions among people or groups of people, but is about recognizing the difference between God and humanity. Barth again draws upon the notion of parable (*Gleichnis*) or likeness; "all human thought and action and possession—however orthodox—are no more than a parable" (333). When we cannot see the parable of the corruptible to the incorruptible we serve the church, religion, and not the gospel. The parable of the corruptible to the incorruptible shines through our failures to speak rightly about God's eternity, personality, and unity.

Another understandable question arises: should we leave and abandon God and pursue the easier task of serving the church? We cannot escape the difficulty this way, and neither should we abandon the church to serve God on our own. Instead, we serve God by participating in the church's failure and guilt; "the Church means suffering, not triumph" (334). The only kind of relationship between

humans and God within this world is a churchly, religious one (which even includes supposed non-churchly forms). The believer stands within the sphere of the church, its guilt and its failure. The believer is not a spectator standing outside of the church, for its possibilities also belong to the believer. Humanity has fellowship and solidarity inasmuch as the whole of it lacks God's glory (3:23).

There is no end or stop to this solidarity; Paul remains with his kinsmen and people. It would be better to have no grace, no Spirit, than to be a separated, unconcerned spectator aloof from the church. Paul's calls the Pharisees his kinsmen, just as in the church the prophet has solidarity with the priest. There cannot be any kind of final unity or agreement within the church. In fact, this lack of agreement is a sign of the final difference between the gospel and the church. The believer would rather take a position in hell with the church than in some heaven that does not exist. We might be tempted to think that we are actually taking the church, an admittedly sinful reality, too seriously. However, despite its guilt and sin, the visible church still forces us to look at the invisible God. Equally, just as religion is unavoidable as the highest human possibility, so too is "church" unavoidable: "to suppose a direct road leads from art, or morals, or science, or even religion, to God is sentimental, liberal self-deception. Such roads lead directly to Church, to Churches, and to all kinds of religious communities—of this the experiences of so-called 'religious' socialism provide an instructive illustration " (337).

In proclaiming the gospel Paul proclaims nothing new. The Israelites also speak of adoption, the glory of God, the covenant, law, serving God, and the Messiah. Does the church say anything new? What Barth is primarily referring to is not the *information* that humanity has about God, but the structure or tendency of humanity; "humanly speaking, everything relevant has been said and heard already; and that at humanity's highest eminence there is always erected a Church of some kind or other, as a living witness in history that men have exhausted every human possibility" (338). It is religious impulse that Barth is referring to when making these comments. What is new and has not been done before, however, is *God's fresh working and acting*. In God contrasts appear, and solidarity is broken as Jacob and Esau are distinguished.

The church's failures are obvious, and between the cries of protest and the quiet of reform there is Paul's resigned solidarity. While it is not a ringing endorsement, religion is still concerned with the relation between God and humanity. Its words might fail, but it is not as though the word of God is of no avail. "The Theme of the Church is the Very Word of God," but it is the word of God as "proclaimed by human lips and received by human ears" (341). Historical, psychological, or sociological accounts of the church's theme tend to make the theme of the church a concrete thing (certain practices, attitudes, social groups) and in this way God's word comes to nothing. The church's theme can only be "Let God be found true, but every man a liar" (3:4).

The contrast between God's truth and humanity's falsehood divides the church into the Church of Esau, where humans remain liars without grace, and the Church of Jacob, where truth is spoken and miracles occur. The two churches are not two realities that co-exist within the world. All of our talk about church is talk about the Church of Esau, for only it is visible and possible within this world. The Church of Jacob, on the other hand, is *invisible*, *impossible*, and *unknowable*. It does not take place within this world; "it is simply the free Grace of God, His Calling and Election" (342). Yet Esau depends upon Jacob and is Esau only because he is not-Jacob. There is a relationship here, yet there is also a problem. The church must seriously ask itself whether it can actually produce anything other than lies and deceptions. There is no room for resignation or abandonment here, for the task is to wrestle with the God of Jacob.

Barth takes Paul's "seed of Israel" as referring to the church, the religious who follow God's revelation and wait upon him. When God speaks and is heard a miracle occurs. The church, the seed, becomes the Church of Jacob, children of God, and receivers of the promise. There is a contrast between being "the seed of Israel," and being "in Christ." The seed of Israel are affected by the twofold nature of the church, or in other words, by the divine double predestination. As the seed of Israel, or children of the flesh, they can be elected or rejected. In Christ we are both established and dissolved, for we are united to what we are not. Children of the flesh

become children of promise because of God's new reckoning with them. God's promise means miracle, redemption, newness, but it is and remains a *promise*: "direct fulfillment in the Church of the promise of God is the denial and loss of His veritable promise—hope that is seen is not hope (viii. 24)" (345). Yet the cause of the church's suffering is also the reason for its hope. When it can see its crisis, it can genuinely have hope and expectation.

In his commentary on 9:10–13 Barth fastens upon two Old Testament verses that Paul includes in his text: "the elder should serve the younger" (Gen 25:23) and "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated" (Mal 1:2–3). That Esau should serve Jacob is not an obvious or natural state of affairs. Neither has precedence or a basis for this divine decision. We can repeat the question "why Jacob and not Esau?" over and over again. The answer cannot be found in the brothers themselves, but only in God's desire to make himself known as God in both rejecting and electing, as both the Lord of life and of death. How else could the church recognize that it stands under God's judgment? Barth paraphrases Kühl and notes, "the inevitable doctrine of eternal 'Double Predestination' is not the quantitative limitation of God's action, but its qualitative definition" (346). Predestination does not give us a number of the saved, or refer to a known or unknown group from the mass of humanity. Rather, predestination tells us who God is and how God acts. The doctrine of predestination actually rules out any kind of "quantitative limitation" because it shifts our focus from ourselves or from that person or that group to "the one who calls."

Likewise, the verse "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated" (Mal 1:2–3) points us to who God is and how God acts. God is free, majestic, and works without any concern for boundaries. We can understand who God is only because of his electing and rejecting, his loving and hating; God "makes Himself known in the parable and riddle of the beloved Jacob and the hated Esau, that is to say, in the secret of eternal, twofold predestination" (347). But by this secret humanity is not divided into parts or groups; instead all of humanity is united. Jacob is always Esau and Esau is always Jacob. Barth notes, "when the Reformers applied the doctrine of election and rejection (Predestination) to the psychological unity of this or that individual,

and when they referred quantitatively to the ‘elect’ and the ‘damned,’ they were, as we can now see, speaking mythologically” (347). Paul, for Barth, speaks neither in terms of numbers (quantitatively) nor about the consciousness of individuals (psychologically). Paul is concerned about *God* and is speaking about *God*. Just as with sin and grace, Adam and Christ, the old and the new, there cannot be an equilibrium between election and rejection. Instead of duality we encounter victory, disturbance, and the overwhelming quality of God’s love, justice, and faithfulness. But this is a *hidden* victory, for the observable church is always the rejected church, the church of reprobation and judgment. The election of the church can only be known in faith and hope. The church must continually wrestle with God until daybreak (Gen 32:24).

Romans 9:14–29: The God of Esau

But is God unrighteous, capricious, and fickle in loving Jacob and hating Esau? Following Paul’s own question, Barth asks three times and each time the answer is “No!” God’s decision is indeed terrible and horrible, and by asking this honest question we show that we have perceived the truth of our perilous situation. This decision allows God to be known *as God* and shows all our knowledge of him to be inadequate. Were God not confronted by these questions and complaints then God would not be God but some human nicety. Knowledge of God always invokes contradiction and resistance. We cannot accept the idea that predestination is a soothing truth to the righteous and torment to the unrighteous. We cannot avoid scandal, dismay, and disbelief at this point: “For God is the God of Esau *because* He is the God of Jacob. He is the Creator of tribulation, *because* He is the bringer of help. He rejects *in order that* He may elect” (350).

But is God an unrighteous despot? In Christ, we know that the “despot,” the tyrannical ruler, is the eternal and loving Father. In Christ we can know that the God of Esau is the God of Jacob. Any other ideas of God we can come up with are in fact the “No-God” we ran across earlier. But even this “No-God” can be a parable of the true God, for the “No-God” can point beyond himself and can be dissolved and negated by God. God is not unrighteous, for God is

also the God of Jacob, and he is not the “No-God,” the phantasm of our own making who quickly comes back to haunt us.

Again we ask, is God unrighteous? (351). We could quickly answer “no” and argue that God is beyond all our ways and our knowledge. But how do we actually *know* that God is beyond our knowledge? We know that God is beyond our knowledge when we realize that we can only protest against rejection and the visible God of Esau and call upon the God of Jacob *after* we know the true Creator and Redeemer God. Our protest against this God, against the God of our direct and visible rejection, reminds us of an indirect and invisible righteousness. We accept the rejection and wrath of the God of Esau because we know that he is also the God of Jacob. And how could we know the God of Jacob, the God of election, without knowing the God of Esau and the God of rejection? God raised up both Moses and Pharaoh but for different roles and offices: Moses to lead and Pharaoh to be hardened. The only distinction we can find between the two is the invisible paradox of election and rejection. Both are, then, the servants of God, one revealing God’s “Yes” the other God’s “No.” The church is always a human work, and even its worship of God is a human work. It is not God’s work. If the church wants to be elect, to be Moses, then it must realize that it is rejected, that it is Pharaoh and the Church of Esau. When and where the church accepts these truths then room is created for the miracle by which it can become Moses and the Church of Jacob.

Barth takes 9:19–21 as a brief episode concerning human responsibility and irresponsibility (instead of seeing it as the beginning of an argument that flourishes into 9:24–29). The honest question is, if no one can resist God’s will, then why does God still find fault in us? We have seen this objection before (3:8; 6:1,15). Once again it seems that humans are irresponsible and free to do either good or evil. There is an ever-present danger that in speaking of the gospel and God’s freedom we will not care about understanding God and his work but instead will give license to human irresponsibility. The key point to Paul’s response is his “O man.” One cannot think of God and humanity as equal partners in a joint venture. Equally, using concepts like cause and effect (as in, God is the cause and human actions are the effect of this cause) is not very helpful either.[1] Barth

simply notes, “Human conduct is related to the will of God neither as cause nor as effect” (355). The freedom and work of God is neither a mechanism within humans, nor an active immanent principle. We should not be afraid of our responsibility being taken away by God’s freedom, but neither should we desire such a thing. All of the catastrophes and disasters of religion that so quickly come to mind only show that we cannot even wait one hour with Christ. Neither moral earnestness nor depravity allows for humans to be justified before God and to escape suffering and tribulation.

Paul’s parable of the potter and the clay invokes a familiar and venerable metaphor (Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; Wis 15:7). Barth looks at the parable and asks how we could speak of God and humanity as partners or as causes and effects (for the record, this example probably fits best under the idea of a formal cause). Barth sees no continuity here, only infinite qualitative difference. God, Barth notes, confronts humanity as its primal Origin, not as a first cause (as if that makes matters clearer), and even the parable is precisely that—a *parable* inadequate to describe what “creation” means. Whenever we stress creation’s freedom and responsibility, we are simply deferring the problem of human and divine freedom. The doctrine of predestination is the end of that deferral. “How could the conception of human responsibility—the undermining of which the objectors either feared or desired (ix.19)—be more securely protected, than by the complete relativity (relatedness!) of men when they are confronted by God?” (357).

With 9:22–23 we return to our main theme: why is God both the God of Esau and Jacob, of wrath and mercy? The question is mythological, for there are not two Gods, one of Esau and one of Jacob. There is only one God, “but our thought cannot escape from dualism. We know that we are unable to comprehend otherwise than by means of a dialectical dualism, in which one must become two in order it may be veritably one” (358). To reveal himself to the world God shows his wrath against the gods. When humans receive revelation, they receive it as vessels of wrath, as sinful humans incapable of receiving or obeying revelation. But God also reveals himself to be the Redeemer, making known his mercy and the riches of his glory. Revelation moves from time to eternity, from rejection to

election, from Esau to Jacob. Vessels of wrath are destroyed in order to reveal the vessels of mercy hidden within them. Visible distinctions and barriers break down: “When in the eternal ‘Moment’ the Church of Jacob dawns in Christ, the fences are broken down, and the Gentile Esau enters the service of God and participates in the divine promise. And with Esau enter the hosts of those who stand outside. Then what is without becomes within, what is afar off becomes nigh at hand, what is not-beloved becomes beloved, and the place of rejection becomes the place of acceptation” (360, with an allusion to Hos 2:23; 2:1). Double predestination is this movement from rejection to election. Judgment and promise cannot be separated (Isa 10:22–23).

Further Reading

Karl Barth. “The Election of the Community.” In *Church Dogmatics* II/2, 195–305.

1. While the use of causes and effects to describe God and the world has a long and venerable history in both Roman Catholic and Protestant scholasticisms, Barth was sufficiently “modern” to never really like this strategy. The earlier “liberal” Barth did not like speaking about God in terms of causes, neither did the Barth of *Romans*, and neither did the Barth of the *Church Dogmatics* (the discussion in *Church Dogmatics* III/3, 94–107 is hardly a ringing endorsement).

13 The Church's Guilt (Rom 10)

Romans 9:30—10:3: The Crisis of Knowledge

THE CHURCH'S SUFFERING COMES from its knowledge of God. Yet it is also a misery that everyone, including the religious, must endure. In the church humanity becomes aware that it is religious. Why and how could God prepare the church, or all people, for such suffering unless guilt was involved? It is not simply that God wants his creation to suffer, for "our creatureliness is a curse only in virtue of sin. It is not otherwise a curse" (362).

The crisis first appears in those outside of the church. How is it that the "Gentiles" continue to have apathy and indifference in the face of the gospel and the church? Does this mean that the word of God is ineffective? That the church is useless? Barth's answer is that the "Gentiles" have not entered the church because God has already found them. They are not "objects" of our missions or our charity. They are known and loved by God and know and love God in return. Certainly there is a visible poverty among the "Gentiles," but we also know that they receive the invisible and impossible righteousness of God. What, then, becomes of the church's mission and its zeal for righteousness?

What if "Israel" (meaning here the church) followed after righteousness and yet did not reach it? Can the church consider the possibility that it is Esau, not Jacob? The church knows that humanity cannot follow after a law of righteousness, which means that the church knows that it itself cannot do so. It makes no difference at this point to switch between "objective" attempts and "subjective" attempts at righteousness, meaning external acts and internal experiences, for both are condemned. Both attempts involve the law, or actions done to please God, and we already know that the law cannot be done. Law is not revelation itself but a negative, visible impress of revelation. Law is a human work and human works necessarily take the form of religion in this life. All forms of religion, whether external or internal, are human works, including faith: "When the Church speaks of faith, however, it means notoriously a profitable 'something,' which men of the world can 'have,' and which

this or that man can strive after, attain, and boast about. But how can such a human work be the faith by which men are justified by God?" (366).

Faith means to love and fear God above all things and to surrender to God's merciful judgment. Faith only comes from faith. Pursuing righteousness is directly opposed to faith, for as a pursuit it involves works, actions, and doing. "We imagine that we are able to hunt the righteousness of God and faith and miracle through supposed gaps in His judgment. But there are no gaps" (367). Barth offers a series of reflections on what it might mean for the church to hold onto its own "theme," to accept its own particular truth and knowledge, always under the shadow of forgiveness. Faith in Heb 11 seems too bizarre and loveless for those that want the good news to be direct and positive. When the church cannot bear its knowledge and its theme, then it risks taking religion and religious humanity as its theme. But even the most pious and religious among us cannot escape the curse and guilt of sin. The church suffers and is in tribulation not only because it is Esau and not Jacob, but also because it is guilty. Guilt is the fact that what is possible with God is impossible for humanity.

Jesus Christ is both the stumbling block and the precious cornerstone (9:32–33). In Jesus Christ God reveals to us that he is the hidden God. In Jesus Christ God conceals himself so that he might manifest himself to faith. Jesus Christ is an offence and a stumbling block because he reveals that the one who "follows after," who pursues any law, even a law of righteousness, will receive nothing. *By itself* the Church of Esau can only remain the Church of Esau. The church can only be justified inasmuch as it undergoes judgment. The church that resists judgment, pleased with itself and its work, "can never be the Church of God, because it is ignorant of repentance" (370).

One can criticize the church until one's heart is content, but this doesn't mean that we are free and ready to abandon it (10:1–3). When we describe and criticize the church, we are actually describing and criticizing *ourselves*. We can fully admit the church's zeal and passion for God, and the visible zeal of particular individuals. But our compliments and applause (or our condemnation) are of little use

when it comes to the relationship between God and humanity: “the meeting-place of God and man is not an arena where men crown each other with laurels or refuse to confer that distinction, but a point where God and man meet in order to separate and separate in order to meet” (372).

The church is full of zeal, but not according to knowledge. Being zealous and passionate for God with knowledge means surrendering to judgment, accepting the divine predestination, and loving God as God: “to know God is the continuous, never-completed acknowledgment of this divine sovereignty, an acknowledgment which in no sense lies behind us, an acknowledgment which carries with it an unceasing critical distinguishing between the righteousness of God and every—yes every—human righteousness” (373). Zeal for God can arise with this knowledge in hand. But who has this knowledge and this zeal? Who will not make even the righteousness of God into another program, movement, or task that we can happily go about undertaking? Who will not turn even the righteousness of God into an advantage to lord over others, or a thing about which to boast before God?

Romans 10:4–21: Light in the Darkness

The church suffers because of its guilt. It is guilty because it ignores the suffering that its theme imposes upon it. In other words, the church’s tribulation and guilt come from its avoiding God. The church has no one to blame in this failure other than itself. But light shines in the darkness, for as the church’s suffering comes from its guilt, so too does hope come after guilt is seen and recognized. After the possibility of the church comes the impossible possibility of God.

There is one righteousness of God, one freedom, and one truth, and that is Christ (10:4–5). We encounter the one righteousness of God in both the righteousness that comes from faith (which means God’s faithfulness) and in the righteousness that comes from the law. This righteousness is one and the same, only that the righteousness of God’s faithfulness is invisible, while that of the law is visible. “All human religion is directed towards an *end* beyond itself (iii.21); and that *end* is Christ. For Christ is the goal of all the needs and longings and endeavours of men” (375). If only the church knew what to do with all its zeal, piety, and activity! No human

righteousness or piety can remain satisfied with itself, for “in fact all human piety does point beyond itself, for it knows that it can be no more than an imprint, a signpost and an intermediate station, a reminder and a negation” (375). The revelation of God ends every human pursuit of righteousness, and every human attempt to establish self-righteousness. But all this depends on the miracle and revelation of God’s own righteousness. Where the church is, where religion knows itself to be only a penultimate reality, the impossible possibility of God takes place within the arena of human possibility.

It is not the *hearers* of the law that are justified, but the ones who *do* the law (as seen earlier in 2:13). But what does it mean to “do the law”? Once again Barth offers a somewhat counter-intuitive response: “to do the law means to comprehend that human righteousness comes into being only through the majesty of the nearness of God and of His election. Human righteousness exists only in order to bear witness to that nearness and to that election” (376). To do the law is not possible within time, history, and the realm of experience; there is no boasting here (3:27–28). Once again, it a matter of the *future*, of the “will” in “they *will* be justified.” Neither the promise (“will live”) nor the condition (“doing the law”) is visible and historical; both remain messianic, eschatological. There is a dialectical truth to be grasped here: no righteousness comes from the law, but from Christ—the law’s requirement—righteousness comes. In Christ the guilt of the church can be removed, the guilt of those who actively pursue righteousness can be removed, just as the light shines in the darkness.

Moses himself knew that the righteousness of God’s faithfulness is the end of the law (10:6–8). The gospel of the unknown God is strange. What is strangest about it, however, is that it is not foreign to the church or to humanity. The church can neither bring Christ *down* nor bring “Christ into the picture” (378) with its liturgy, politics, theology, or administration. The church also cannot bring Christ *up* into the spheres of the ideal, for Christ is not the ideal man but the *new* man. The church hears the supreme negation enacted against it in the cross. But we must avoid a potential misunderstanding here; “We must not clothe the final and abiding Word of the Cross with a positive human negation” (379). We cannot substitute idealism with

the demolition, critique, and negation of all things human and then call it “the gospel.” Likewise, we cannot substitute the church’s vigor, energy, and activity with an artificial passivity: “we are not permitted to seek salvation by doing nothing or by remaining unmoved” (379). The word of God is *already* near, in our mouths and our hearts. We do not need to manipulate it or try to make it present ourselves. The church’s task is to move nearer to the word of God that is already near within history and humanity. The church does not need to make Christ present; it needs to acknowledge that Christ is *already* present to human lives filled with suffering and misery.

In Rom 10:9–11 we again return to the doing of the law and future justification. What is the doing of the law? What is its condition? What is its promise? The promise is again set in the future—“*shall be* saved,” “*shall* live.” The conditions for doing the law, what makes doing the law possible, is the Lord Jesus, resurrection, and faith. “Lord” here means the imperative directed towards humanity, “resurrection” means the strangeness of new life, and “faith” means not a human quality or effort but God’s free and gracious initiative. To “do the law” is thus to confess and believe in the righteousness of God against our own righteousness, that our very confession and belief are impossible but that God’s faithfulness in Christ and the resurrection still exist and happen. We are speaking quite loosely of religion, law, and the person who believes and confesses, but the emphasis and reality here is not ourselves but Jesus as Lord, as resurrected, and as the one in whom we believe. Righteousness too is set in the future; it is always a *coming* righteousness. The next task is to show that the church can know and fulfill this condition.

Barth’s exegesis of 10:12–15 is a masterful and beautiful praising of the universal significance and power of the risen Lord, “the master key which opens every door” (383). There will be no distinction between Gentile and Jew for there is one risen Lord above them both and upon whom they both call. In Jesus’ resurrection the height and breadth of human existence is oriented towards salvation and towards fulfillment. Jesus is even “the goal to which all law and all religion move” (383). If human life is never without law, religion, and death then it is also never without a potential calling upon God and the promise of resurrection. In fact, “the questioning concerning the

secret meaning of life which is manifested in every law and every religion, is assuredly a calling upon the Lord who is the deep and hidden answer to this questioning" (383). How could we speak of universal suffering and tribulation without also speaking of the universality of salvation? If Jesus really is this risen Lord, then we cannot speak of making distinctions. Christ's death on the cross is the revelation of God's unbounded freedom. God justifies both the Jew and the Greek; God in Christ confronts and concerns *all*.

Jesus is generous and merciful to those that call upon him. And, as seen in Barth's remarks above, we can ask, who does not call upon Jesus even in their own doing of the law and religion? Yet we always want to know exactly who these people are. Who precisely are the ones that call upon Jesus? Are they outside or inside the church? The question is unimportant; what is important is that the church is disturbed. We are not speaking about a small number of converts to Christ in Rome, Corinth, or Ephesus in the first century. We are also not speaking about pious and noble heathens or atheists who are unknowingly Christian. Even the faithful pagans can only be signs and witnesses of the light of Christ that shines over everything. "The faithful heathens" that also call upon the Lord are not a set, identifiable number but an eschatological one. We cannot get rid of the secret of predestination by joining to it some human, visible way to salvation. All law and religion disclose a crying and calling unto the Lord, but this crying already presupposes a real, albeit invisible, knowledge of God. Faith is hidden, so too is hearing, mission, and preaching.

Not all who hear the gospel come to its glad tidings (10:16–17). There is also a separation in the claim that the doers of the law will be justified. The universal action and re-orientation described above is not "some rationalistic general religious *a priori*, which, in fact, blunts the edge of a genuinely critical rationalism" (386).[1] We are not talking about some universal "religion of reason" hidden within "positive" religions (meaning the actual and historical religions that exist). Revelation and the universal significance of Christ do not mean the establishment of religions, but their destitution and emptying. In the face of such an innate capacity for religion, Barth simply notes, "We proclaim that God is free" (386) and that the

sovereignty of God judges all human presuppositions (including those about our own transcendental faculties). The human response to this freedom is obedience, which means repentance. Obedience means readiness, wakefulness, and surrender to the judgment of God. But who is capable of obedience? No one. Who is capable of listening to the glad tidings? Who has read our report (Isa 53:1)? Even the church's response is to avoid God and keep itself occupied and concerned with the cares and concerns of its contemporaries. The church devotes itself to making faith into something that can be psychologically analyzed or historically described, or to noting "interesting parallels" between one religion and another (another slam against Troeltsch and the History of Religion schools). The church in all its glorious and ignominious failures is the only church we will ever know. "The Church needs to be continually reminded of the most serious of all symptoms. It was the Church, not the world, which crucified Christ" (389).

Can we remove guilt by saying the church did not hear? To answer "yes" implies that the word of God is a new and unfamiliar thing that some have heard and others haven't. Barth's response is "Whoever we are, we have heard the *word of Christ* and we are within the picture" (389). Can we remove guilt by saying the church did not understand? What do we mean by understanding and where is understanding to be found? Is there anyone anywhere who understands? "Characteristic of men is a tenacious, profitless opposition to God. And this is also characteristic of the Church. The light shineth; but it shineth in real darkness" (390).

1. By "religious *a priori"* Barth is most likely referring to the claim made by Ernst Troeltsch (and others) that religion is an innate, universal human capacity or faculty alongside other ones (such as for capacities and faculties for knowledge, morality, and aesthetic judgments). Barth's criticisms of the idea of a religious *a priori* can already be found in his writings from 1911–13, during his supposedly liberal, pre-dialectical period. The earlier Barth, and the Barth of *Romans* II see in this idea of a natural, transcendental religious faculty a misunderstanding of faith as the free and contingent gift of God to individuals. Barth can also applaud Kant for not taking up such a venture. From the late 1900s to about the middle of the 1920s Barth understood revisionist Protestant theology and critical, modern philosophy to be different pursuits which nevertheless corresponded or were parallel at certain points. An example of this correspondence is that both Protestant theology and critical philosophy reject the idea of a religious *a priori*, albeit for very different reasons.

14 The Church's Hope (Rom 11)

Romans 11:1–10: God's Oneness

Barth twice asks Paul's question "did God cast off his people?" As his responses make clear, Barth interprets God's "people" to mean the church. How are we to understand Paul's straightforward denial of such a possibility, his "God forbid"? It really has to be *God* who is preventing such a possibility. We cannot set our hope on some new possibility within the world, either some new movement outside the church, or some new and improved church. The only possibility left open to us is the divine possibility that we, in our guilt, have neglected. Hope can only come after realizing the church's perilous situation, and my own, for "I also am" guilty. We can hope *because God is one*. God is both the beginning *and* the end, the one who rejects *and* elects, the suffering *and* hope of the church. He is both the hidden God (the *Deus absconditus*) *and* the one who resurrected Jesus. This oneness is our hope. Just as the light shines in the darkness and the darkness overcame it not, so too will the Lord not abandon his people.

The one God certainly is the church's hope but the church cannot misunderstand its situation. Elijah's complaints to God about the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 19:10, 14) should actually be applied to the church: "Put quite bluntly, the Church is the Church of Ahab and Jezebel" (394). We cannot deny the need of repentance by imagining that Jehovah is somewhat present as well even though it is Baal who rules the church. Elijah cannot see the remnant of the 7,000 who did not bow to Baal. These 7,000 are not men that Elijah could meet, point out, or name, for Elijah correctly gauged the situation when he lamented, "I am alone." Once again it is not the quantity of the 7,000 that is important, but what they show about the quality or way of God's acting and judging. The 7,000 "represent invisibly the whole people of God in their quality as objects of election in the midst of rejection; they represent the invisible Church of Jacob in the midst of the Church of Esau" (395). The point of the 7,000 is not to limit God's grace by giving a specific number, but to prove that God's mercy is infinite. We might catch flashes of God's invisible election, but even

these flashes are ultimately unobservable. God alone judges, saves, and justifies: "*I* have left *for myself* 7,000 men" (396). We can hope because "at this present time" God is still judging and electing, and by grace a remnant remains. A miracle takes place whenever Elijah is actually not left alone, whenever the Church of Jacob is present within the Church of Esau, whenever God does not abandon his people. Once again it is not the remnant's exact number that is important, but the fact that it exists only by grace. The remnant is invisible: "the remnant must not be looked for by direct observation; it must not be located in particular cases of piety, in particular epochs of faith, in revivals, or in reformation, where it is supposed that the grace of God breaks through; for then *grace is no more grace*" (397). Even if election, grace, justification, and salvation are invisible, they are still God's election and gospel, and thus they remain true and effective.

With Rom 11:7–10 we return to God's "No," which Barth interprets as a "No" to the church. If we are really hoping in God, then we must wrestle with a negation: Israel did not receive what it sought for. There is no worldly, visible, human righteousness to be sought after. Even so, "The search itself is not guilty—Seek ye him, and your soul shall live. We are guilty, because we forget that the search is beyond human competence" (398). But there are those who have obtained God's righteousness: the elect. The elect are not a definable quantity, they are not particular individuals that we can point out and identify, and they cannot be described in history books. In this invisible election, the church learns that the church (or "Israel" here) did not receive what it sought after. Election is a *miracle*. The church can only see that "the rest were hardened" (a claim that Barth thinks should be put over every church door, at the start of every sermon, and the title of every religious book). But "the rest" is also not a definable quantity; election and rejection are not about numbers. Everyone is "the rest" when God is not recognized, but they are still "the rest" only in relation to God. Both the elected and the rejected belong to God and are who they are through God. The Church of Esau cannot escape God's judgment. The oneness of God is the church's hope. For the God who gives mercy also says "No," the God who includes all also excludes all, the God who reveals himself

also remains hidden. But where does hope come from and how does it come from *this* God?

Romans 11:11–24: A Word to Those Outside

We return to the others, the "Gentiles," those outside the church. Those outside see the church stumbling and tripping over some unseen obstacle. "Outsiders as such have a most delicate insight into the tribulation and guilt of the Church. They perceive the divine 'No' which is set against it" (400–401). The church simply is the highest and loftiest human reality and possibility, and it may stumble, but God does not allow it to fall or to be completely destroyed. The church and the world cannot exclude each other, but God excludes both of them, for both are opposed to God. The tribulation, suffering, and stumbling of the church is a moment, an episode in the movement from rejection to election, from Esau to Jacob, from the divine "No" to the divine "Yes." The church's suffering is not its final reality, and "rejection is no more than the shadow of election. The 'No' of God is no more than the inevitable turning to the man of this world of the reverse side of His 'Yes'" (401). The church's fall means the "Gentiles'" salvation. This salvation comes into being only through divine grace. In fact, the church's pseudo-righteousness is more of an obstacle to grace than is the "Gentiles'" genuine unrighteousness. The justification of those outside, of the "Gentiles," is their resistance to the church, for in their opposition and their salvation God displays his power over and against the church. Both the church and those outside of it are in God's service. Yet the calling and election of those outside (the Gentiles, Moses, Jacob) provokes and disturbs those inside (the church, Esau, Pharaoh). The calling of those outside reminds the church that God is free. With this reminder of God's freedom, the church's suffering and guilt achieves its goal, and it regains its hope.

Paul's "how much more" returns in Rom 11:12–15. To stumble upon God, to suffer, to fall, entails the hope and possibility of rising again. The church's fall is not final and absolute. The church's suffering, losing, and falling means riches unto the world and unto the "Gentiles." It is in the cross of Christ that this wealth is revealed, for in it God reasserts his freedom and his invisibility, his power and his divinity (1:20). In the cross God alone acts and works, apart from and

above all human actions. Emptying means that fullness can come again: “His Fullness! yes! His plus quantity, His riches, His mercy, His observability. This is the goal of all the emptying of all human possession” (404). God’s fullness is infinite and eternal, it tears down barriers rather than erecting them. In God there is not election *and* rejection, those outside *and* those inside, “Gentiles” *and* “Jews,” for in Jesus Christ all are *one*. The divine fullness means that there is no “and.” All are *one* in Christ Jesus.

The “Gentiles”—those outside—need to hear of the church’s suffering and guilt, for “the moment of the rejection of those within is the moment of salvation of those who are without” (404). The rejection of those within takes place *for* those without. Without any righteousness of their own the “Gentiles” are saved in their very worldliness, as those without any claim to God’s mercy. They are a parable of all who are saved in their poverty before the God. “Israel” and the “Gentiles,” the rejected and the elected, both need each other: “On the one hand the world is the mirror in which the Church recognizes its own humiliation and its own promise. On the other hand, the Church is the mirror required by the world if it is to perceive its own relation to God” (405). Once again these are not historical groups of people (humanity cannot be divided into two parts), but dialectical factors. God’s casting away of the church is his judgment that the highest human possibility, the ventures of religion, is valueless (the proof of this claim is Barth’s contention that the church crucified Christ). With this judgment, this casting away, the reconciliation of the world to God occurs, for the old subject of religion—the subject who seeks after his or her own righteousness before God—encounters God and dies. The church’s rejection is not the final word, however, for the church can also wait and receive the impossible: reconciliation and new life in Christ.

Paul’s parable of the first piece of dough and the whole lump, the root and the branches (11:16–18), is not supposed to describe some organic or natural continuity between the church (the branches) and God (the root). The holiness of God disrupts every analogy and parable. The parable involves an agricultural impossibility: breaking off branches and grafting in new ones. Any self-respecting gardener would balk at the possibility. But the botanical impossibility is

precisely the point. The breaking off means the church's rejection, and the engrafting means the election of those outside. The parable does not suggest that those outside are somehow *deserving* of this new situation. The point of the parable is grace, wild and unexpected grace. The "Gentiles'" poverty can only be a parable of everyone's poverty before God. Paul (and Barth following him) switches to the second person, "you," to address those outside. The "Gentiles" have no reason to boast before God or feel superior to the church. For the life of the "Gentiles" also depends upon possibilities beyond its grasp, and any sense of entitlement comes dangerously close to the church's own attempts to seek after righteousness.

Barth's interpretation of 11:19–22 could be summed up in this single line: "to discover oneself in the picture of the history of salvation, and to compare oneself with others is dangerous" (410). Belief and unbelief belong to God, not to the visible, concrete world. At this point there is no reason to be "high minded," or superior, but there is reason to fear. Notions of the "assurance of salvation" misconstrue faith as a human possession or quality. God's decision to elect and reject, to be merciful or severe, is new every morning. Election always depends upon and points to God's free grace. If God is able to break away the natural branches to graft in new, wild branches, *how much more* could he re-graft the natural branches back into the tree (11:23–24)? The church's hope remains. The God who rejects and the God who elects are one and the same. Both rejection and election are inscrutable, yes, but also wonderful (for rejection is for the sake of election); "more wonderful, more inscrutable, and more incomprehensible than the election of those who ever seek God is the election of those who never seek Him" (412). Those outside the church have every reason to hope with the church and for the church, just as those within the church have every reason to hope for those outside.

Romans 11:25–36: The Goal

Barth thinks that by "mystery" Paul basically means "paradox," and he alludes to several other places in the New Testament where the word occurs (2 Thess 2:7; 1 Cor 15:51; Eph 5:32). Barth describes the entire relationship between God and creation to be one of mystery, and thus of paradox. The divine mystery stands opposite our own

wisdom and conceits. “The contrast between the Church and the Kingdom of God is infinite” (413), and no one can escape this contrast. God makes the church’s task possible. Yet God also makes this task impossible to fulfill and renders humanity guilty. By making humanity guilty, God makes himself known as the God of hope. The hardening of the church, the Church of Esau, comes from God. As the hardening of “Israel” (the church) comes from God, it is *partial* (alongside the rejected there is the invisible 7,000) and it is *provisional*, temporary, for the hardening has as its goal the fullness of the “Gentiles.” Once again these are not historical groups or persons who could be psychologically identified and analyzed, but eschatological realities; “the actual existence of Gentiles who have become Christians has, in this context, no more than a demonstrative significance” (415). From the catastrophe of the church comes the world’s redemption.

“Election” and “predestination” are the key words here. The old subject must give way to the new, the humanity that thinks it chooses God must give way to the humanity chosen by God. “This is the meaning of ‘Double Predestination,’ the revelation of the *mystery* of God, and the goal of His carefully preserved freedom” (415). This mystery also means that God reveals himself as both the God of wrath and mercy, that God has sealed off any historical, psychological, or direct way from humanity to himself. The Father is the one who resurrects Jesus and it is he who resurrects humanity. In Jesus Christ dualism becomes unity, for rejection is overcome by election.

With 11:28–32 we are reaching the conclusion of Rom 9–11. We have seen the church’s ambiguity and suffering, and have seen how hostility to God attains its highest and most refined forms in the church. The temple must be cleansed and any direct, human way to God scrubbed out. The possibility of an indirect road of mercy and forgiveness remains, and at this point God announces such a road in the election of those outside the church, the “Gentiles.” God has determined to give mercy and grace to the outsider and has decided that the outsiders’ poverty is no obstacle to his freedom and love. Yet the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (3:3; 4:6; 11:2). Fortunately the church’s message and theme has more truth than the church

itself does. The church's theme is God's freedom to dissolve and establish, to afflict and heal, to reject and elect. By rejecting the elect, God actually establishes them: "the rejection of the elect does not destroy His gifts and His calling. They are as much established by it as they are by the election of the reprobate" (419). The church and the whole world are Esau, disobedient, and are thus rejected. "But now" the rejected *are* the elect, and God's mercy towards disobedience reaches *everyone*, for everyone is disobedient. The resurrection is God turning towards the elect, and the cross is God punishing and exposing the rejected. "God has shut up all in disobedience, so that he might have mercy upon all." For Barth this verse is absolutely key to understanding Paul and Scripture more generally: "Our understanding or our misunderstanding of what Paul means—and not only Paul—by the key words, God, Righteousness, Man, Sin, Grace, Death, Resurrection, Faith, Hope, Love, the Day of the Lord, is tested by whether we do or do not understand this summary" (421). There cannot be any equivocation or difference between the first "all" and the second "all" (the master of equivocation in this context being Pascal and his *Writings on Grace*); both must be taken completely seriously.

The depths and the riches and the wisdom of God are unfathomable! In Christ the hidden God is revealed, but he is revealed as the God who is hidden. In Christ we know that there are hidden depths of riches, wisdom, life, and glory in God. God is God in that his electing and rejecting are not only inscrutable and hidden but also victorious and merciful. God cannot be bound into a relationship of obligation or mutual responsibility with humanity.[1] Famously, Paul borrows the closing doxology of this chapter from pagan authors: "for from him, and through him, and to him, are all things." Despite its pagan pedigree, Barth thinks it a fitting conclusion to the chapter, for it announces both the threat and the hope that the outsiders already know, or at least should have taken more seriously.

1. "Federal Theology," or "Covenant Theology," is a Reformed theology largely inspired by seventeenth-century Protestant scholastics that takes as its guiding principles various covenants found within Scripture, along with an emphasis upon the "federal headship" of Adam and of Christ, whereby Adam and Christ are the covenant "heads" of the covenant of works and of grace respectively. For one of Barth's more extensive engagements with Federal Theology see *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, 54–66.

15 God, Ethics, and Disturbance (Rom 12—15)

Chapter 12 of *The Epistle to the Romans* is by far the longest chapter in Barth's text.[1] Barth compresses four of Paul's chapters (Rom 12–15) into one of his own, and then moves through the material at a snail's pace. Throughout this chapter Barth offers a long passage and then takes several pages to exegete a couple of verses. The tempo of this chapter only begins to quicken somewhat with the beginning of Rom 14 and Paul's discussion of "the weak" and "the strong." Barth's chapter 12 has seven sections in total: (a) the "problem of ethics" as implied in Paul's exhortations to his readers; (b) the "presupposition" of ethics, that God is God; (c) "positive" ethical possibilities, or actions that oppose "the form of this world"; (d) "negative" ethical possibilities, or actions in line with the coming, transformed world; (e) the "great negative possibility," meaning subjection to the ruling powers; (f) the "great positive possibility," which is loving one another; and (g) the "crisis" of human freedom, independence, and detachment, or the issue of "the weak" and "the strong."

While this chapter is long and slow, and while it comes after the climax at the end of Rom 11, it is immensely important for understanding Barth's *Romans*. In this chapter Barth clarifies several of the more suggestive and cryptic exegetical decisions we have encountered. There are, for example, insights into the contrast between the invisible and the visible, time and eternity, God and human action, and grace and human thinking. It is unfortunate, then, that due to the length of this chapter I will have to move through the material fairly quickly.

Romans 12:1–2: The Problem of Ethics

Barth's commentary on Rom 12:1–2 lasts a good fifteen pages and the two verses receive their own section. The main focus is Paul's "I beseech you therefore brethren." This beseeching is a disturbance, for it demands *change*. It is a reminder that we are talking about life, about real people living in the real world. We are not discussing spiritual highs, divine substances, or an ideal world somewhere else.

Barth admits that he might have given this impression with all his talk of “God Himself, God alone” (424). The topic of discussion is life, here and now: “If our thinking is not to be pseudo-thinking, we must think about life; for such thinking is a thinking about God” (425). Our lives are neither simple nor straightforward, and our thoughts need to recognize this fact. Life’s hubbub demands dialectical thought, which is partial, broken, indirect, and biological. But even dialectical thinking itself is not the point: “break off your thinking that it may be a thinking of God; break off your dialectic, that it may indeed be dialectical; break off your knowledge of God, that it may be what, in fact, it is, the wholesome disturbance and interruption which God in Christ prepares” (426).

One of the main phrases of this section is “by the mercies of God.” Paul beseeches his readers and listeners “by the mercies of God.” This small phrase tells us that we have not begun a new conversation. Paul has been speaking all along of God’s mercies, of resurrection, forgiveness, election, faith, and grace. Natural and obvious questions like “What should I do?” and “How should we live?” have not been neglected, for the point is not abstract knowledge of God. A church that wishes to exhort, to beseech, and to instruct cannot forget that it too, like the world, is a mess of “dry bones” whose sole hope is God. The criticism of worldly and human “high places” is still an all too human criticism, and its beyond is still a beyond and a reflection of *this* world. But what is exhortation? It is not a demand, but grace. If exhortation is grace, then it must presuppose grace and not create it. Exhortation presupposes the existence of grace in all concrete things. This presupposition is not a thing alongside other things, but more like the unseen context, field, or basis for things. As human exhortation it is still all too human and its sole justification is the mercies of God.

Barth calls the true worship of God that Paul mentions “the primary ethical action,” which was called “sanctification” earlier (6:19, 22). As true worship of God is the primary ethical action, the problem of ethics is the same as the problem of dogmatics. All “secondary” ethical action must be “relative” to (or better, “related to”) this primary behavior. All human ethical behavior, both primary and secondary, can at most be a demonstration, an illustration, a pointing towards

other things, and a witnessing to God. It is a necessary demonstration, but still a demonstration or witness nonetheless. All human action or inaction, all doing and waiting, all sacrifice, can only point to God and to God's action.[2] Barth remarks, "pure ethics require—and here we are in complete agreement with Kant—that there should be no mixing of heaven and earth in the sphere of morals" (432).[3]

Paul beseeches his readers and listeners "not to fashion yourselves according to the present world" but to the coming one. Grace and the mercies of God mean the disturbance of human being and acting. The "form of this world," just like the "mercies of God," will be a refrain throughout this section. The world has a form, a certain stability, a variety of identifiable patterns. Barth subsumes these patterns and this form under the figure of Eros. No human action, including primary and secondary ethical behavior, is free of this form. There is no denial of how great the gifts, talents, and ingenuity of humanity are (notice the shout out to Mozart on p. 434; despite the allegations of some, Barth never was a despiser of culture). These gifts and talents, however, are passing away, just as the form of this world passes away (1 Cor 7:31). They genuinely are sacrifices. No human action can completely correspond to the coming, transformed world, but it might be transparent to it, or a parable of it; "human conduct is therefore in itself only—but why should we say 'only'—a parable, a token, of the action of God; and the action of God cannot occur in time; it can occur only—and again, why should we say 'only'?—in eternity" (435). No sphere or area of human life can stand outside of this crisis and disturbance. In this same way, no sphere of human life stands outside of God's grace.

Repentance (as a form of worship and sacrifice) is the primary ethical action upon which all secondary ethical action depends. Barth interprets repentance as primarily a re-thinking, a transformation of thought, a renewing of the mind. (Here again the criticisms that Barth is anti-intellectual or anti-rational fall flat.) In the midst of death and decay all around us, there is still a thinking of resurrection and grace. Thinking can participate in promise and hope. Thought can also be a sacrifice to God: "as an act of thinking it dissolves itself; it participates in the pure thought of God, and is therefore an accepted

sacrifice, living, holy, acceptable to God" (437). Thought can remember and bear witness to this crisis, for thought is able not to forget. Neither anti-intellectualism nor intellectualism is of any use here. We return to Paul and Scripture not to escape from life or from the rigors of thinking, but because our life and thought demand it.[4]

Romans 12:3–8: The Presupposition

What is the presupposition, the background, to Paul's exhortation, the mercies of God, and the renewing of one's mind? The answer is found throughout the first eleven chapters of the Epistle to the Romans: "God is God: this is the pre-supposition of ethics" (439). Human acting and thinking can be deemed "ethical" to the extent that they have this presupposition. With this presupposition the person concerned with ethics cannot regard him- or herself too highly. The tendency to seek high places, spheres of eminence, remains in place even when we are concerned with Scripture: "disillusioned with psychology and history, we betake ourselves to the Bible and undertake to fashion one more idol out of the *wisdom of death* and out of the *living God*" (439). Perhaps even the living and sovereign God in Barth's *Romans* is such a "high place"! The alternative is to think soberly, but even sober thought is not an achievement or stable form of human righteousness.

In 12:3b–6a, Barth begins a theme that will remain a rather difficult one throughout the remainder of the book—the individual, the One, the Many, and the All. He starts with denials. Paul's parable of the body does not represent a romantic, conservative, organic attitude towards the individual (as Barth sees in Roman Catholicism). The individual assumed in this parable is not one part of a larger whole (Barth uses the example of many cells making up one organism), but is a whole within her- or himself. God himself, and not any visible community, confronts and claims the individual. Certainly we need certain limitations about the individual to prevent arrogance or presumption. The most important limitation of the individual, however, is the limitation shared by all humans: that God is God and humanity is humanity.

The parable reminds the individual of the existence of others and of the community. These "others" are not "empirical others," people we can see and touch and deal with. These "others" are other

believers who have been established as individuals in Jesus Christ. The otherness we are concerned with is not visible, because it exists only in relation to Jesus Christ. By “others” we are talking about the relationship between Christ and other individuals in their relationship to Christ.

There is fellowship in this community of newly constituted individuals, but this fellowship means encountering the other in her or his complete otherness. The individual’s complete otherness comes from the presence of “the One,” Jesus Christ, within them. Barth offers us a strange definition of fellowship: “In fact, Fellowship is no concrete thing at all. It is, rather, that Primal synthesis and relationship and apprehension of all distinct concrete things which is their final unobservable Oneness” (443). Fellowship lies in the One that is beyond every individual other. In the individual, there is the One (Jesus Christ), and so the individual is not primarily one part of a larger whole, but the individual sanctified by God. The body mentioned in the parable is not a sum of individuals, or the result of individuals interacting with each other. The Body, or Jesus Christ, creates its members and unifies them. The parable’s meaning is this contrast between the Oneness of the Individual, the Body, Jesus Christ, and every other particular individual, whether considered separately or as one group. Individual believers remain individuals. They do not form a giant mass, but are in Jesus Christ, the Individual, the One, the New Man (1 Cor 12:12–13).

A series of conditional statements follow. If the crucified Christ is the measure of faith, if each individual has different gifts, if each individual puts on Christ, if the neighbor reminds us of the otherness of the wholly other and the fellowship created in the One, then high places and the false exaltation of the individual are excluded. If all of this occurs, then to think soberly becomes an ethical action because it is related to God in Christ. Even one’s own self-reflection is then directed towards God, and secondary ethical action is directed to primary ethical action.

This conversation about the One, the individual, and fellowship continues in 12:6b–8 and Paul’s list of different gifts granted to different individuals. The unity of the fellowship is possible because Christ, the One, the Individual, is in each individual. As each

individual is related to Christ, there is a unity in diversity. There are many different gifts but they are all united by their surrender and service to God. Christ is within the other and so the wholly other can meet us in the otherness of the concrete individual. The One is honored in different ways by the different gifts, but the different gifts are unified in their diversity by being directed towards God. There is, however, a "perhaps"—*perhaps* one has the gift of prophecy, *perhaps* one can teach—that serves a reminder of grace. Secondary ethical action is demonstration, witness, and illustration. With these different gifts we move from thinking to works and tasks. Each individual has a purpose, a task, and a different gift to direct back to God. "In performing his own work, each ones does the One thing, which is the Whole" (446), for the "one thing," the "Whole," is service and witness to God.

Barth proceeds through the gifts Paul mentions: prophecy, teaching, preaching, giving, ruling, and the showing of mercy. Each of Barth's considerations shares a similar structure. There is an initial skepticism and surprise at the gift or possibility Paul mentions (especially as regards teaching theology!). There is a reminder of the "perhaps" (the dependence upon grace) that characterizes the gift. If the gift recognizes its limitations and its presuppositions, then it does not become one ethical possibility among others, but the only ethical possibility.

The foundation of ethics can be found in the fellowship, in the community. The community is formed by each individual's relation to the One that unites them all. "Christ is the One-ness of each particular one, and He is therefore the Fellowship of them all" (450). But we cannot forget what came earlier in the epistle. We cannot forget the fact that we are really speaking of the *coming* church, the Church of Jacob. We should not be surprised or disappointed if this fellowship never materializes or becomes visible. At most we can hope that the Church of Esau, which is all we can see, can reflect some of the light of the coming church.

Romans 12:9–15: Positive Possibilities

By "positive ethics" or possibilities Barth means actions that oppose the erotic form of this world. Absolutely positive ethics belongs only to God, but we can still know a relative positive ethics. Our relative,

positive ethics are always stamped by *eros* and the form of this world, but they can still serve as a parable to the divine protest. *Agape* is *the* positive ethical possibility, and *the* form of opposing this world of *eros*.[5] Barth reads Paul's specific exhortations in 12:9–15 as so many instances of *agape* and protests again the erotic form of this world.

As one person's love for another, *agape* sums up all the commandments in the "Second Table."[6] As humanity's love for God, *agape* also sums up the "First Table." This love for God is expressed by worship, the primary ethical act. This primary ethical act must be translated into love towards others, for the wholly other is also the One-ness and the Other-ness of these others. Worship of God is an expression of love only insofar as it is expressed in the corresponding love of others, as a "parable of love towards God" (452). *Agape*, as the love between individuals, "is the concrete analogue of election" (452). Our talk of love includes what has been said about the divine freedom and double predestination. When God disturbs and addresses humanity, various positive possibilities arise, and love is the greatest of these. Love too stands under the divine crisis and disturbance. *Eros* deceives and comes and goes. *Agape* desires that all of our actions towards others serve God; it remembers the necessary renewing of one's mind, and it seeks to direct the Second Table back to the First. *Agape* serves the One in the others.

Paul's injunction to "abhor what is evil and cling to what is good" still refers to other people, not to things. *Eros* does not know the Other in the other and so it cannot see evil. *Agape*, however, accepts what is good and rejects what is evil; it is both sweet and bitter; it forgets and knows, forgives and punishes. Hope too can be a protest against the course of the world. Paul's "pray without ceasing," Barth argues, does not refer to how many prayers are said (quantity) or how good they are (quality), but to their being directed to God. Barth takes special interest in Paul's "rejoice with those that rejoice and weep with those that weep." Laughter and weeping, as the extremes of human emotion, are parables; "there is a laughter which represents life; and there is a weeping which signifies death. Both are pointing to the 'One'" (460). Human joy and sorrow can be

protests against the form of the world if we remember that "*sin-controlled flesh* is a parable (viii.3)" (460). Laughing with those that laugh and weeping with those that weep represents "the *krisis* in which all positive ethical possibilities are involved" (460), for here we have strong, passionate, even violent human emotions reflecting not *eros*, the form of the world, but *agape*, the form of the coming world.

Romans 12:16–20: Negative Possibilities

Negative ethical possibilities are actions in line with the coming world and the transformation of this world. By "negative" we mean actions that are a "not-doing," a "not-acting," things not willed. Absolute negative ethics belong only to God. At most negative human ethics can be a parable: "As, however, there are things willed and done by men which, in spite of their relativity, are pregnant with parabolic significance, powerful in bearing witness, capable of concentrating attention upon the 'Beyond'; so there may be things not willed and not done which are endowed with a like gravity" (461).

Barth spends some time on Paul's exhortations to "be of the same mind towards one another" and "to set one's mind on what is lowly, not on what is high." The divine disturbance seems to question more critically all high things and to be more attracted to the lowly. The resurrection is the final negation of all human positions, both positive and negative. But on the edge of this final negation we encounter an "observable parable" (462). This parable is revealed not in life's fullness, but in Christ's bodily death (the analogy of the cross!). What is lowly has a greater capacity as a parable than what is high. Earlier we encountered a "seen from the cross." Here we have a "seen from the resurrection": "Seen in the light of the resurrection, every concrete thing that we appreciate as life and fullness, as great and high, becomes primarily a parable of death; death, however, and everything that is related to death—weakness and littleness, decrease, deprivation, and lowliness—become a parable of life" (462). Christianity is suspicious of all "high things": culture, science, religion, marriage, the family, church, and the state, of both individualism and communitarianism. In all these ideals Christianity sees a parable of death.

Christianity sees a parable of life in what is lowly. Christianity is nearer to disturbance, suffering, the depressed, and revolution. It

makes sense that Christianity can praise socialism, for socialism sees Lazarus (the poor man) not with God, but at least in Abraham's bosom. Christianity "sees in the *lowly* at least a parable of life. This is because it cannot forget the meaning of resurrection" (463). "In all probability" the lowly are blessed, and the high are not blessed. We must say "in all probability" for all concrete things, whether lowly or high, can at most be parables. Christianity cannot be absolutely certain, then, regarding what is lowly or high, for what is lowly may have already become exalted and what is high may have already become debased. God remains free to elect and reject at every moment as he sees fit. Still, Christianity opposes what is high and befriends the lowly, but it does so with its own freedom.

The first, negative rule of Christian ethics is "be not wise in your own conceits" (Prov 3:7). Christianity is concerned with what is lowly, and high places are always seemingly wise but are actually haphazard conceits. "Not rendering evil for evil" is also a negative possibility in line with the coming world. Evil is the necessary condition and defining feature of all visible human action. Even our love for one another is characterized by rendering evil for evil. Instead of seeing what the other is *not* (in the One, the good) we see what the other *is*, evil. But we should not render evil to any one. The concrete forms of this attitude are non-retaliation and non-resistance. To overlook the evil of the other, to forgive the other, is an illustration and witness of what is invisible: the presence of the One in the other. Barth again sees affinities to Kant's ethics in Paul's exhortation to do what is honorable in the sight of all (Prov 3:4). As ethical action is a protest, it cannot be a private, personal, individual matter (this would ignore the presence of the One in the individual). It is not the case that others set a standard for ethical action, but that ethical action always has an audience. The One that is in everyone protests again the visible behavior of "the Many." Ethical action does not need the approval of "the Many" but it does submit to the judgment of "the All" (as the One is within everyone). Paul's "all men" or "everybody" are not visible groups, but an unobservable reality.

With Rom 12:18 and Paul's instruction to live in peace, we turn to a discussion of peace and war. Peace can be an illustration and witness that humanity is tired from its struggling with God and has

struggled itself into a deep rest. But war also seems to be a parable, for it is always war against the visible and known person of the world. War is a mistaken parable, for the visible and known person, "the old man," does not die in such a way. The only effective and true negation and death of the old subject is offered in Jesus Christ, the One in the All. Paul's exhortation to be at peace contains a reservation: "if it be possible," "as far as possible." The command to be at peace is not an absolute command, but a broken command. This reservation, "as far as possible," belongs solely to the free God. This reservation cannot mean ignoring the Sermon on the Mount (as Barth accuses certain Lutherans of doing) or the ability to preach war sermons with a good and clear conscience. We cannot occupy the high place of war, but neither can we occupy the high place of peace.

The enemy is not merely my rival or oppressor, but the person in whom I see unrighteousness, evil, and the true nature of the old subject. More significantly, however, "the enemy is the man who incites me to render evil for evil" (472). Everything I can do to my enemy is evil, for it is rendering evil for evil. The desire to enforce my righteousness and bring a higher and more refined righteousness to the enemy means that all righteousness has been lost. If conflict against my enemy is forbidden, then what should I do? Barth's response is Paul's: if the enemy is hungry, feed him; if the enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink. These are not new human possibilities, or new goals that we can set out to achieve. The love of the enemy required here is not visible, concrete behavior. Coals of fire are in order! Heaping coals of fire means that the other must be removed from the place and role of being the enemy; the One must shine forth in my enemy. God has already established the righteousness that I wanted to bring to my enemy. Christian ethics is concerned about loving the enemy, not rendering evil for evil, because Christian ethics announces a coming and transformed world.

Romans 12:21—13:7: The Great Negative Possibility

Barth offers a warning for those coming to Rom 12:21—13:7 in the hopes of finding an easy answer to social questions: "Should this book come into the hands of such persons, they ought not to begin

with the Thirteenth Chapter. Those who do not understand the book as a whole will understand least of all what we now have to say" (476).[7]

The problem of the One in the other was dealt with in the context of the enemy. Now the problem of the One in the Many is dealt with in the context of the orders and ordinances that regulate human life. Our quest to renew our minds encounters other groups of individuals —past and present—that claim to have already solved the problem of the One. We meet the church, the law, the state, and society, and their answers to "what should we do?" These realities claim to be not merely things in one's life, but the very conditions of life, the realities that give life order and direction. They are authorities that we may obey (legitimism) or whose authority we may deny (revolution). We find a direct denial of both legitimism and revolution in Romans.

We are dealing with "the great negative possibility." It is great because we are not dealing with individuals, but with a plurality of individuals. It is negative because we are not concerned with "positive" duties and practices, but with the requirements and duties that should not be broken (negative behavior, not-doing). Barth is anxious about both revolutionaries and conservatives, but he is more worried about the revolutionaries, as Paul's epistle seems to imply revolution. The revolutionary seems closer to God, and is thus more dangerous. Throughout Romans we have heard about parables of death, divine negations, criticisms, human unrighteousness, and sin. In revolution this criticism is misunderstood and turned into a positive, justifiable, human program.

The problem of the enemy seems relatively small in comparison to the problem of the evil and unrighteousness found in human orders. Revolution is born from this perception of the evil present in all human orders. The overthrowing of a corrupt order in order to install a better, newer one is completely understandable, just as is hostility against the enemy (12:9). It seems, though, that the revolutionary is overcome by evil and forgetful of the rightful place of the One. Likewise, the revolutionary always works with pre-existing, human possibilities, ones open to humans living in a world characterized by death and law. (The legitimist is also overcome by evil, just in a different way. The legitimist attempts to equate the revolution and

true order with what already and currently exists.) What the revolutionary really wants are impossible possibilities like forgiveness and resurrection, in other words, Jesus Christ. The revolutionary is being criticized, but this does not mean the legitimist is vindicated: “there is here no word of approval of the existing order; but there is endless disapproval of every enemy of it” (481). The only possibilities left open for the revolutionary are negative: *not*-doing, *not* becoming incensed, *not* assaulting, *not* demolishing. God is the only one who can overcome the evil and unrighteousness of the present order.

Paul’s exhortation that everyone is to be in subjection to the ruling powers is a purely negative possibility. This subjection may take the form of specific, concrete acts and practices, but it primarily means to withdraw, *not* to be resentful, *not* to revolt. The conflict of the revolutionary with the existing order is actually the conflict between evil and evil. The revolutionary simply cannot enact the needed judgment, negation, and transformation of what exists. (Barth offers a small mathematical example of distribution to illustrate this point.) The exhortation to be in subjection is a criticism of all human reckoning. The way to undermine the existing order is to recognize it, without illusion or sense of triumph. “State, Church, Society, Positive Right, Family, Organized Research, &c., &c., live of the credulity of those who have been nurtured upon vigorous sermons-delivered-on-the-field-of-battle and upon other suchlike solemn humbug. Deprive them of their *pathos*, and they will be starved out” (483). Revolution, by contrast, provokes the existing order into higher forms of self-defense. Living these ordinances will undermine them inasmuch as evil and dysfunction perishes. To be in subjection is not a positive action, but it is to be devoid of purpose.

Paul’s claim that “there is no power but from God” seems to affirm the existing order. This interpretation forgets everything that was just said about subjection. We have to be careful, then, as to who this specific God is: “It is therefore evident that the emphatic word ‘God’ must not be so interpreted as to contradict the whole theme of the Epistle to the Romans” (484). “God” here cannot mean some empty metaphysical concept, or some generic reservoir of power. “God” in this context means the same God we have met throughout the

epistle: the Creator and Redeemer, the one who elects and rejects, the known and unknown God. Every human power is measured by reference to *this God*. God too is their beginning and their end, their "No" and their "Yes," the one who elects and rejects. The epistle itself seems to share the revolutionary's outlook; the discussion of the existing powers comes right after the discussion concerning the enemy and not overcoming evil with evil! Like every other concrete thing, the existing order is a parable; it is a parable of the Order that does not exist. While evil, the present order can also be a parable of the good. As God is Creator, the powers that be are from God, and even ordained by God (surely a problem for the revolutionary). Revolution cannot become a human high place; it must also be deprived of its zeal and attraction. Subjection means that vengeance is not our affair. The legitimists, who might feel comforted at this point, should be warned that revolution has also been ordained as evil so that it can be a witness and parable to the good.

Paul's claim that whoever resists the existing order is resisting God is a remark *against* revolution, not *for* the existing order. It comes from the presupposition that *revolution belongs to God*. Revolutionaries need to learn that the meaning of the divine revolt is order, not disorder, that the One cannot be forced to appear, that humility must replace contempt. Overcome by evil, the revolutionary faces judgment. To revolutionaries the rulers are indeed a terror, a source of anger, resentment, and anxiety. The divine element in the existing order is its ability to bring humanity's evil conduct under divine judgment. The existing order cannot be a terror to good works, since good works do not have a temporal existence, but take place where no existing order could possibly reach them. The "good citizen" tolerates the existing powers, aware that there can be good amongst the relative evils and that they are shadows to some other brighter reality. The existing order is a minister of God, but so is the revolutionary to those who remain undisturbed and unpunished. Subjection serves the good when it banishes romanticism from social life, when it separates God from the course of life, and when it continually offers questions and negations.

All of our actions and positions within the present order are dangerous and questionable, whether we support or revolt against

the existing order. The actions of the existing order may meet with the revolutionaries' sword, just as the revolutionaries meet the existing order's sword. In both cases we meet our destiny and the divine wrath against human unrighteousness. Evil does not simply befall us in the existing order, for we ourselves are evil. We can see a minister for the good in the evil done to us by the existing powers. Paul's conclusion that his readers pay tribute is strange, for he is instructing them to do what they were doing anyway. Rulers are indeed God's priests. But they are priests only because they represent the unrighteousness of humanity, both in their very persons and in their unrighteous actions towards us. Paul's remarks no doubt seem unsatisfactory and incomplete as regards the question of the evils of the existing order and of revolution. Perhaps their incomplete and unsatisfying character represents the great negative possibility of God beyond all of our own questions.

Romans 13:8–14: The Great Positive Possibility

With Rom 13:8–14 we turn to the great positive possibility: *loving one another*. If subjection was the great negative possibility of not-doing, then love is the great positive possibility of doing. "Owe nothing to anyone" means non-resistance, not-doing, not entering the field of evil. What we do owe to everyone, though, is love. With love we return to positive possibilities (12:9–15), meaning actions not conforming to this world (12:2). Love is the great positive possibility, for it is not a single action alongside other ones, but the sum of all positive possibilities. To love one another means that we cannot wish to maintain the present order. Love makes the reactionary's position impossible, just as subjection made the revolutionary's position impossible.

Love appeared at crucial moments when discussing the relationship between God and humanity (5:5, 8:28ff, 12:9). Love lies beyond law and religion. It is not an act of the will or the intellect, but the invisible presupposition of everything visible. Love is the outpouring of the Spirit (5:5), the reality by which humanity knows God as the unknown God. Love is being touched by God's freedom and it establishes the particularity of every individual. Love is the more excellent way (1 Cor 12:31) and the fulfilling of the law. "Our conversations about God are always interrupted conversations" (494),

for when we think to answer our question, “what should we do?” God interrupts and answers, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18).

In the paragraphs that follow Barth emphasizes and considers one word in the exhortation “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” The neighbor presents to us the riddle of our existence, our finitude, our sin, and our death. In the figure of the *neighbor* a decision must be made regarding whether God is a mere phantom of metaphysics, a figment of our imagination, or if he is the unknown God who has spoken to us in Jesus Christ. Can we hear the voice of the One in the other, can we see the wholly Other in the other? In loving the neighbor as *myself*, I realize that not only am I one with God, but I am also one with the neighbor. In Jesus’ words “Go and do likewise”—after his parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:37)—we are instructed to be the neighbor. The neighbor is the answer to the question, “Who am I?” *Love* is not only the meeting of one person with another, but it is God meeting God. Love is the One in me meeting the very same One in the other: “Love is always the disclosing of the One in the other, in this and that and every other” (495). Love sees in the other the parable of the One to be loved. It sees in every concrete, temporal “You,” the eternal “You” that makes the “I” possible (12:3b–6a). Love is the love of concrete individuals only when it shows no preference among individuals. The command, the “shalt,” means that love of the neighbor is the duty of the new human being. In love humanity resumes “doing” after having been instructed what “not to do.” Love is the doing that sums up and fulfills all not-doing.

Love does not seek or ask for evil against the neighbor. Love overcomes evil and so it is beyond reaction and revolution; “Love is that denial and demolition of the existing order which no revolt can bring about” (496). Love is the reverse of everything concrete and existing because it is the presupposition of everything. Love does not contradict, does not compete, and thus cannot be defeated. To love means to protest the course of the world, to love God, and to renew one’s mind (12:2). Love fulfills the law.

In the course of Barth’s interpretation of Rom 13:10–14 we are given several helpful comments about time and eternity. We are also told when and where human love takes place. Paul exhorts us to “know

the time." Love is an unparalleled action that demands an unparalleled occasion or time. The possibility to love emerges when time is like eternity and eternity like time. Between the times, between the future and the past, there is a Moment that is not a moment. This Moment is the eternal Moment, the eternal Now, when both the past and future stop. In the eternal Now individuals both live and die, are created and are created anew. Time cannot be reversed; the future approaches and the past recedes (for those with philosophical interests, this is an "A-theory," or a "tensed" theory of time). Time is a parable of that hidden, invisible present between the past and the future: "Facing as it does, both ways, each moment in time is a parable of the eternal 'Moment'" (497). Every moment carries the secret of revelation within itself, and so known time, when it is understood in its broader significance, can be the occasion for love.[8] Love occurs in the Now created by revelation. Love is the great positive possibility; it is a command, and it is the final and highest relationship between time and eternity. We love and act knowing the time, knowing that our action can only be a witness to Christ's victory.

We live and love in a succession of time or we do not live and love at all. Likewise, "Jesus was the Christ, not somewhere outside this flux but within it, not outside this succession of moments but within it" (498). There must be an occasion in time for us to love and for us to know God. Knowing the Moment must occur within one of our moments. The present is the time for us to wake from our sleep. Every time, even the time of "when we believed" (3:28), is different from the eternal Now that lives within every time. All concrete things, even faith, belong to the time of sleeping. The hour of awakening, of Christ's presence, of the Last Hour, is not a moment in time, not even the last and final moment. The New Testament speaks of an End that "is no temporal end, no legendary 'destruction' of the world, or 'telluric' or cosmic catastrophe" (500). The End is so very much the End that it is, in a way, present to all times, for even Abraham saw it; in earlier language, the End is non-historical. We are speaking in parables, and so we cannot make the End into a temporal reality: "neither should we join the sentimentalists in expecting some magnificent or terrible *finale*, nor should we comfort ourselves for its

failure to appear by embracing the confident frivolity of modern protestant cultured piety" (501). The eternal Moment cannot enter into the moment, but the moment can become a parable of the Moment. As conditioned and qualified by the Moment, the moment has its own dignity and importance, and is replete with ethical demands. We should "know the time," await the appearance of Jesus Christ, repent, convert, think of eternity, and love.

The kingdom of God is not too far away or too transcendent but too near, urgent, and pressing: "Far too nigh at hand is the Kingdom of God, far too near is the overhanging wall of eternity—in every stone and flower, in every human face!—far too oppressive is the boundary of time—*momento mori!*—far too insistent and compelling is the presence of Jesus Christ as the turning point of time" (501). The realm of evil in which we live and the kingdom of God seem like two circles that overlap at many points, but we firmly remain in only one circle: "clear, direct, observable human righteousness has not appeared. The world is the world and men are men" (502). Nevertheless, we are instructed to put on the armor of light, for there also remains the great possibility of being clothed with what God can provide.

Romans 14:1—15:13: The Crisis of Freedom and Detachment

Barth sees in Paul's conversation about "the weak" and "the strong" a warning to those who feel secure and satisfied after having read and dealt with Paul. Having read Paul, we might think that we now know where we are and how we are to live. Paul has presented to us a way of life that could be described as "free detachment." It seems detached because it comes only from God and the divine disturbance. It seems free because it depends upon God's freedom. Those who live freely, detached from anything besides God, are "the strong" (15:1). "The weak," by contrast, are those Reformers and ascetics who continue to work hard (and want others to work hard!) in order to please God.

No sooner, however, than we have heard the divine "Yes" to the free and detached, then we hear the divine "Stop!" Having read and understood Paul we are again disturbed and thrown into crisis: "Paul against 'Paulinism'! The Epistle to the Romans against the point of view adopted in the Epistle! The Freedom of God against the

manner of life which proceeds inevitably from our apprehension of it!" (504). The free and the strong, the genuinely Pauline, are also questioned and disturbed. Freedom is indeed the way of life described and demanded in Romans, but this freedom belongs to God alone. The strong cannot use Paul to attack others: "The man therefore who, armed with the knowledge of the Epistle to the Romans, himself advances to the attack, has thereby failed to perceive the attack which the Epistle makes upon him" (505). Once again it is the other, the neighbor, who represents this great disturbance.

The significance of "the strong" does not reside in the free and detached individual, but in directing our attention to the One in the particular; the significance of the strong and free individual is fellowship. The work of the strong is criticism, Socratic questioning. Even so, the strong exert their influence by remaining within the community and within fellowship; "He wins his victory by always conforming. He inaugurates the great divine disturbance by disturbing nothing at all" (507). The strong descend from every high place, including the high place of Romans, but they do so inconspicuously.

The strong should be humbled by the realization that their position is not a stable position, for being strong is actually an illusion. "The weak" at least have a concrete position, and are concerned with concrete, visible acts, and deeds. The "vegetable eaters" come in many different forms; they are not the historically or psychologically weak for they include within their ranks some of the noblest people within history. Paul accuses and exhorts both the weak and the strong. The vegetable eaters have the advantage as far as accusations go, for they are the ones visibly concerned with proper and correct human action. But Paul is primarily concerned with the strong. The strong ought to know that God has extended and maintained fellowship with the weak. To believe in *justitia forensis* means knowing that one cannot take pride in one's knowledge. There is no advantage in being either weak or strong. There is only one advantage: divine election. Election could be extended to any and all vegetable eaters. The strong should be able to realize that the weak are still acting unto the Lord and have been affected by the

divine disturbance. The strong must accept the claim of the weak to be serving the Lord, no matter how much of an idol the strong think is being served. The action of the weak can be a witness, but we cannot suppose that eating vegetables is more pleasing to God than not eating.

The Lord always remains the judge, both in our life and in our death. Neither rigorism nor freedom is justified in itself. The weak are unaware of this. As our life and death stand upon double predestination, some are weak (implying rejection) and some are strong (implying election). But it is God who elects and rejects, and so the strong (the elect) have no right against the weak (rejected). The one who has faith, knowledge, hope, and love still has no advantage: "As the faithfulness of God, faith justifieth; as the knowledge of God, human knowledge is true; as the hope of God, hope is our salvation; as the love of God, love is still the more excellent way. But all this is true only in so far as there emerges from the action of the man who believes, knows, hopes, loves, no merit or right or claim" (514). We can only see concrete action and behavior and so we do not know whether the election of the weak is present in their rejection.

The theoretical attitude that the free and detached might adopt towards the rigorist has been criticized above. In 14:13–15 we hear a warning against the practical application that might tempt the strong. To judge another person according to Paul's epistle would mean usurping the place of God as judge, as the one who elects and rejects. God certainly places stumbling blocks and offers occasions for falling, but he does so in order to elect, in order to offer hope and promise. Humans judge not to liberate, make alive, or elect, but to bind, kill, and reject.

The strong realize that the assumption of the weak, the rigorist, and the ascetic is false. In Christ any notion of taking small steps towards human righteousness has been done away with. Everything, not just this or that thing, is impure before God. Repentance depends upon each person following her or his own path. No one should deprive another of the possibility of repenting. I no longer walk in love when I forget that the One is in the other; that Christ is also in the weak. Christ died for the neighbor and so I cannot harbor

any sense of superiority over my neighbor. Our freedom can only be good when it is the freedom of the kingdom of God. Strong Pauline freedom cannot be seen as important in itself. “How questionable, how ludicrously accommodating, nay rather, how precariously and hypocritical is Paulinism, if its main theme be—what is undoubtedly the main theme of modern Protestantism!—the hideous, mistaken idea that men are justified by their secret knowledge of God” (519). The weak would be right in their complaints if this were the message of Paul’s Romans.

The strong should support the weak, and work for the good of the neighbor (15:1–6). Supporting the weak cannot become another opportunity to rejoice secretly in one’s own faith. Paul does not recommend free detachment for one’s own sake, but for the sake of others. It is not an act of the will, an achievement, or a positive program. Protestantism is lost as long as it thinks that it has a stable place or position, that it is a positive something, even if only as a rival to Rome. The strong do not have rivalries, for they remember the One in the others. God does not merely teach and instruct us, God gives so that we might know that fellowship exists even in the party and personal strife within the community.

Further Reading

Karl Barth. “The Christian Community and the Civil Community.”
———. “Church and State.”
———. *Church Dogmatics* III/2, 274–85 (for a different take on *agape* and *eros*).
———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/4: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation (Fragment)*.

1. In *Romans* I chapters 12–13 are included in one chapter called “The Will of God” (“Der Wille Gottes”), while chapters 14–15 are called “The Movement” (“Die Bewegung”).

2. This line is highly similar to what Barth will eventually argue regarding the difference between baptism with water and with the Spirit in *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 *(Fragment)*. In this late work Barth maintains that baptism with water is a free, good, and true human action that testifies to the divine action of baptism with the Spirit.

3. Here again we can see the correspondence or parallelism (not identity) between critical philosophy and theology.

4. It is hard not to see this remark as autobiographical, for Barth himself was indeed pushed back into Paul and his Epistle to the Romans by the pressures of life. We should also remember, however, that these pressures almost threw Barth back into Kant or Hegel, and it did throw him into Overbeck, Plato, Kierkegaard, and Dostoevsky.

5. We can be fairly certain that Barth had not yet read Anders Nygren’s massively influential *Eros and Agape* when writing *Romans* I or II. The two-volume Swedish original, *Den kristna kärlekstanken genom tiderna. Eros och Agape*, was first published in 1930 and 1936 respectively.

6. As the commandments are numbered differently by different groups, the commandments that belong to the “First Table” and those that belong to the “Second Table”

are different as well. Typically, though, the first three (sometimes four) commandments dealing with God are placed within the First Table. The last seven (or six) commandments dealing with one's neighbor are placed within the Second Table.

7. For Karl Barth on revolution and subjection, see Ellul, *Christianity and Anarchism*, 86–88; and Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus*.

8. The presence, "between the times," of salvation, the "Moment" is the existential grasping of the revelatory *Urgeschichte* in Christ.

16 The Apostle, the Community, and the Epistle to the Romans (Rom 15—16)

Romans 15:14–33, 16:1–24: The Apostle and the Community

PAUL'S MESSAGE IS OLD and familiar. It is neither a systematic theology nor fundamentally about Paul or Paul's authority. Paul is not Christ, and Christ is not a book. We do not believe in Paul, or even in what Paul wrote. We only believe in God; such "is precisely the thesis of the Epistle, the thesis of 'Paulinism.' And by this thesis Paulinism is itself dissolved, long before opponents have found sufficient breath to utter their anxious warnings against it" (527). "Paulinism" is not a coherent system. Paul's letter does not appeal to authority, to inner or religious experience, or to conscience. It appeals to the *sensus communis* (which does not really mean "common sense" as the phrase is typically meant now in English). We could do worse than simply use the definition Barth takes from Oetinger: the "universal feeling for truth." Paul's Romans speaks to the One in the All. It says what everyone already knows and has heard.

Paul has written boldly. Looking to Paul's boldness, Barth asks, "Must every straightforward, peaceable, practical, historical, psychological, friendly via media be abandoned? Must we always choose the most precipitous knife-edge? We answer 'No, certainly not!'" (528). What Paul describes is not a normal course of behavior or thinking that everyone could simply adopt and put into a program. "We repeat once more that in the end Paulinism condemns itself" (529) no less than the strong, detached, and free Pauline person was also condemned and dissolved. Paul's Romans is concerned about *God*, not about any of our normal religious concerns and questions. It is concerned with *Christ crucified*. Following Paul means speaking boldly, but "in some sort," for we cannot put into words what is being expressed here. Paul's Romans is abnormal and revolutionary. But it is not "abnormal" as simply contrasted with normal, everyday life. It is certainly strange, but it speaks about a crisis and catastrophe that is not one thing, but that affects everything, including the Epistle to the Romans itself.

Theology's theme is grace. Other sciences may attempt to deal with grace, but theology remains an irritant to them all. Paul is a minister to the Gentiles, meaning that theology speaks to the concrete, visible, specific person, and it speaks of the invisible One that is in everyone. Theology is "totally unpractical" and "non-religious" because it is concerned about the meaning of religion. It is interesting that Barth argues that theology is not primarily a service to the church, as this will in fact be his position fairly quickly and for quite a long time. Theology speaks not to the church, but to the "Gentiles." Theology can at best remain at the outskirts of the university for it speaks of a crisis that affects the university as well. Theology is "scientific" (an important issue in German-language theology) when it is objective, meaning when it conforms to its object, when it follows its own object. Barth invokes the notion of "courage" in asking theology to stick with its theme, not to be afraid of its own particularity, and not to live off the remains and scraps of other disciplines.[1]

Any glory we might ascribe to Paul is taken away as Paul places his own glory in Jesus Christ (15:17–21). Paul in himself cannot be of any interest to us, only Paul-in-Jesus-Christ. We can, however, consider Paul as a historical figure, as a part of humanity's religious history. At the historical level, we might even think that Paul probably wasn't too pleasant or endearing of a person. The same is true of Paul's gospel. The fact that his gospel has survived and has been "effective" is surely due to his refusal to build on any foundation other than God in Christ crucified. Paul himself is non-historical (just look at his use of Old Testament passages!), his thought is hardly very stable or coherent, and he doesn't seem to care for "Christ according to the flesh," or the publicly available knowledge about Jesus' life. Yet even Paul's strangeness is not significant in and of itself, "but it may be a significant strangeness, that is to say, it may bear witness to a strangeness which is wholly different" (533).

With Rom 15:22–29 and 30–33 we are given a quick account of Paul's missionary journeys. With Rom 16:1–6 we are given a small window into a different time and place, a small world of suffering, mutual assistance, and courage. Here is a good place to ask about what kind of life could possibly correspond to what we have just read.

What would life be like if lived according to Paul's Romans? Barth's answer to this question is simply to point to this small window of first-century life, but we could just as well point around at what we ourselves see today: "Here is the simple 'life' which we have so often missed. The answer to our question is provided by the readers of the Epistle, each in his own way, to this very day" (535). Paul's Romans would have been incomplete if it were not addressed to specific people in specific times. It is fascinating to think that there was a very small group of people who would have understood Romans, and for whom Romans would have been a valuable and treasured letter. These people probably form the most interesting and problematic enigmas of Paul's letter to the Romans, more so than any other historical questions we might think to ask. In 16:17–20 we read one last and urgent appeal not to be deceived. Beware not only the wares of religion, but beware of yourselves! Put on the remembrance of the Lord so that one does not drown in a sea of different opinions and options.

Barth keeps 16:21–24; indeed, he closes his book with these verses. Strangely enough, Barth's reasons to omit the closing doxology, or praise, in 16:25–27 are found much earlier, on pages 522–23. Barth maintains that the original versions of this manuscript did not have these last two verses, but that they were added to manuscripts that stopped at 16:23 to give the letter a more liturgical conclusion.

1. The issue of theology's particularity (*Einzigartigkeit*) or independence (*Selbständigkeit*) had a strong advocate in Herrmann (i.e., theology must not be absorbed into other disciplines—history, literature, cultural studies, philosophy, religious studies).

Conclusion

After Barth's The Epistle to the Romans

BARTH FINISHED HIS *EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS* in September 1921. Soon afterwards he also finished his pastorate in Safenwil, and in October that same year the Barths moved to Göttingen, where Barth had been offered an honorary university post. Barth actually started teaching at Göttingen shortly before the publication of *Romans* II and the subsequent furor it generated.

The publication of Barth's early lectures from Göttingen have given a much richer and more interesting picture of Barth after the release of *Romans* II. The Barth of *Romans* II was traditionally associated with three fiery and heavily dialectical addresses given in the summer of 1922: "The Problems of Ethics Today," "The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching," and "The Word of God as the Task of Theology." With material from Barth's Göttingen courses now available we have Barth the university lecturer alongside the thrashing and prophetic Barth. We can see, for instance, Barth reading and commenting upon Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* and *Psychopannychia*, working through Schleiermacher's Christmas sermons, giving some shout-outs to religious socialism while dealing with the Epistle of James, discovering more fully the Protestant traditions, and adopting his Reformed heritage more and more as his own. Barth's first semesters at Göttingen were a flurry of academic activity, with Barth often writing lectures late into the night and feeling rather insecure about his academic and professional training and background. While Barth was making his way through a good swathe of historical and exegetical material very quickly, these lectures still show Barth to be a curious, sympathetic, and sometimes bemused reader of past texts. We have, in effect, a pastor catching up on his historical and exegetical theology in rapid succession.[1]

Barth's sense of academic inadequacy was only compounded in early 1924 when he had to start preparing lectures in systematic theology for the upcoming summer semester. It is amusing to think that the man so famous for his *Church Dogmatics* initially felt so

overwhelmed and uncertain about how to go about doing systematic theology. Here he found the Reformed and Lutheran scholastics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—as mediated through two collections of longer quotations from their texts—immensely helpful as dialogue partners.[2] Barth found the Protestant scholastics helpful for the way in which Scripture was the air they breathed, the church was their clear and immediate context, and their theology was academically respectable and rigorous. In effect Barth found these Protestant scholastics more immediately helpful than either Schleiermacher or Ritschl, although one should add that Schleiermacher and Ritschl had given Barth several insights that he would never abandon. Barth truly had to learn to sink or swim, for he gave more lectures in dogmatics over two more semesters in Göttingen and finished his last lecture series at the University of Münster.[3]

Barth was as unsatisfied with his initial foray into systematics as he was with the first edition of *Romans*. He revised his dogmatic lectures for publication, releasing the first sections as the 1927 *Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* ("Christian Dogmatics in Brief"). Again dissatisfied with this version, Barth revised his lectures yet again into *Church Dogmatics*. However, it is not the case that Barth "started over," as the continuity between the *Christliche Dogmatik* and the *Church Dogmatics* vastly outweighs the still undeniable differences. Aspiring theologians take note: Barth wrote and delivered two different sets of systematic theology before ever beginning his *Church Dogmatics*, and even then he recycled a great deal of material from his earlier two attempts.

Questioning Barth

We have already encountered some of the early criticisms of *Romans* I and II when we dealt with the prefaces. Two of the dominant issues were whether *Romans* I and II are actually biblical commentaries, and not impressionistic sketches loosely inspired by Paul's Romans, and the nature of Barth's relationship to historical criticism. Subsequent criticisms have questioned the work's implied soteriological universalism, its understanding of time and eternity, the relationship between God's action and human action, the distinction between history and the non-historical, its account of election, law

and gospel, its monism (whereby God becomes and is everything, even creation) and its dualism (whereby God and creation are drastically separated and unrelated).

There are many more questions we could put to Barth. How is the law (or religion) both a “negative impress” of revelation and a human possibility? What exactly is the nature of Jesus Christ’s resurrection by the Father (especially in Barth’s exegesis of Rom 5:8–11)? What good is the criticism of religion if in the end we have to be religious anyway? When, where, and how does human salvation exactly take place? What happens to Paul’s letter when “Gentiles” are understood simply as “those outside” of the church and “Israel” becomes the church? Does Barth have to ascribe a bizarrely acute knowledge of God to “those outside” because he misses the fact that Paul is most likely referring to Gentile God-fearers (who worshipped the God of Israel), or Gentile Christians? What is the relationship between the two accounts of Adam’s Fall in Rom 5 and 7? Is Barth’s exegesis of Paul’s parable of the body in terms of the One (Jesus Christ), the otherness of the other (the neighbor), and the All (everyone in their particular relationship to Christ) convincing and coherent? Has Barth missed the significance of Paul’s discussion of “the strong” and “the weak” by making them into historical types and not once living and breathing historical groups in Rome?

Barth himself could add some questions and concerns to this list. In a speech from 1956 entitled, “The Humanity of God,” Barth looks back upon his earlier work and observes: “How we cleared away! And we did almost nothing but clear away! Everything which even remotely smacked of mysticism and morality, or pietism and romanticism, or even of idealism, was suspected and sharply interdicted or bracketed with reservations which sounded actually prohibitive! What should really have been only a sad and friendly smile was a derisive laugh! Did not the whole thing frequently seem more like the report of an enormous execution than the message of the Resurrection, which was it real aim?”[4]

Barth is also clearly amused with the new and shocking expressions they invented or took over from others: the “wholly other,” the “infinite qualitative distinction,” the void and the vacuum, mathematical points, tangents touching circles, and so on. What the

time period needed to hear, Barth argues, was the *deity* of God in the face of an anthropocentric, religious, and humanist theology more concerned with the pious person than with the righteous God. Barth admits, however, that perhaps the *humanity* of God was obscured in their criticism and reaction. What Barth means by the "humanity of God" is simply Jesus Christ, for in this man we learn that God's deity includes his humanity. Despite still thinking that he was in the right, Barth concedes that at the time, "The problem of ethics was identified with man's sickness unto death; redemption was viewed as consisting in the abolition of the creatureliness of the creature, the swallowing of immanence by transcendence and in conformity with these the demand for a faith like a spring in the abyss, and more of the like!"[5] While I am uncertain as to whether these descriptions are accurate, more than a few readers of *Romans* II would no doubt agree with Barth's assessment.

Perhaps the most popular criticism of *Romans* II involves its dialectics, and not simply for their contribution to making Barth's theology difficult to understand. The issue is what consequences dialectics have for theology and exegesis. Erich Przywara, for instance, made the rather sophisticated accusation that Barth's grandiose and sweeping dialectics have two related consequences.[6] First, dialectics suck all of the substance and stability out of creation; the world is simply erased before God. Second, when creation loses all its own reality then God becomes everything, as God rushes in to fill the void or vacuum where creation once stood. Barth's dialectics have both of these results because they set God and the world within an antagonistic and competitive relation. Dialectics mean that God's glory comes *at the expense of* creation's own glory; "more God" means "less creation." Hans Urs von Balthasar made a similar point. He argued that the dialectics of *Romans* II presuppose an identity between God and the world that was clearer in *Romans* I. He notes, "The apparently new Kierkegaardian and Reformed pathos of the absolute distance between God and creation has a hidden, not explicitly stated presupposition that is none other than original identity"; and again, "Only on the background of an original, presupposed identity is the whole dialectic of the *Epistle to the Romans* possible."[7] It is difficult to know how to go about responding

to these criticisms, particularly as they stray so far from the specifics of Barth's interpretation of Paul and Paul's letter to the Romans. They are, nonetheless, prescient and persistent criticisms that deserve some type of response.

Of some help here is Barth's own rejoinder to a similar accusation. One of the first to raise the question of dialectics and its effect upon the relationship between God and the world was none other than Adolf von Harnack.[8] Barth's dialectics, argues Harnack, sever any connection between humanity and faith, or between the world and God. Barth responds, "I do not cut off, but I fight against every continuity between here and there; I hold to a dialectical *relation* that neither puts into practice nor maintains that there is an *identity* here."[9] Barth elaborates upon this "dialectical relation" by bringing up the idea of "*Gleichniswert*" (he emphasizes the *Gleichnis*-part in the original), or "parable-like quality," between divine and human speaking and acting, and between the corruptible and the incorruptible.[10] While this is a *dialectic* relation, it is still a genuine *relation*; Barth has not "cut off" the world from God. Yet Barth also uses the notion of parable to differentiate God and the world, emphasizing the parable between the creaturely and the divine is "*only* a parable."[11] Our speaking and thinking about this dialectical relationship must be done indirectly, in parables, in hope, and without being able to assess comprehensively or speculatively some abstract and impersonal relationship between God and the world. In the language of *Romans* II, this is an "invisible relation" (178). There is, then, still no continuity, identity, or directness here between history and revelation, or the world and God.

The identity charge is worth pursuing further. In *Romans* II Barth certainly speaks of an *Einheit* ("oneness," "union," or "unity") between God and humanity in the Garden or in the Holy Spirit, but never of an *Identität*. In fact, the identification (*Identifizierung*) of oneself with God means separation from God (45), while the distinction between God and humanity means their union (*Einheit*) (114). Barth uses the term "*Identität*" when speaking of the identity between the old and new subject or between the God of Jacob and the God of Esau. The closest Barth comes positing an identity between God and humanity also occurs when he discusses divine

and human love being identical in Christ (329). Almost immediately, however, Barth adds that *we* cannot create this identity or even think it. Von Balthasar is, in fact, quite close to the truth on this issue as there certainly are moments of close union and immediacy in *Romans* I and II. He errs, however, in the fact that "identity" is too overloaded and unhelpful of a term for the presence and faithfulness of God towards creation, and the unity between God and the world that Barth talks about in *Romans* II.

We can also list further instances in *The Epistle to the Romans* of the "dialectic *relation*" that Barth was telling Harnack about. For instance, even human religion is flanked by and depends upon God's election and righteousness (129–30). Barth can call the claim "the positive relation between God and man, which is the absolute paradox, veritably exists" (94) the theme of the gospel. When speaking of the Fall Barth will argue that the "primal union" between God and humanity can be disrupted but never broken, for this primal union is nothing other than the Creator's continual faithfulness to creation (249). He calls Jesus the "document" that guarantees our union with God (277). He insists on the "relativity" of creation in the sense that everything created is "related" to God. Many other examples of this dialectical relation could be given. It should be noted that for Barth a *completely independent* creation would not be a sign of a healthy "doctrine of creation," but probably a desire to withdraw oneself from God. Additionally, thinking that there is any *identity* between God and the world would be either a sinful usurpation of divinity or making a god out of something within the world (rendering the incorruptible the parable of the corruptible).

In fact, I think what some of the criticisms of dialectics are getting at is not really an issue of dialectics or analogy at all. As we have seen, *Romans* II has both a fair amount of dialectics and a fair amount of analogies. Additionally, in *Romans* II both often serve the same purpose of distinguishing *and* relating God and the world. Barth sometimes uses analogy to distance God and the world, and sometimes uses dialectics to relate God and the world. My guess, then, is that the real culprit behind these criticisms is not the presence of dialectics or the absence of analogy, but Barth's "consistent eschatology," or at least the dialectics and analogies

involved in Barth's consistent eschatology. It is this *exegetical* decision (and not simply that God is too "transcendent" or "distant") that can make a sinful and rebellious world seem so devoid of God and eternity, and so helpless and insubstantial in comparison to the glory of God and the new world.

Rephrasing the debate about dialectics and analogies in terms of Barth's consistent eschatology has a couple advantages. First, it points us towards what Barth is actually doing and trying to express with his dialectics and analogies. Second, with Barth's consistent eschatology and its related dialectics and analogies at stake (especially those involving the time-eternity distinction), the task is to assess whether this eschatology can actually provide a good exegesis of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. If Barth's consistent eschatology is wrong, then the definitive answer to Barth is to offer a better and more coherent exegesis of Paul, not berate him for using dialectics. Nevertheless, I do think there is much to question in Barth's consistent eschatology. Finally, readers who either intensely like or strongly dislike this aspect of *Romans* II should note that Barth soon began to move away from this position.[12]

There is certainly much to criticize, question, and doubt in Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*. It is indeed a flawed and sometimes bewildering work. Nevertheless, I think that these criticisms are most fruitful, productive, and appropriate, when they tackle Barth's *actual exegesis* of Paul's letter. This type of challenge to *The Epistle to the Romans* takes seriously Barth's contention that the work is a biblical commentary and that what is at stake is not Barth himself or *Romans* II but the subject matter itself.

Some Anecdotal Afterthoughts on Barth's Epistle to the Romans

In the Preface to this work I mentioned some of my initial and palpably misguided impressions of Barth and his *Epistle to the Romans*. Having gone through the work again, some of my early judgments have been confirmed. I still, for instance, think the work bizarre and strange, although for different reasons now. Some of my other judgments have shifted somewhat, as *The Epistle to the Romans* is a very different book from what I once remembered it to be.

There are more parables, relationships, and affirmations of God's faithfulness than I previously remember. In Christ's cross, his resurrection, and in the work of the Spirit God re-establishes the relationship of humanity to God (for even sin couldn't destroy God's relationship to us). In Christ and the Spirit God relates all things to himself, and in the process renders everything a parable. There is also much more talk of resurrection, new creation, and invocation of Paul's "how much more" than I gave Barth credit for. I also see Barth's ferocious criticism of religion as so many different forms of human self-justification as far less radical and original. These criticisms now seem to me simply to be a good use of Luther's own theology of justification by grace through faith. Barth just makes sure to include faith itself in his sweeping away of achievement or every reason for boasting, while not denying the beauty, power, and allure of human creation and culture.[13] Likewise, the strong and continual stress on divine election and rejection fit well with Barth's Reformed background. The book is, obviously, very Protestant, but it is kind of revisionist Protestantism that feels free to use and modify Luther and Calvin as Barth sees fit when he is exegeting Paul.

The book is also far less "conservative," or concerned about repristinating past forms of thought, than I once thought. To be sure, Barth's actual way of exegeting Scripture has "certain affinities" to a doctrine of inspiration, but there is still much in Barth's commentary that might raise some eyebrows: Barth confidently calling some traditional doctrines, such as original sin or double, eternal, and individual predestination, "mythological"; his denial that Adam is a historical person; his repulsion towards any kind of tragic and violent eschatological finale; his nascent universalism; his dismissal of apologetics; his firm denial that there can be concrete forms of human righteousness, including any kind of visible human faith; his disinterest in the psychology of faith; and his claim that all religions, philosophies, and worldviews desire Jesus Christ. It is interesting that the book often given credit for dismantling and destroying theological liberalism could still have so many elements that would no doubt seem highly questionable to some groups.

There are also more ironic and self-deprecating gestures in this text than I previous remember. In general the tone remains quite

serious and dramatic, and yet there are all kinds of fissures and leaks in the text. Barth admits that he is speaking “after the manner of men” and so it must seem as if he is making all kinds of ludicrous, and thus trivial, remarks (224). He admits that it seems as if he is talking about other worlds or “God alone” all the time (424). He concedes, despite just about everything else he said, that we don’t have to completely disassociate grace and concrete experience (230). Particularly interesting and important, I think, are Barth’s remarks on how the final act of Paulinism is to dissolve and condemn itself (527–28), as do the freedom and potential criticisms that the strong “Pauline man” might offer against the weak, “vegetable eater” (502–26). Barth even cautions his readers that “The man therefore who, armed with the knowledge of the Epistle to the Romans, himself advances to the attack, has thereby failed to perceive the attack which the Epistle to the Romans makes upon him” (505). The position of Paul’s Romans is not a stable one from which to attack and criticize others, and by extension neither is Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*. The “strong” in Paul’s account, and in Barth’s commentary, “is in opposition to no one; rather, he lies behind all men. He does not hurry ahead, he waits; he does not criticize—for that he is far too critical—he hopes; he does not educate, he prays, or rather he educates through prayer. He does not stand out, he withdraws; he is nowhere because he is everywhere” (525). Irony indeed, for these words come from a work so notorious for its criticisms, the criticisms it has received in turn, and the criticisms it has inspired in so many devoted followers of Barth and his *Epistle to the Romans*.

Further Reading

Karl Barth. *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*.
———. “The Humanity of God.”
———. “The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching.”
———. “The Problems of Ethics Today.”
———. *The Resurrection of the Dead*.
———. *The Theology of John Calvin*.
———. *The Theology of Schleiermacher*.
———. “The Word of God as the Task of Theology.”

1. For those keeping score, during Barth’s first semester he lectured on the Heidelberg Catechism and volunteered to give exegetical lectures on Ephesians. One wonders whether he voluntarily gave these Ephesians lectures because he was more comfortable with exegesis (having been a preacher for ten years) and because he had already delivered some talks on Ephesians in 1919–20. During his second semester Barth lectured on Calvin but was unable to give the lectures on Hebrews he had been preparing. In the following

semesters Barth lectured on the book of James and Zwingli (winter 1922–23), 1 Corinthians and the Reformed confessional writings (summer 1923), and 1 John and Schleiermacher (winter 1923–24).

2. These source books were Heinrich Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*, and Heinrich Schmid's *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*.

3. Barth lectured on prolegomena (summer 1924), the doctrine of God and the Word (winter 1924–25), the doctrine of reconciliation (summer 1925), and ended with lectures on eschatology at the University of Münster (winter 1925–26). These lectures were not published during Barth's lifetime but were edited and published as *Unterrichten in der christlichen Religion*. About half of these three volumes are translated in Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*.

4. Barth, "The Humanity of God," 43.

5. Ibid.

6. Przywara, "Gott in uns oder über uns?"

7. Balthasar, *Karl Barth*, 77, 77–78, respectively.

8. Barth, *Offene Briefe 1909–1935*, 59–62 and 67–72.

9. Ibid., 83.

10. Ibid., 82–85.

11. Ibid., 85.

12. See Bruce McCormack's account of Barth's movement from dialectics within a consistent eschatology to dialectics within an anhypostatic-enhypostatic Christology in McCormack, *Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 327–463.

13. Herrmann, a good Lutheran, was also anxious to avoid the misunderstanding that faith is an achievement and work. Herrmann, *Communion*, 214–16.

Glossary of People

Most of the information below depends on the multi-volume *Religion Past and Present* and Busch's biography of Karl Barth.[1]

Johann Friedrich "Fritz" Barth (1856–1912) was a Swiss pastor who taught theology at a school for preachers in Basel until 1889. He then lectured in church history at the University of Bern, although his real interest was in New Testament studies. He himself had studied under Adolf von Harnack in Leipzig and Johann Tobias Beck in Tübingen. While a theological "positive," or conservative, Fritz Barth could still be friends with more liberal types, such as Harnack, and could speak warmly of both Franz Overbeck (whom he heard lecture in Basel) and Friedrich Nietzsche (whom he knew personally). In fact, when Karl was still a child, both Harnack and Adolf Schlatter would occasionally come to visit the Barth household.

Heinrich Barth (1890–1965) was a Swiss philosopher, the son of Fritz Barth, and the younger brother of Karl. His earlier works consisted of critical interactions with Descartes, Plato, Kant, and Augustine. In his later works he developed a philosophy of "appearance" and dealt with matters of knowledge and existence. In addition to his interests in critical idealism and the philosophy of existence, Heinrich wrote a couple of pieces in the late 1920s for the dialectical theology circle and later published a work on existentialism and New Testament hermeneutics. While Karl certainly respected Heinrich's work and intellect, the relationship between the two was never very close.

Johann Tobias Beck (1804–78) was a systematic theologian who also had interests in exegesis and practical theology, and whose sermons were highly regarded. Critical of both traditional Protestant Orthodoxy and historical-critical methods of biblical interpretation, the centerpiece of Beck's theology was the kingdom of God, which begins in Jesus Christ, gradually grows in this world, and reaches completion in the age to come. Barth found Beck's two-volume commentary on Romans (1884) particularly helpful while writing *Romans* I. Beck's biblicist, pietistic theology centered on the

kingdom and Christ not only influenced a young Karl Barth but Adolf Schlatter and Christoph Blumhardt as well.

Christoph Friedrich Blumhardt (1842–1919), or "the younger Blumhardt," was the son of J. C. Blumhardt. Like his father, the younger Blumhardt was also a pastor and he took over the ministry at Bad Boll after his father's death. He studied for some time under J. T. Beck and his theology and ministry emphasized hope, freedom, and the concrete, political, and this-worldly character of the kingdom of God. Blumhardt saw the actualization of the kingdom of God in the workers' and peace movements, socialism, and the movement for increased international cooperation. Blumhardt was highly regarded by the religious socialists in Switzerland, especially Hermann Kutter, Leonhard Ragaz, and the young Karl Barth.

Johann Christoph Blumhardt (1805–80), or "the elder Blumhardt," was a pastor who in 1852 established a ministry and retreat center in Bad Boll in southwest Germany. Blumhardt's ministry focused on forgiveness and healing the sick, and it embodied a hopeful expectation for the imminent return of Christ and his kingdom and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Blumhardt thought that although the current time is characterized by waiting and hope in God, Christians are nevertheless to continue concrete and political struggles for the kingdom. Blumhardt and Bad Boll gained an international reputation, not least for the miraculous healing of a member of the congregation and the cry of her momentarily afflicted sister during the healing, "Jesus is Victor." He was also the father of C. F. Blumhardt.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) was a highly respected New Testament scholar best known for his *The Gospel of John* (1941), his *Theology of the New Testament* (1953), and his attempt at a demythologization (or re-interpretation) of certain New Testament texts that presuppose an out-dated cosmology (*The New Testament and Mythology*, 1941). Critical of theological liberalism, Bultmann was also a member of the young dialectical theology movement. He differed from Karl Barth, however, in his conviction that theology must deal more seriously with anthropology and modern critical philosophy. He often preached, was a member of the confessing church, and was very critical of National Socialism. Bultmann was heavily influenced by Søren Kierkegaard, Wilhelm Herrmann, and Martin Heidegger.

Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930) was a highly popular and well-respected historian, theologian, and public intellectual. He is best known for his *History of Dogma* (originally three volumes published in 1886–90) and his *Essence of Christianity* (1900). Like Albrecht Ritschl, Harnack felt free from the demands of Lutheran confessionalism, took historical research as the basis for systematic theology, and argued that the "Gospel of Jesus" formed the basis of Christian living and thought. Barth studied with Harnack at the University of Berlin but the two soon had a public debate on the nature of theology as science (*Wissenschaft*), and the merits of historical-critical methods. Harnack essentially wrote the 1914 manifesto of the ninety-three intellectuals in favor of the war.

Wilhelm Herrmann (1846–1922) was professor of systematic theology in Marburg and student of the pietist Friedrich Tholuck. Herrmann's early emphases on Christology and critical philosophy led him to being a follower of Albrecht Ritschl. Heavily critical of the use of metaphysics within theology, Herrmann stressed the experience and certitude of the revelation of God within the individual believer. Later in his career Herrmann conducted a dialogue with fellow Marburg professors and Neo-Kantians Hermann Cohen and Paul Natorp. Highly influential in his own time, Herrmann's work was almost entirely eclipsed by the advent of dialectical theology. Despite the quickly waning influence of Herrmann's thought after the outbreak of WWI, several important elements of Herrmann's theology can be seen in both Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann.

Adolf Jülicher (1857–1938) was a New Testament scholar and church historian at the University of Marburg. He was best known for his historical-critical research on the differences between the parables of Jesus and the allegories of the Gospels. At one time the teacher of Barth, Jülicher eventually wrote critical reviews for both editions of Karl Barth's *Romans*.

Hermann Kutter (1863–1931) was a Swiss pastor and co-founder of Swiss Religious Socialism. He was best known for his work *They Must: God and the Social Democracy* (1904) in which he argued that socialism was God's instrument in the world. As a result of differences with his co-founder Leonhard Ragaz on practical issues, as well as his favoritism for Germany in World War I, Kutter later

withdrew from the Swiss Religious Socialists. He was also heavily influenced by Christoph Blumhardt.

Franz Overbeck (1837–1905) was a theologian, biblical scholar, and friend of Friedrich Nietzsche. Overbeck was a fierce and trenchant critic of both conservative and liberal theologies. He argued that early Christianity was a completely eschatological phenomenon and betrayed itself as soon as it became a historical movement with ties to its surrounding culture. “Scientific” or “academic theology” is a contradiction in terms, and completely opposed to the original Christian message of Christ’s imminent return.

Martin Rade (1857–1940) was a pastor and professor of theology at the University of Marburg. With Wilhelm Herrmann he edited the journal *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, and was later editor of the journal *Die Christliche Welt*, one of the main journals of the “modern school” of theology that followed in the wake of Albrecht Ritschl. Karl Barth soon knew him as “Uncle Rade,” after Karl’s brother Peter married Rade’s daughter, Helene, in 1915. Rade was the first member of the previous generation of theologians and pastors that Barth contacted after the outbreak of World War I in hopes of gaining some clarifications as to where the “modern theology” stood on the issue of the war.

Leonhard Ragaz (1868–1945) was a Swiss theologian, pastor, and co-founder of Swiss Religious Socialism. He was elected minister at Basel Münster (the cathedral) and taught at the University of Zürich until 1921, when he gave up his chair both to protest the Swiss Church’s indifference to the poor and in order to devote himself to peace work and the worker movements.

Albrecht Ritschl (1822–89) was a systematic theologian, church historian, and the guiding light of the dominant “modern school” of theology in the late nineteenth century. Ritschl was skeptical of theologies heavily indebted to Aristotelian philosophy, or the abstract and speculative philosophy of Hegel. Ritschl’s own theology emphasized the kingdom of God, the church as a living community, the practical import of Christianity, and faith as trust in God. A young Karl Barth argued that dedicated followers of Herrmann and Ritschl (and he was certainly one of them) could not accept the new metaphysical theologies being put forward in the early 1900s.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834) was a highly influential theologian, preacher, philosopher, and translator. He took part in the founding of the University of Berlin (1810) and lectured there in New Testament, ethics, systematic and practical theology, church history, translation, aesthetics, and dialectics, to offer only a partial list. Schleiermacher attempted to mediate between modern culture, historical methods, and philosophy on the one hand and Protestant theology on the other hand. His two most important theological works are the earlier *On Religion* (1799) and the later *The Christian Faith* (1821/22; rev. ed. 1830/31). The young Barth was especially impressed by Schleiermacher's *On Religion*, although after the outbreak of World War I Barth would eventually trace back the errors of "modern theology" to Schleiermacher's thought.

Eduard Thurneysen (1888–1974) was a pastor in Leutwil, who with George Mertz and Karl Barth founded the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten*. Thurneysen and Barth were close friends and their massive correspondence has proved immensely helpful for those studying the development of dialectical theology and Barth's thoughts more particularly. Thurneysen later taught practical theology in Basel and published works on pastoral care, homiletics, and the relationship between theology and psychology.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) was a systematic theologian who also wrote several influential works in philosophy of religion, history, and social ethics. Troeltsch sought to rethink Christianity within a context of modern historical and religious relativism, and conducted a debate with Wilhelm Herrmann on the relationship between faith and history (the young Barth himself joined in on this debate as well, clearly siding with his teacher Herrmann). Like other members of the History of Religions School, Troeltsch applied general historical methods to the history of Christianity, its Scripture, and its confessions in a manner more consistent than did Albrecht Ritschl. His work on the relationship between church and state was also highly influential, particularly his church, sect, and mysticism typology of Christian groups.

1. *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*, ed. Hans Dieter Betz et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Busch, *Karl Barth*.

Bibliography

Works by Karl Barth

Karl Barth. *Adam and Christ: Man and Humanity in Romans 5*. Translated by T. A. Smail. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004.

———. "Afterword." In *Action in Waiting*, by Christoph Blumhardt, 189–94. Farmington, PA: Plough, 2007.

———. *Anselm*: *Fides Quarens Intellectum: Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme*. Translated by Ian W. Robinson. London: SCM, 1960.

———. "Biblical Questions, Insights, Vistas." In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 51–96. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.

———. "The Christian Community and the Civil Community." In *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth*, 149–89. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.

———. "The Christian's Place in Society." In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 272–327. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.

———. "Church and State." In *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth*, 101–48. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.

———. *Church Dogmatics* I/1: *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975.

———. *Church Dogmatics* II/2: *The Doctrine of God*. Translated by. G. W. Bromiley et al. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1957.

———. *Church Dogmatics* III/2: *The Doctrine of Creation*. Translated by H. Knight et al. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960.

———. *Church Dogmatics* III/3: *The Doctrine of Creation*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley and R. J. Ehrlich. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960.

———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956.

———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961.

———. *Church Dogmatics* IV/4: *The Doctrine of Reconciliation (Fragment)*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edited by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969.

———, with Eduard Thurneysen. *Come, Holy Spirit!*. Translated by George W. Richard et al. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.

———. *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth*. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004.

———. "The Concept of the Church." In *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928*. Translated by Louise P. Smith, 272–85. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

———. "Concluding Unscientific Postscript." In *The Theology of Schleiermacher*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley, 261–79. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.

———. *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth: Fourteen Sermons with Commentary by William H. Willimon*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 2009.

———. "Epheserbrief 1919/1920." In *Erklärung des Epheser- und des Jakobusbriefes 1919–1929*, edited by Jörg-Michael Bohnt, 3–44. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2009.

———. *Erklärung des Epheser- und des Jakobusbriefers 1919–1929*. Edited by Jörg-Michael Bohnt. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2009.

———. “Erklärung des Epheserbrief W. S. 1921/1922.” In *Erklärung des Epheser- und des Jakobusbriefes 1919–1929*, edited by Jörg-Michael Bohnt, 45–156. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2009.
———. “Erklärung des Jakobusbrief W. S. 1922/23.” In *Erklärung des Epheser- und des Jakobusbriefes 1919–1929*, edited by Jörg-Michael Bohnt, 158–529. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2009.
———. *Gespräche 1964–1968*. Edited by Eberhard Busch. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 1997.
———. “Glaube und Geschichte.” In *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, 149–212. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993.
———. *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*. Edited by Hannelotte Reiffen. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.
———. “Die Hilfe.” *Die Christliche Welt* 28 (1914) 774–78.
———. *The Humanity of God*. Translated by John N. Thomas. Richmond, VA: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1960.
———. “The Humanity of God.” In *The Humanity of God*, translated by John N. Thomas, 37–65. Richmond, VA: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1960.
———. “Interview von Henri-Charles Tauxe.“ In *Gespräche 1964–1968*, edited by Eberhard Busch, 569–73. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 1997.
———. “Jesus Christus und die soziale Bewegung.” In *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, 380–417. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993.
———. “Lebensbilder aus der Geschichte der christlichen Religion.” In *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, 71–125. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993.
———. “Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit.” In *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*, edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, 334–66. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993.
———, and Emil Brunner. *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Professor Emil Brunner and the Reply “No!” by Dr. Karl Barth*. Translated by Peter Fraenkel. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002.
———. “The Need and Promise of Christian Preaching.” In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 51–96. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.
———. *Offene Briefe 1909–1935*. Edited by Diether Koch. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2001.
———. *On Religion: The Revelation of God as the Sublimation of Religion*. Translated by Garrett Green. London: T. & T. Clark, 2006.
———. *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History*. Translated by Brian Cozens and John Bowden. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002.
———. *The Resurrection of the Dead*. Translated by H. J. Stenning. Reprint. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003.
———, with Adolf von Harnack. *Revelation and Theology: An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923*. Edited and with commentary by H. Martin Rumscheidt. London: Cambridge University Press, 1972.
———, with Eduard Thurneysen. *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914–1925*. Translated by James D. Smart. Richmond, VA: Westeminster/John Knox, 1964.

———. “The Righteousness of God.” In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 9–27. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.
———. “Roman Catholicism: A Question to the Protestant Church.” In *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928*. Translated by Louise P. Smith, 307–34. New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
———. *Der Römerbrief: Erste Fassung 1919*. Edited by Hermann Schimdt. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 1985.
———. *Der Römerbrief 1922*. Zürich: Evangelische, 1940.
———. “The Strange New World of the Bible.” In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 97–135. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.
———. *Die Theologie Zwinglis 1922/1923*. Edited by Matthias Freudenberg. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 2004.
———. *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–1928*. Translated by Louise P. Smith New York: Harper and Row, 1962.
———. *The Theology of John Calvin*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.
———. *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*. Translated by Darrell L. Guder and Judith J. Guder. Richmond, VA: Westminster/John Knox, 2005.
———. *The Theology of Schleiermacher*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982.
———. “Unsettled Questions for Theology Today.” In *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings*, 55–75. Translated by Louise Pettibone Smith. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
———. *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1905–1909*. Edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms. Zürich: Theologische Verlag Zürich, 1992.
———. *Vorträge und kleinere Arbeiten 1909–1914*. Edited by Hans-Anton Drewes and Hinrich Stoevesandt with Herbert Helms and Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt. Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 1993.
———. *The Word in This World: Two Sermons by Karl Barth*. Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 2007.
———. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. Translated by Douglas Horton. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.
———. “The Word of God as the Task of Theology.” In *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, translated by Douglas Horton, 183–218. Gloucester: Smith, 1978.
———, and Eduard Thurneysen, *Zur inneren Lage des Christentums*. Munich: Kaiser, 1920.

Works by Others

Betz, Hans Dieter, et al. *Religion Past and Present: Encyclopedia of Theology and Religion*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Karl Barth: Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*. Einsiedeln: Johannes, 1976.
Beintker, Michael. *Die Dialektik in der »dialektischen Theologie« Karl Barths: Studien zur Entwicklung der Barthschen Theologie und zur Vorgeschichte der »Kirchlichen Dogmatik «*. München: Kaiser, 1987.
Burnett, Richard. *Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Period*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001.
Busch, Eberhard, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*. Translated by John Bowden. London: SCM, 1976.
Drewes, Hans Anton. *Das Unmittelbare bei Hermann Kutter: Eine Untersuchung im Hinblick auf die Theologie des jungen Karl Barth*. PhD diss., University of Tübingen, 1979.
Ellul, Jacques. *Christianity and Anarchism*. Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991.

Härle, Wilfred. “Der Aufruf der 93 Intellektuellen und Karl Barths Bruch mit der liberalen Theologie.” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 72 (1975) 206–24.
Herrmann, Wilhelm. *The Communion of the Christian with God: Described on the Basis of Luther’s Statements*. Translated by J. Sandys Stanyon. Edited by Robert T. Voelkel. London: SCM, 1972.
Holtmann, Stefan. *Karl Barth als Theologe der Neuzeit: Studien zur kritischen Deutung seiner Theologie*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007.
Marga, Amy. *Karl Barth’s Dialogue with Roman Catholicism in Göttingen and Munster: Its Significance for His Doctrine of God*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010.
Marquardt, Friedrich-Wilhelm. *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths*. München: Kaiser, 1972.
McCormack, Bruce. *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909–1936*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
Moltmann, Jürgen, ed. *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, vol. 1. München: Kaiser, 1977.
Schröer, Henning. *Die Denkform der Paradoxalität als theologisches Problem. Eine Untersuchung der hermeneutischen Funktion der Zeit in Karl Barths Theologie der Krisis und im Seinsdenken Martin Heideggers*. Göttingen: Vanderhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979.
Spieckermann, Ingrid. *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths*. München: Kaiser, 1985.

Table of Contents