

Hans Urs
von Balthasar

The
Theology of
Karl Barth

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HANS URS VON BALTHASAR

The Theology of Karl Barth

Exposition and Interpretation

Translated by
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Whatever else historians of the future may say about this era of the Church, they will certainly never call this a period of doctrinal cohesion. But however the verdict falls, this book by the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar on the theology of his great Protestant contemporary Karl Barth will certainly rank as one of the classics of twentieth-century theology. And what will make it so especially striking are the evident power and creativity that come when one theologian, in full adherence to his own tradition and without any attempt to cut corners, meets another theologian who is equally faithful to his own tradition.

This power to bring new treasures from old storehouses was immediately obvious to all who first read this book, a landmark in Barth scholarship. More than any other work by a Catholic theologian at that time, it made clear how much the issues dividing Catholicism from Protestantism had been transformed in the course of four centuries. But von Balthasar's work did more than open up new pathways to ecumenical understanding; it showed how a fundamental rethinking of issues could lead, not just to a rapprochement between the two great rivers of Western Christianity, but to an astonishingly new understanding of the Christian message in the modern world—all the more astonishing because this rethinking was conducted (on both sides) in complete fidelity to the great tradition of Christian dogmatics.

An abridged English translation of this book was done by John Drury and appeared in 1971.¹ This translation was itself a momentous event and helped catalyze ecumenical discussion in the English-speaking world. Although it omitted some of the often technical discussions on nature and grace then dominating the European scene, it presented the main theses of the book succinctly and effectively.

However, now that von Balthasar's theology as a whole is generating interest in its own right, it was felt that an unabridged translation should appear, giving the full details of the discussion not only for the benefit of historians of dogmatic theology, who will find these details of interest, but also as part of the effort to bring before the English-speaking world the complete works of Hans Urs von Balthasar.

Because the earlier translation not only omitted many of the technical discussions but also often gave the gist of a passage rather than a full translation, I have decided not to supplement the original translation with the omitted passages but to translate the whole book from the original German. The reader will soon notice that von Balthasar is not shy about quoting vast tracts of Barth verbatim (and other authors as well), a practice not usual in American scholarship. I have translated these passages directly, exactly as they occur in the book (there are also long passages quoted in the footnotes; these too are given in full). In this way, the reader will have the book exactly as a German reader had it in 1951.

I should mention that I have avoided the practice of translating *Sein* as "Being" with a capital B. This conspicuous capital letter is meant to tell the reader that the verbal infinitive ("to be") is intended rather than the verbal noun ("beings"). The former refers to the *act* of existence, while the latter refers to the thing *that* exists. But, to my eyes at least, upper-case Being looks like a thing, while lower-case being conveys better the act of existing (thus, "analogy of being" rather than "analogy of Being"). But some passages, on a second reading, seemed ambiguous; so whenever Being is (infrequently) capitalized, it refers to the German infinitive.

Finally, I would like to thank Elisabeth Kohldorfer for assistance with the technical matters of German musicological terminology and for her consistent willingness to help solve other knotty problems of German academic style.

It was a transforming event for me to become so intimately acquainted with this work, and I hope a careful reading of its thesis will have the same effect on the reader.

Edward T. Oakes, S.J.
Feast of the Assumption
August 15, 1991

ABBREVIATIONS

This table lists works of Karl Barth that are cited in the body of the text or in the footnotes. Further details on Barth's publications are available in the bibliography assembled by Charlotte von Kirschbaum and published in the Barth Festschrift *Antwort* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1956) and in the table at the end of Eberhard Busch's *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

Die Kirchliche Dogmatik (KD)

(Citations to the *Church Dogmatics* are usually given without accompanying abbreviation but simply with a number indicating the volume and a number indicating the page.) English paginations may be found in the table in the Appendix.

1. I/1 *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*. Teil 1. (1932)
(on the Word of God as criterion of theology)
2. I/2 *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*. Teil 2. (1939)
(on revelation)
3. II/1 *Die Lehre von Gott*. Teil 1. (1940)
(on the knowledge of God; the reality of God)
4. II/2 *Die Lehre von Gott*. Teil 2. (1942)
(on predestination and the commandments of God)
5. III/1 *Die Lehre von der Schöpfung*. Teil 1. (1945)
(on the work of creation)
6. III/2 *Die Lehre von der Schöpfung*. Teil 2. (1948)
(on the creature)
7. III/3 *Die Lehre von der Schöpfung*. Teil 3. (1950)
(on the relationship of Creator and creature)

All of the *Church Dogmatics* is available in English, translated by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1977).

Other Major Works

- I D *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes: Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* (Munich, 1928).
- I R *Der Rbmerbrief* (first edition; Bern, 1919)
 - R *Der Romerbrief* (second edition; Munich, 1922). English trans.: *The Epistle to the Romans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1935). The English translation is drawn from the sixth edition.
- A *Fides quaerens intellectum: Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes* (Munich, 1931). English trans.: *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum* (London: SCM Press, 1960).
- AT *Auferstehung der Toten* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1924). English trans.: *The Resurrection of the Dead* (New York, F. H. Revell, 1933).
- C *Credo* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1935). English trans.: *Credo* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962).
- DG *Dogmatik im Grundrifi* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947). English trans.: *Dogmatics in Outline* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949).
- G *Gotteserkenntnis und Gottesdienst* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1938). English trans.: *The Knowledge of God and the Service of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938).
- HG *Zur Lehre vom Heiligen Geist*, with Heinrich Barth, first issue of *Zwischen den Zeiten* (1930).

- HK *Die christliche Lehre nach dem Heidelberger Katechismus* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1948). English trans.: *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964).
- Ph *Erklärung des Philipperbriefes* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1928). English trans.: *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962).
- PT *Die protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1947). English trans.: *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History* (London: SCM Press, 1972).
- TK *Die Theologie und die Kirche* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1938). Collected articles, 1920-1928.
- W *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1924). English trans.: *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1928).

Essays and Pamphlets

A. From the series *Theologische Existenz heute* (a few are translated in Karl Barth, *God in Action* [New York: Round Table Press, 1936]):

- TE 1 *Theologische Existenz heute!* (1933)
- TE 2 *Für die Freiheit des Evangeliums* (1933)
- TE 3 *Reformation als Entscheidung* (1933)
- TE 4 *Lutherfeier 1933* (1933)
- TE 5 *Die Kirchefesu Christi* (1933)
- TE 7 *Gottes Wille und unsere Wünsche* (1934)

- TE 9 *Offenbarung, Kirche, Theologie* (1934)
- TE 10 *Der gute Hirte* (sermon, 1934)
- TE 12 *Der Christ als Zeuge* (1934)
- TE 13 *Der Dienst am Wort Gottes* (1934)
- TE 14 *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner* (1934)
- TE 17 *Drei Predigten* (1934)
- TE 19 *Vier Bibelstunden* (1934)
- TE 22 *Vier Predigten* (1935)
- TE 25 *Das Evangelium in der Gegenwart* (1935)
- TE 27 *Die Kirche und die Kirchen* (1935)
- TE 28 *Die theologische Voraussetzung kirchlicher Gestaltung*
(1935)
- TE 29 *Das Bekenntnis der Reformation und unser Bekennen*
(1935)
- TE 32 *Evangelium und Gesetz* (1935)
- TE 37 *Calvin* (1936)
- TE 43 *Calvinfeier* (1936)
- TE 47 *Gottes Gnadenwahl* (1936)

B. From the series *Theologische Studien*:

- TS 1 *Rechtfertigung und Recht* (1938)
- TS 2 *Evangelium und Bildung* (1948)

TS 5 *Die Souveränität des Wortes und die Entscheidung des Glaubi* (1939)

TS 6 *David Strauss als Theologe* (1939)

TS 14 *Die kirchliche Lehre von der Taufe* (1943)

TS 20 *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde* (1946)

TS 22 *Die Schrift und die Kirche* (1947)

TS 23 *Die Botschaft von der freien Gnade Gottes* (1947)

TS 27 *Die Wirklichkeit des neuen Menschen* (1950)

TS 28 *Humanismus* (1950)

C. From the journal *Zwischen den Zeiten* (ZdZ):

(Only those articles are cited here that are not collected in W or TK.)

“Brunners Schleiermacherbuch” (1924): 49-64

“Das Schriftprinzip der reformierten Kirche” (1935): 215-45

“Menschenwort und Gotteswort in der christlichen Predigt”
(1925): 114-19

“Rechtfertigung und Heiligung” (1927): 281-309

“Das Halten der Gebote” (1927): 206-27

“Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie” (1927): 309-48

“Die Lehre von den Sakramenten” (1927): 427-60

“Die Theologie und der heutige Mensch” (1930): 374-96

“Die Not der evangelischen Kirche” (1931): 89-122

“Die Theologie und die Mission in der Gegenwart” (1932): 189-215

“Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom” (1933): 297-314

D. Important essays before the Romans Commentary:

“Was sollen wir tun?” *Christliche Welt* 23 (1909): 236-37.

“Moderne Theologie und Rechgottesarbeit”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909): 317-21.

“Antwort an D. Achelis und D. Drews”, *ibid.*, 479-86.

“Der christliche Glaube und die Geschichte”, *Schweizerische theologische Zeitschrift* (1912), issues 1 and 2.

“Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 24 (1914): 21-32; 65-95.

E. Autobiographical essay:

“Parergon: Karl Barth über sich selbst”, *Evangelischer Theologie* (1948/1949): 268-82.

FOREWORD

This book is a contribution to a confessional dialogue among theologians. It takes its place within an impressive array of earlier attempts to wrestle with Karl Barth's theology from a Catholic point of view.¹

German voices went mute after 1940, but since then French-speaking areas have shown remarkable vitality: Fathers L. Malevez, S.J., G. Rabeau, S.J., and Henri Bouillard, S.J., all of whom have published articles prior to 1940, now promise to present larger monographs to the public in the near future. In 1949, Father Jerome Hamer, O.R., gave a detailed treatment of all Barth's occasional writings. And from Holland we have the great work by Johann Cornelius Groot.²

Thus, much work has been done, and even more significant work is promised. Nonetheless, whoever knows this material cited here will not deny that much still remains to be done. Karl Barth has developed his thought and is now beginning to give definitive and mature expression to it in his *Church Dogmatics*, which as of this writing has amounted to eight separate volumes since the initial one was published in 1932. This has meant that whatever disputes arose about Barth's thought before the appearance of the *Church Dogmatics* are valid only for the initial phases of his thought but have been almost completely overtaken by the new turn he has taken in the period of his maturity.³

In this study we have tried to fill these gaps that have arisen since the full maturation of Barth's work. This book will adopt a twofold strategy: it will try to interpret the sense of the whole, and then it will give a *possible* Catholic answer to this whole. Both prongs of this strategy need to be explained. The attempt to present an exposition of the structure of Barth's thought—the first and it seems to me the most important part of this work—can scarcely be expected to go into all the details of the whole of Barth's doctrine. Rather, this book

will seek out the motivating principles and the formal structure that animate Barth's thought, but it will do so in view of the second prong: confessional dialogue.

Thus this book should in no way be considered an "Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth". Such an undertaking could certainly never succeed unless one were willing to plunge into the whole of his works. Also, the Catholic answer that will be attempted in the second half of this book is explicitly a *private* attempt by an individual theologian to respond to Barth and should not be understood as presenting anything like an official response to Barth by Catholic authorities. That the answer given here, however, is not an isolated one but the expression of a common direction and movement, I will also try to show at the right juncture in the argument.

The author of this book has meditated on this theme since the early 1920s. His reflections on this issue have undergone many transformations in the course of the years, which have been spent in constant contact with Karl Barth's theology as it has evolved. The early stages of this book⁴ should now all be regarded as superseded by this present study.

The experience I have had during these years of Barth's continued development justifies this warning: no one should think he can quickly and offhandedly dispose of the questions posed here. True, the obtuse think they can be done with these questions without prior encounter with them. They are the type who think they already have the answers before they have understood and felt the impact of the questions. One would rather advise such people to keep away. Whoever attempts to dialogue, even if only as a serious book reviewer, should be asked to do so only out of a deep expertise in these issues.

Such expertise, it seems to me, would include: a more than superficial acquaintance with the works of Karl Barth, above all with his *Church Dogmatics*, a sensitive awareness of the most important Catholic replies, above all those of Erich Przywara and Gottlieb Sohngen. The more deeply one enters into the dialogue, the less one will be tempted to think one can get anywhere with slogans. Swords for cutting through the Gordian knot should be left at home. It was precisely because writers were in the habit during the time of

the Reformation of theologizing with a hammer that the split in the Church became irreparable. And to work at overcoming this split means much effort. We need to be cautious lest we needlessly offend. Only the patient need apply.

In the encyclical *Humani generis*, the Magisterium of the Catholic Church has pointed out today two dangers and errors of the time, which among other things could influence ecumenical dialogue: a false irenicism in dogmatics and a contempt for the rational and philosophical moment in theology. The former would so water down and efface the confessional differences in a zeal for creating mutual understanding that these differences finally seem nugatory and insignificant. The latter would seek to strip from the dogmatic deposit of faith its rational (and thus philosophical) raiment and to ascribe this clothing to the historical process, thereby relativizing it and denigrating Scholasticism and the *philosophia perennis*.

As we will show in the first part of this book, there is a great irony in this trend of irrationalism: for Karl Barth, precisely at the time when Catholic theologians were turning away from Scholasticism under the influence of Max Scheler and a misunderstood Newman, was finding his way to the Scholastics. On account of this, he was attacked very early on by his Protestant colleagues for such assorted sins as rationalism, philosophism, lapsing into the Middle Ages, abandoning the Reformed emphasis on faith as a form of fiducial trust and generally being a traitor to the orthodox cause. But we can only rejoice over this development, because it permits us to speak with Karl Barth within our own theological climate. Of course we must test and probe how well Barth has made room for such an appreciation of the *ratio* in theology, but it is found at the very basis of his thought.

As far as the first danger goes, our experiment in dialogue cannot be accused of a “false irenicism”, because it gives full play to the obvious dogmatic differences, such as the doctrine of the Church, of the Magisterium, sources of revelation, sacraments, and so forth, in all their sharpness, as will become obvious even in the first half of the book. Nonetheless, these differences will be bracketed, as it were, from the present investigation, not because I regard them as objects of less importance, but because they do not seem to be the

disputed questions that at the moment can be most fruitfully explored. That is why this book bears the subtitle “Exposition and Interpretation”. It signifies the limits of theme that are the focus of this book.

But even with so specific a focus, there will never come the moment when one may obscure or relativize one’s own ecclesial position. Our task, however, will simply be to interpret what stands before us—both one’s own theology as well as the theology of the “other”, Karl Barth—and bring them into a mutual conversation. Certainly, the hope that such a conversation is possible is the very presupposition of this book, which never would have been written simply for the sake of cataloguing what divides us.

H. U. v. B.
1951

PART I

OVERTURE

Chapter 1

A HOUSE DIVIDED

“The mysterious split that has divided the Church for four hundred years”¹—what does it mean to us? If we are aware of the true nature of the Church, we must feel this split not only as a daily wound but even more as a constantly burning shame. The essence, and not merely the name, of the Church is *agape*: unity in love. So every lapse from this unity calls the very substance of the Church into question. It is impossible not to ask each day with renewed concern—even if this has to go on for centuries—about the reason and necessity for this shame, which for us who have remained within the ancient precincts of the Church is no less burning than it must be for those who felt, certainly with a heavy heart, that they had to leave.

Because the Church’s visible infirmities and defects were at least the occasion, if not the sufficient ground, for this split, we must not only repent and atone for this past, but even more constantly we must check the present scene to see if there still persist any traces of that scandal that was reason enough for countless Christians to sacrifice the unity of the Church for the sake of a supposedly pure faith in Christ. Do we Catholics still labor for the unity of the Church with that deadly earnest that tells us our very salvation or damnation depends on it? Have we done everything we can to restore it? Should we not hear the reproach that others are more serious and passionate for Church unity than we?

We are confronted with “the paradoxical fact of heresy”.² Yes, a paradox, but even more a *contradictio in adjecto*,³ because the essential inner unity of Christ’s Body must be manifested just as necessarily as an external unity too. “We have to seek the divine mystery of the Church in its human form, or else we shall never find it” (G 163). But in fact the human form contradicts the Church’s essence. Her essence is founded on Christ’s commission to her: united to Christ, she has been commissioned to lead all things to union with God:

This mission compels us to confront the question of Church unity. In this commission we find no hint of a variety of churches. Of course, the New Testament knows of a variety of communities, a variety of gifts and a variety of persons *in* the *one* Church. But these varieties have no meaning in and of themselves. They have their origin in unity; unity is their only justification and the limit of its expression. Nay, not just in “unity”, but in *the* One: Jesus Christ, who is the *one* Son of God and the sole dispenser of the *one* Holy Spirit. . . . The New Testament does not recognize a polar relation of tension, a mutual tug and pull, between unity and these varieties of gifts and communities. It knows. . . only of multiplicity's one-sided relation of dependency on, membership in and subordination to, unity. That is why multiplicity cannot be the foundation for churches. That would require that they be possessed of a self-subsistence they do not own and that they can only procure at the expense of the unity of their real identity. From reading 1 Corinthians we know how determined Paul was to resist the first stirrings of such a precedent. And back then it was only a question of party factionalism; no one so much as dreamed of multiple *churches*.⁴

For that reason Karl Barth forbade all forms of theological deduction based on *de facto* schism:

We should not try to explain the plurality of churches as a necessary trait of the visible and empirical Church in contrast to the invisible, ideal and essential Church. We should not do this, because. . . according to the New Testament, the Church of Jesus Christ is one even in this respect: indeed she is invisible according to the grace of God's Word and of the Holy Spirit; but she is also clearly and materially visible as a community with a communal office. She is visible in her ministry of word and sacrament. All that gives credibility to the Church comes from such manifest and visible *being* and *doing*. There is no escape-hatch from the visible to the invisible Church.

Nor should we try to explain the multiplicity of churches as something willed by God, the normal unfolding of the riches of the grace given to mankind in Jesus Christ. . . .⁵ [merely] dissonant strains that can be brought into one accord through a larger harmony. . . .⁶ To do so, however attractive it might seem, would be to construct a philosophy of history or of society, not a theology. In other words, to solve the question of Church unity, we would be constructing our own ideas instead of listening to the question as it is put by Christ and hearing Christ's own answer. . . . If we listen to Christ, we do not live above the differences that divide the churches but in them. [Which leaves us with only one painful alternative:] We should not try to *explain* the multiplicity of churches at all. We should treat it the way we treat our own sin and those of others: *as sin*. We should see it as part of our guilt. . . .⁷ [We] can only be *shocked* by these divisions and *pray* for their elimination.⁸

Certainly there are signs that Christ's unity is not completely lacking to the divided churches. But, far from comforting us, these signs of accord—which “can hardly be said to manifest the unity of the Church”⁹—should goad us on to fulfill the pressing task set before us. For “if Jesus Christ is the unity of the Church and if the

multiplicity of churches is the very sign of our distress, then there is no avoiding the fact that uniting the churches into the Church is a duty, a commandment given to his Church by the Lord himself.”¹⁰

For Protestants, the first task is to reunite with their own sister churches. The possibility for such reunion often preoccupied Barth. We will not be concentrating in this book on how the details of this project are worked out. Our focus rather will be on the basic considerations Barth brings to bear on this issue, which he will repeat almost unchanged when the question of the unity of Catholic and Protestant Churches is raised: Barth’s fundamental thought was that unification between churches can never be accomplished on the basis of political or practical-social reasons but only on the basis of a right understanding of the Church in her theological fullness. That is why he rejected the union proposed by the Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm III in the nineteenth century and remained mistrustful and reserved toward the ecumenical movement of the twentieth.¹¹

For Barth, church reunion must be a reunion *in faith*, and therefore it must entail a unity in clear, and clearly formulated, articles *of* faith. This can only happen based on a more authentic and vital faith and not on a tepid indifference regarding differences of belief. An understanding between Lutherans and Reformed Christians, for example, could only be forged when they both rehearse, and reimmerge themselves in, the theological passions that at that time seemed to make the separation of confessions inevitable. It might well be that the common need for making common cause against some anti-Christian threat can reawaken this original alertness to the meaning of dogmatic divergence. But it should not lead to a false irenicism, to overhasty compromises, but to a relentlessly earnest theological testing of one’s own confessional beliefs.¹² “The move from a divided to a united confession must happen without compromise and above all without resorting to forms and formulas of unity that try only to cover up rather than to overcome the disunity.”¹³

Whereas Barth, at least up until Amsterdam,¹⁴ showed a consistent skepticism toward most contemporary attempts to promote interconfessional unity within Protestantism,¹⁵ he nonetheless sought out and approved of attempts to establish

serious dialogue with the Catholic Church. In a 1927 lecture on “The Concept of the Church”,¹⁶ he insisted that discussion was as urgently demanded of Protestants as it was of Catholics.¹⁷ Barth called for precisely the kind of dialogue that was falling out of favor. To his mind it was a bad sign that ecumenical dialogue had sunk into the vague sand of a weary bourgeois tolerance. The raging struggles of the past were in their own way a sign of health:

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Catholics and Protestants stared at each other grimly, but at least eyeball to eyeball. Then they talked to each other, sharply, harshly, but they really did speak. Whereas today we have grown weary of the old quarrelling but perhaps also of the importance of the issues. Now all we see across the board are people who talk around the issues, looking past rather than at each other, standing around without ever really confronting worthily the great high mystery that is the final point of all this hustle and bustle.¹⁸

And indeed, why should real dialogue not be possible?

The quest for Christ's truth is always a journey filled with hope and promise; it is always a work of love, and, no matter what the circumstances, it always contributes to reunion, even when neither side budes from its position and the gulf between the parties seems to grow all the wider.¹⁹

For only when we once more clearly see why we are not one will we discover ways of reuniting. What is required is a penetrating reflection on the roots of disunity rather than an empty tolerance for its own sake.

I hold that it must be fundamentally possible to come to some kind of understanding even with a Catholic theologian and even about the sacrament of the altar, without forcing anyone to change his views. In the final analysis, the promise of the Christian proclamation—divine judgment and divine justification—also stands behind the Church of Trent too. There is enough Catholicism in us Protestants for us to realize that the urge to reform cannot simply be dead there either.²⁰

Precisely in a real confrontation will we be forced to spell out our differences in all their clarity and consequences. In such an honest encounter, any apparently well-meaning attempt to overlook differences, any hasty effort to buddy up to one's partner, any merely psychological empathy, will only compound the rift by bandaging the wound without healing it. In other words,

we must listen to Christ and through him engage once more in an orderly, sober, strict and effective *theology*. It is remarkable but true: it is not those who are seriously interested in and care about theology who do not understand each other across church divisions but the idler, the amateur, the dilettante and historian on both sides. Whereas it is precisely those people who must respond to each other with a clear, logically developed and necessary *Sic et Non* who tend to find, despite the way they refute each other, a real encounter and community spirit beginning to develop. This arises from the very concern they both share for the cause over which they struggle from such different sides and in such painfully different ways. This cause, however, could be Jesus Christ himself, the very unity of the Church.²¹

Why this paradox? Because unity cannot be found in some neutral no man's land *between* the confessions; it can only be found *within* the respective ecclesial spaces of each denomination. Theology is church theology or it is nothing at all. But if each church really "thinks through to the end"²² her own doctrines in obedience to revelation, it could happen that both sides might discover they share a common position. Barth's challenge is for "the Roman Church to think through her own doctrine on nature and grace and the dogmas on justification developed by Trent!" And we say to him in reply: "Let Reformed theology really think through to the end its doctrine of the visible Church, of obedience and Law, and also its dialectic of man *simul justus et peccator!*" Then new life will at last begin to flow again through the Church's limbs, grown so sclerotic over the centuries. At least the *question* will once more be posed; and we can never find the right answer unless someone first asks the right question.

Of course, this whole project must begin with the admission that unity can only be the grace of the Church's Founder; this is no human product. We must admit that we are "unprofitable servants" whose sins once shattered the unity of the Church and who must not be allowed to rest until we have "done everything". And only the faith that can move mountains will be weapon enough for such a task. For this faith knows that even the mountains obey the Word of God, the God who wants to involve us in his own work. Both sides in the division share in the knowledge of this great mystery; and this unity in *faith* is the very promise of *unity* in faith.

Let us not be led astray when Barth refuses to call the Catholic Church a "sister church" as he does (as a Reformed Christian) the other communities of Protestantism, or when he chooses to address

us with the painful term “heretical”,²³ “in whose profession of faith we can *not* recognize our own faith and therefore the true Church of Jesus Christ; [a church] we must *reject*, with heavy heart, as a *false* church”.²⁴ How can we hold this anathema against him as long as we cannot recognize ourselves in his confession and, with just as heavy a heart, must repeat the anathema of Trent against Protestantism?

Yet Barth also sees another side of Catholicism: “Here is Church *substance*,. . . distorted and corrupt substance perhaps, but still it has not been a lost substance.”²⁵ He well knows that for all of the unbending either / or that determines the debate, it is still only “comparative issues”²⁶ that divide us.

And what of us? Will we who see in Protestants our baptized brothers and sisters in Christ and therefore members of his Body, that is, his one visible Body, will we then find another language for dialogue? Especially since for us they are members of Christ’s Body, who by rights should belong to the *Una Sancta Catholica*? We live by the same hope. Harkening to the charge laid on us by that hope, and not trusting our own power, we begin this dialogue.²⁷

Chapter 2

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

Such an interdenominational dialogue presupposes that we are *able* to understand each other. This must be a very specific, concrete possibility for me, the speaker or listener. Moreover, we are not simply referring to a merely psychological possibility of human understanding and empathy but to a Christian possibility within the context of faith and its analogical method.

Having reflected on the issue in all its implications, I can affirm my belief in the infallibility of the Pope or Mary's Immaculate Conception; but at the same time I can understand why someone else rejects these doctrines for reasons that I find inconclusive because incomplete. As dialogue proceeds, I can understand, in ways I had not earlier suspected, how a Christian would not want to know anything of the meritoriousness of his works before God. Yet at the same time I can believe in obedience to the word of Christ and the Church that my worthless and corrupt works do merit a reward.

I may reject something, but that does not mean it is completely alien to me. It is a possibility for me, but I have moved beyond it because it did not prove to be the ultimate, decisive possibility. It is, as it were, a possibility bracketed and parenthesized by other, wider realities.

While this is formally true of both sides, it can still happen that the way in which this is worked out will take different forms, because the starting points are different. The Catholic attitude usually takes the form of a kind of feeling of superiority over Protestantism. This harkens back to Kierkegaard's saying that Catholicism is to Protestantism as the Cathedral is to its buttresses, the "corrective" of the whole,¹ an image that even Barth once made his own.² In other words, Catholics tend to think that, since they are possessed of the whole and since anything contained in the part is by definition, or at least eminently, to be found in the whole, any need for a serious wrestling with Christian divisions is superfluous.

It is perhaps inevitable that the Catholic will think back with satisfaction on the Donatist controversy, when Augustine triumphantly defended Catholic universality by exposing the Donatist church as merely an African outpost: that famous *pars Donati*, which died out precisely because it was only a part. There is certainly no doubting the general intellectual apathy and sloth prevailing in wide circles of Catholicism today—perhaps in unconscious imitation of Hegel's famous master-slave dialectic! Nor can it be disputed how many Catholics feel it is better to know as little as possible of Protestant theology. I venture to say that one could count on two hands—perhaps even one—the Catholic theologians who regard Barth's *Dogmatics* as required reading.

Such condescending attitudes are to be found not only among the stubborn and rigid revanchists who think that time has suddenly stood still for them because, after all, everything necessary has already been thought and said with such exhaustive sufficiency that nothing new need be generated even to the end of the world. But such smugness is also to be found among many of the most nimble and agile minds; these are controversialists who can fight with all the weapons of the opponents, can get inside the skin of anyone and know how to use any philosophical system. Through such skill they think that they have thus already attained superiority. Faced with such a debater, who can so nimbly penetrate, distinguish and classify his opponent's position before he has even begun to open his mouth, is it any wonder that the Protestant representative would lose his sense of humor? We might well ask ourselves whether such a representative of the cause of Catholic *universality* truly realizes what division in the Church means: the yawning chasm over which no dialectical or analogical method can leap, the bloody wound that cannot be healed with the plaster of theological formulas!

Now, however, after four hundred years, it is gradually beginning to dawn on many Catholics that the comforting image of part and whole will not suffice. According to Yves M.J. Congar and Joseph Lortz, the Reformation—which theoretically should have taken place inside the Church—instead snatched priceless treasures from her, treasures that might well be contained implicitly in Catholic doctrine but that could never find expression because the Church was

distracted by the wounds of division and by her urgent need to oppose the reality of the division.³

Out of such suggestions one can even hear talk of the “end of the Counter-Reformation era”. Even though, of course, the truth of the Councils of Trent and Vatican I will never be overtaken or even relativized, nonetheless there are still other views and aspects of revelation than those expressed there. This has always happened throughout church history, when new statements are brought forth to complete earlier insights in order to do justice to the inexhaustible riches of divine revelation even in the earthen vessel of human language.

According to a well-known position of Newman, the Catholic Church can see herself as the embodiment of wholeness and totality only when she has done all in her power actively to incorporate the riches of all partial points of view. The Fathers themselves tried to do this by seeing how the *logos spermatikos* of Scripture, of Greek philosophy and even of heretical Gnosticism, converges into the unity of the universal Logos. Aquinas too did this with extraordinary subtlety with every form of Christian and pagan wisdom. With these precedents, are today’s Catholics supposed to wait around while the immense intellectual accomplishments of modernity and of Protestant theology are handed to them on a silver platter, served up and ready to fly right into their satisfied and lazy mouths?

Since we have just mentioned modern philosophy and Protestant theology in the same breath, we must touch on another aspect of the problem. Historical and cultural epochs can often be characterized by distinctive styles and modes of thought, some of which are sharply, and others only faintly, different from each other. Now these styles of thought can for the most part be neutral respecting the content of the thoughts being expressed, so that the same content of basic truths (let us call these basic truths *philosophia perennis*) can be couched in these various “languages”. Yet at the same time, these forms, like language itself, can have their own rules and thus affect the content with its overshadowing presence. Worldly truth is created truth, and, despite its participation in the immutability of the eternal, it possesses its own historical dimension, whose fullness is brought out in a wealth of forms and languages.

Anyone who wants to survive in this world must know languages. And whoever wants to be well versed in the intellectual world must have a command of its “languages”: the languages of thought and concepts that change from culture to culture, age to age. Catholics who feel a responsibility for preserving intact the deposit of faith dare not shirk their duty here; they especially of all people must make the strenuous effort it takes to learn the languages of the spirit, and not least the “modern languages”. If they do not, they will only be able to gesticulate or shrug their shoulders if one of their contemporaries should ask the way, perhaps because the only language they know is “Medieval-ese”.⁴

It has often been said that the Fathers of Trent gave a medieval answer to a modern question. Their statements were correct, in all points. But were they always addressed to the actual question being posed? Could the questioners really understand the answer? And if there was already a gap then between question and answer, content and language, how much more so now, three or four hundred years later, when modern questions confront answers first formulated in the Middle Ages or at Trent! The charge to go out and make disciples of all nations in Matthew 28:19 and Jesus’ command to become the servant of all in Matthew 20:27 must mean for the Catholic that we owe it to our partners to answer back in the language they understand. At the very least this should be the logical consequence of feeling that one belongs to the “more universal” point of view, which we have just specified as the Catholic presupposition.

Nonetheless, this attitude so easily assumed by the Catholic of feeling superior when entering the arena of religious dialogue is open to question, and on the objective level (which goes beyond any merely tactical considerations). Every split in the Church is not only, as Augustine used to note, an occasion for further dogmatic research; it is also for the Church, unconditionally, an impoverishment. A schism in the Church represents not merely a loss in the number of members alone but also a diminution in the breadth and fullness of the truth, because a portion of the truth has been hauled away from the Church’s rightful ownership. If all heresy is a form of one-sidedness, this forces the Church to reply with an

emphatically one-sided counterstatement of her own. We might here well note what Yves Congar has to say:

When faced with a one-sided distortion of the truth, the Church must do more than simply emphasize the other, equally partial, side of the same truth. Her obligation is to point to the total truth that towers over all error and partial truths. And yet it is inevitable that in her pronouncements of the time she will end up stressing those substantial points that are being denied by the heresy. Her apologetes have no choice but to try to restore to their rightful place the truths that have been distorted by error. Her theologians cannot help but flesh out the corresponding truth in all its sharpness. Thus heresy is for theology both an occasion for progress and a danger tempting it to become one-sided. When a certain error is propounded, the organism of the Church, with heightened alertness, steels itself to counteract the evil.

Often this is a case of exaggerating some truth, which the Church counteracts by delineating its exact dimensions. But the method usually is not to refer back to the totality of dogma but simply to remain content with giving sharper definition and greater precision to those truths being distorted or denied. In other words, the error is always a partial one, and so the corresponding dogmatic truth is in danger of being partial too insofar as it contents itself with merely maintaining the contrary. Contrary truths, say the Scholastics, belong to the same species.

There are too many among us who cling, whether from habit, method or convenience, more to official texts than to Christian life: they are those lazy and not seldom opportunistic theologians who are content to open their Denzinger rather than their Bible, who study statements rather than the Fathers, the liturgy, the living faith of the Church and the clear witnesses of the Christian spirit. They are finally those apologetes who by profession must do battle against the errors of the time and yet who do their fighting only by looking at the most superficial aspects of the Church. Far too many who speak and write in defense of the Church do so only by counterposing against error a one-sided and partial truth, a truth grown hard and sclerotic, by definition incomplete.

Yes, the reaction to dogmatic errors has led to progress, to greater precision and specialization. But it has also led to a hardening and constricting of the content of revelation. Consider the condemnation of Baius,⁵ the definition that there are seven sacraments, the emphasis of tradition over Scripture to counter Protestantism, the condemnation of Modernism! The gain in attaining greater dogmatic precision and certainty in matters of faith is worthwhile, even necessary. But, on the other hand, it has narrowed our perspectives and focused questions in specialized fields.

Think how this happened when Baius was condemned, which encouraged theology to define the supernatural only in terms of its freedom from the guilt of sin, thus running the danger of neglecting or denigrating other relationships between grace and nature. Furthermore, has not the massive crystallization of sacramental reality around the seven sacraments brought severe theological and canonical consequences and made us forget the sacramentality of the whole Church and of the whole spectrum of the Christian life, deadening our understanding of symbolism and liturgy? And has not the justified anti-Protestant reaction that emphasized tradition only brought further difficulties in its wake? Just because it is false to say that the Church is founded on Scripture does not justify the counterassertion that Scripture is founded on the Church. And has not the quite necessary reaction against Modernism not led to a

certain generalizing of true but nonetheless incomplete aspects of doctrine (for example, on the *ecclesia docens*)? Has not this same reaction against Modernism led to a certain distortion and even bracketing of those motifs that could round off the picture, especially what touches on the life and historical unfolding of the Church, so that now the reality of the true concept of tradition and thus of Church dogma is being called into question?⁶

On the Protestant side, the partner in this dialogue will be bringing his own set of presuppositions, corresponding to the uniqueness of his perspective. The essential point here is to see that the Reformation intended to restore “pure Christianity”, which took the form of a protest against certain Catholic “excesses”. The qualitative Plus of Protestantism thus consciously meant a quantitative Minus, a subtraction that became a kind of “purification of the Temple”.

The Catholic then replies that this approach can be valid *within* the comprehensive Plus of the Catholic perspective. But this seems like special pleading to a Protestant. For it is precisely this comprehensive Plus that Protestantism rejects as the purest summation of its protest. The Catholic of course regards the possession of this Plus as the guarantee of living in the fullness of truth. It would be a complete denial of the Catholic element if, as many try to do, one were to renounce this Plus so as to meet half-way those who are searching. But the Catholic is someone who has not only *found* his deepest mission but *received* it from this wholeness. And yet what can be done when the very way in which he possesses the truth is an obstacle, even a source of scandal, for these searchers?

Barth complains that Catholicism is so structured that the Catholic partner talks instead of listens and assumes from the start that he is right before the conversation has even begun.⁷ Perhaps this complaint that the Catholic does not play by the rules of the game sums up for Barth all his dogmatic objections and gives them new weight. The Protestant partner will without fail see something amiss in the Catholic when this attitude crops up of feeling one has already “dealt with” the heretic—not with his person, of course, but with the truth the heretic represents:

If a person is absolutely sure that he will be vindicated when confronting the other, he can afford to let himself be subject to the give and take of questioning without ever

growing less sure of his own position.⁸

Barth objects just as much when this attitude rears its head among Protestants. He objects to the traditional attitude that says that “a healthy, serious and convinced Protestantism consists precisely in dispatching the question of Catholicism cheerfully, resolutely and finally.” And the reasons he advances should shame us into a greater modesty: “This feeling of being done with Catholicism once and for all is much too Catholic.”⁹ It is just what the Protestant should be avoiding most of all (assuming it does not arise from never having encountered Catholicism in the first place):

I would even claim that the great strength of Protestantism is that we confront Catholicism differently, quite differently, from the way Catholics meet us, no matter how imprudent that defenselessness is from a tactical standpoint.¹⁰

Now we have just noticed how all truth formulated for polemical reasons is partial; and so it should not be difficult for the Catholic to set aside the scandal: even though he fundamentally represents the “totality of the truth”, he must not forget that every authentic faith, be it Catholic or Protestant, is an implicit faith. All true faith considers itself far from understanding the whole content of revelation but accepts in a childlike spirit what God has given the believer to accept. The illimitable horizon and sheer unknowability of the faith belong to its very essence.

And so Catholics with any sense of flexibility—those, that is, who appreciate the infinity of revelation, the vibrancy of both Scripture and tradition and the development of dogma, should have no trouble in realizing how partial is their own position and even how imperfect is the contemporary Church’s interpretation of the faith.¹¹ Such Catholics will keep an alert ear for all those who are searching for an authentic faith. For it has long been recognized that those who possess faith as a subjective disposition (*fides qua*) are entitled to make appropriate statements about its content (*fides quae*).

And what could be more Christian than to hear out what one’s fellow Christian has to say? This readiness is an integral part and an important sign of a living faith. Just as true love of God is shown in love of neighbor and cannot be divorced from it, so too a willingness

in faith to accept God's truth cannot be separated from an openness to the word and truth of one's neighbor.

Most polemical confrontations never become real encounters, not because they are polemical and fail because people disagree, but because they really want *to meet*: because everyone wants to encounter the other rather than be willing to *be met*. Certainly in many cases we feel that Barth has not really met us, because he does not really see where we stand. But still, I hardly know any Catholic writing where Barth would have to admit he has *been met*, although he has certainly tried to hear what we have to say. But, in a dialogue, a willingness to hear out the other is more important than talking.¹² Such eagerness to listen is in fact a dimension of our very faith and thus of our obedience and our prayer, all of which form an indissoluble unity.¹³

This book will proceed, therefore, on the presupposition that something is really being said to us and that we can answer only after we have really listened. The Church, too, at Nicea, Ephesus and Trent first listened and assembled in silence and meditation before delivering herself of an answer—one that was not a new truth but a new answer that had never been expressed that way before. For before Chalcedon the Church simply did not have the conceptual armory to answer monophysitism, nor before Augustine the tools for effectively responding to Donatism. And similarly, it could well be wrong to assume blithely that the present conceptual toolbox of theology suffices to adjudicate all Barth's questions. At any rate it is our duty to listen seriously before we for our part respond.

Of course, at present a Protestant will still enter the discussion without really understanding this Catholic "Plus". This plus-factor still contains the very points that seemed to make the Reformation unavoidable, the rejection of which, therefore, justifies the very existence of the schism. How reasonable, then, when the Protestant accepts our invitation with a certain inevitable mistrust. We are after all offering to open those doors anew that had once been slammed shut with such force and definition and to discuss those questions (even regarding them as still *discussable*!) that were the very cause of division in the first place.

That is why Catholic “flexibility” raises such suspicions from the very start: for any portrayal of the distinctive Catholic doctrines that Protestants would find acceptable would also presumably falsify the real situation. Protestants are convinced that they have seen through Catholicism once and for all; and if it should so happen that they discover a presentation of Catholic views that they do not find absurd, this must surely be due to the Catholic habit of countenancing “Jesuitical” arguments, hiding the Church’s true esoteric features behind politically shrewd and seductive masks. Slogans like “inculturation [*Anpassungskunst*]”, “the distinction between folk religion and theological religion” and sentences filled with “although. . . but then again”—all these threaten to bring about a collapse of dialogue once more.

How can Catholics counter such deep mistrust? How can they show that they hold no “sinister designs”?¹⁴ Let us hear what Barth has to say: “Catholicism stands before us today much more refined and alluring than in the sixteenth century. It has become Jesuitical. . . . It speaks more fearlessly and speaks more skillfully. It presses home its questions to us with greater urgency and at the same with greater understanding.”¹⁵ And the result is that, if sloth and inattention hinder conversation on the Catholic side, mistrust and suspicion cripple it on the Protestant.

But this should not thwart the task laid on us of reaching an understanding. Protestants by definition do not accept the distinctively Catholic doctrines, but that does not make them unbelievers. They still dwell in the same precincts of faith in the same Christ and are rooted and established in the same baptism. Their faith is still a trust in the same revelation; their object of faith is still the same. Hence our dialogue proceeds within the range of this faith. It is a common *fides* seeking *intellectus* in common.

And so Catholics will not let themselves be deflected from trying to understand their partners, despite their suspicions. But the only way of dissipating this mistrust will be to continue their own earnest search for understanding—*quaerens intellectum*—and to wait eagerly in gratitude for any spark that leads to the fire of a deeper and more vibrant understanding of the faith. A calculating spirit of

reconciliation is not enough; genuine humility must be the mark of all dialogue.

Not the least of the signs of this humility will be the Catholic's enduring readiness, even after four hundred years, to acknowledge and admit his share of blame for the wounding divisions in the Church. "Just as the Church at the time of the Reformation loudly proclaimed her *mea maxima culpa* through the mouth of Pope Hadrian VI"¹⁶—a confession that continues to resound and that can never be retracted so long as the split persists—so too today each individual must declare his solidarity in guilt with his separated brothers and sisters.

There may be reasons why the Church as a whole after the Reformation has not renewed this confession of guilt with the same force,¹⁷ or why, on the other hand, theologians today are once more concerned with the theme of the sinfulness and guilt of the Church and are trying to reconcile this with her holiness.¹⁸ But the individual Christian, at any rate, who enters into dialogue will immediately recognize that guilt is shared by both sides and will be able to confess this guilt openly without harming the obligation to defend the truth.

A cloud of guilt hovers over everything that touches on the divisions in Christendom. We see this most clearly in the early history of the Church, where it was obvious to everyone that the heretic was someone who was tearing apart the seamless garment of the Redeemer; yet it was no less obvious that this split in Christ's robe must have been latent for some time for it to have suddenly broken out with such vehemence. But also, we must remember that, as the history of the Church progresses, these truths still manage to live on, even where they have been rudely hauled away and deposited somewhere outside the walls of the Church. There they continued to live on and propagate as openly admitted truths, while much of the vitality they could bestow inside was painfully missing.

Can we really still say the daily Matins prayer "*Soli* Deo gloria" or sing the hymn of St. Thomas "*Sola* fides sufficit" with the same uninhibited innocence now that the Reformers have inscribed these holy words of the liturgy on their battle standards? Have not both sides been hurt?

Perhaps today we are beginning to move beyond the era of stale antitheses—Reformation and Counter-Reformation—with Catholics trying to be more catholic and not “anti-Protestant” and the Protestants more biblical and “evangelical” and not “protesters”. At any rate, as long as the split in the Church continues, we are daily being admonished for a guilt we have yet to settle.

Montesquieu once made a daring prophecy: “I predict: the Catholic religion will destroy the Protestant religion, and then the Catholics will become Protestants.”¹⁹ There might be a grain of truth in this shrewd remark, at least to this extent: reunion can never happen if one side tries to subjugate the other externally. Both sides often begin their dialogue with this false ideal. But reunion will never come about except through a humble submission by *both* sides to their common Lord and a mutual *rapprochement* in fraternal love, which includes taking seriously the background and approach of the other side. That is how Newman envisioned dialogue.

That is why dialogue in the full sense of the word—and in our ever more common distress—is so necessary. It must be a dialogue that searches out the ultimate causes of division, with both sides fully conscious of their common guilt. It could be, if God so gives his grace, that at the end of such a dialogue the question might arise of whether it is worthwhile to continue this split. Only the most basic and important reasons (which may seem, at best, mere side-issues to one party) could allow a Christian to feel (only a subjective!) justification for giving up the priceless legacy of Christ and refusing his most urgent command to stay united to each other.

With bitter irony Barth once “hailed” liberal Protestantism for its “works-righteousness” and for being so “modern”. In a spirit of earnest desire for self-examination, let us now hear Barth—this time without any irony—as he calls back that same liberal Protestantism and his whole church to the unity of Christ:

With its doctrine of God’s ever-free gift of grace, the Reformation intended to defend the birthright of the Christian Church against all distorting forms of human religiosity in the world. It was not lightly, but with a heavy heart, that it felt obligated to surrender its external unity with the Church of the Pope. If this obligation seems to have passed, . . . then perhaps it is time to wonder whether the restoration of external unity might not be worth the surrender of some small, inconsequential differences that may still otherwise divide us from Rome and that are of little advantage to us anyway.²⁰

Chapter 3

DIALOGUE WITH KARL BARTH

Why do we begin with Karl Barth when we want to come into contact with contemporary Protestantism? Are there not other worthy representatives of Protestantism besides him, more rounded perhaps, people who are closer to us than he? Would conversation not be easier with them? Why approach the very man who has invested all his powers to revive Protestantism in all its distinctiveness and purity, who claims he takes it more seriously than perhaps it takes itself and who intends to “understand it better than it understands itself”?¹ How hopeful or inviting can dialogue be in this case?

We will not be conversing with Barth because he is the head of a strong current in contemporary Protestantism. Schools of thought are transient phenomena that ebb and flow with the times. And not few are the voices that claim, perhaps rightly and not without a certain satisfaction, that Barth’s influence is already waning. But then there are also times when it is not a bad sign for a person to be losing influence.

In any event, Barth himself, at the very height of his influence in 1922, felt that his theology would be finished if it were to become a “school”.² And when he brought out the first volume of the *Dogmatics*, he mentioned that his readers would “understand it better if they regarded it as a solo effort and not as a brief for a movement, direction or school. . . or as *the* dogmatics of ‘dialectical theology’ ”,³ In this way, he wanted to free his thought from the tides of boom and bust.

For that reason, we must be very wary of the argument that “dialectical theology” is simply a product of the postwar period of the 1920s and is now out of date.⁴ Leaving aside the fact that the word “dialectical” (with its corollaries) almost completely disappeared from Barth’s vocabulary more than ten years ago,⁵ can we ever claim that a significant product of a certain time can be dispatched without further ado, or even be seen as being “refuted”, simply because it is

part of the past? Is Leibniz “out of date” merely because he was a child of a long-superseded Enlightenment? Or Bach, because he comes from the eighteenth century, which we feel so sure we have “overtaken”? Barth will never be overtaken as long as we have not seriously wrestled with his thought or answered the fundamental question he has posed.

It is this question, the one basic to confessing Protestantism as such and thus its *cause* (and not the “movement”), that has led us to this dialogue. We must choose Karl Barth for our partner because in him Protestantism has found *for the first time* its most completely consistent representative. He embodies a Protestantism that can only be reached by going back to its roots, its deepest sources: to Calvin and Luther; in other words, past all subsequent “developments”, deformations and etiolations of liberal Protestantism until we reach that moment when Barth purifies and radicalizes those sources.

As a Reformed theologian, Barth would of course modify or entirely drop crucial points in Luther’s doctrine—that is only to be expected of a Calvinist. But he has also done the same with Calvin himself. Can we even conceive of Calvin without a natural theology? Well, Barth works through these implications more consistently than Calvin!⁶ Did not Calvin explain the connection between divine righteousness and human justification? Then the point is to show what Calvin neglected to show!⁷ Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination contradicts the central meaning of redemption in Christ? Then Barth drops it without hesitation!⁸ Insofar as the Reformers are “clearly culpable of inconsistencies”,⁹ it will hardly do simply “to rejuvenate their theology, but we must go *beyond* the road they point out, following a straighter path than their directions gave.”¹⁰ Thus Barth is actually departing from a certain kind of “orthodoxy” at least as much as he is from liberalism, which is why orthodox thinkers have accused him (bizarrely enough) of “Modernism”.¹¹

This concern to pursue the Reformers’ theological reasoning to the end, to follow the spirit and not the letter of the Protestant tradition, meant that Barth was in a way liquidating the historical Reformation

and placing it within the precincts of the Church universal. To the extent that Calvin and Luther are relativized, the figures of the patristic and Scholastic period loom up larger behind them, who have an equal right to be heard on all the decisive questions of dogma:

It is true that during these periods we can see all too sharply those heavy marks of a Church not yet “improved”. And yet in a Thomas or a Bonaventure, and even more in an Anselm, or, going back farther, in Augustine, we are clearly dealing with recognized teachers of the one Church. And it is our Church too, at least insofar as she had not yet rejected reform. These figures, as well as the leaders of the Reformation, have the right to be heard by us. Evangelical dogmatics would do well to listen to them more, instead of treating the Reformation—as it usually does in its well-known belligerent tone—as the beginning of all wisdom.¹²

The Church for which Barth is writing his *Dogmatics* has not been founded at the Reformation: no one can found the Church but Christ.¹³ That is why Barth avers that he has just as much right as we do to lay claim to the pre-Reformation witnesses and documents of the Church. They are for him the witnesses of the understanding of Scripture and revelation of the *Una Sancta*, the one and holy Church, which will endure as the visible / invisible Body of Christ through all time. Just as for Barth there has been a “Catholicism” since the time of Ignatius of Antioch and Irenaeus, so too there has always been a kind of “Protestantism”, provided this is grounded in the enduring foundation of Christ in the midst of the relativity and sinfulness of our race. In Barth’s *Dogmatics* theology attains a breadth of subject matter and historical range that is coextensive with the Catholic understanding.

We have in Barth, then, two crucial features: the most thorough and penetrating display of the Protestant view and the closest rapprochement with the Catholic. On the one hand, we have the fullest and most systematic working out of the contrasts that distinguish Protestant from Catholic views: not merely in individual doctrines, even less in merely historical or psychological or even cultural perspectives, but in a strictly *theological* structure. That is why a dialogue with someone else might seem more promising than with Barth. On the other hand, he formalizes these contrasts in such a way that occasionally the form almost dissolves in the content, so

that the Protestant aspect seems reducible to a “corrective” or a “dash of spice” lending piquancy to the Catholic dough.

So it is not surprising that a Catholic can read through hundreds of pages of the *Dogmatics* or even whole books like his *Credo* or *Dogmatics in Outline* or his book on Anselm without having to raise any objection. But a dialogue with Barth, if it is to be fruitful, will have to take both these aspects into account. Catholic readers who have already overcome the prejudice that sees Barth as the purest incarnation of Protestant intransigence with whom conversation is a priori impossible (that would absolutize the first aspect of Barth) will easily fall into the opposite temptation of overestimating the second. They will read quotes from the Fathers and Scholastics and see familiar questions being discussed in a way that clearly converges with Catholic views on such crucial dogmatic themes as Trinity, the essence of God, the nature of the creature and creation, Christology and large parts of his ecclesiology and practical theology.

Catholic readers will also inevitably notice that Barth interprets certain Protestant doctrines like Luther’s stand on the servility of the will or Calvin’s double predestination in a way that wholly explodes the narrowness of these teachings and seems at first sight to be quite acceptable.¹⁴ Nonetheless, it is not enough simply to draw up a tally sheet of individual doctrines where we are in material agreement with Barth. Such a preliminary account would as yet accomplish nothing. To be fruitful, dialogue will have to take up the fundamental and formal set of theological principles that determine all the individual doctrines. If the conversation does not revolve around the issue of these principles, it will float in thin air, unanchored by anything real or substantial.

But no sooner are we agreed on the need to center all discussion on these principles than a new obstacle seems to loom: Barth’s theology has changed over the years. Not only has it grown and developed, but this process has touched the very inner core of his thought. Our best indication of this is the fact that the polemics directed against him in the 1920s and 1930s—even the cleverest—from both Catholic and Protestant pens now seem, in light of his *Dogmatics*, misdirected, overtaken by later events, ineffective and virtually incomprehensible. Far from being “dispatched” by these

attacks, he has confidently bypassed them and moved on to his main work, developing it with a sovereign neglect of these critics, fashioning a theology that renders obsolete all previous attacks on his thought.

It is now quite clear that the material content of his *Church Dogmatics* is radically different from his earlier writings. But can the same be said of the formal principles of this theology? This is a question to which we will have to return, but we can say for the moment that the answer must be No. Despite the far-reaching evolution of his work, Barth has remained true to his own deepest intuitions. The insight of the beginning has been maintained through all the vicissitudes of his career. True, this insight has found numerous and various conceptual and verbal expressions over the years, with earlier formulations partially scoured and cleaned; but as this image implies, it was all for the purpose of clarifying, purifying and preserving his original intuition.

If we assume this is true, our first task will be to look for the enduring constants supporting the whole of Barthian theology. We must search for the ultimate intuition, the deepest passion that animates him, that fiery vision that has set loose such an immense work and had such an impact. And since the earlier dialogues with the best Catholic theologians¹⁵ stopped short before very much of the *Dogmatics* was under way, we will concentrate primarily in this study on explaining the connection between Barth's formal principles and his main work, the *Church Dogmatics*, particularly those volumes that have recently appeared.

Only then can we find answers to such crucial questions as: Are these all-determining principles really the distinctive feature of Protestantism, as it were, the formalization of the whole of Reform since Luther and Calvin, so that Barth's real achievement is to have put new iron into the spine of confessional differences? Or are they susceptible to a quite different interpretation, one that might prompt us to get beyond previous sterile confessional differences?

Clearly this is no idle dialogue; we are not just warming over old and long-insipid questions that have been around for four hundred years. We are dealing with new and fresh questions raised by Barth's unique (and scarcely traditional) outlook. Barth is not a man

one can dispense with by rummaging around in our old arsenal of stock answers. This is one dialogue that is going to require effort.

There is another reason why we want to begin a dialogue with Karl Barth: his theology is lovely. I do not mean merely that stylistically Barth writes well, though he does. But the beauty of his prose emerges more because he unites two things: passion and impartiality. He is passionately enthusiastic about the subject matter of theology, but he is impartial in the way he approaches so volatile a subject. Impartiality means being plunged into the object, the very definition of objectivity. And Barth's object is God, as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, to which revelation Scripture bears witness.

Like Calvin and contrary to Luther, Barth turned away from the disposition of faith and focused on its content. Indeed Barth writes well *because* he strictly adheres to theological objectivism ("Faith lives from its object.")¹⁶, because he so sharply veers from the liberal Protestantism of Schleiermacher. That is why he is so readable and why we need not fear mushy piety or empty pastoral edification from him. The subject matter does its own edifying, builds its own edifice.

But the subject matter is in itself so far-reaching and demanding that true impartiality must coincide with an enthusiasm that permeates everything yet never lets the ego intrude. Barth's approach differs markedly from that excessively uncommitted theological objectivism that too often marks Catholic dogmatics. This inner unity of passion and impartiality is what makes Barth's theology so attractive and lovely.

Who besides him in the last decades has so understood how to read Scripture: neither "exegetically" nor "biblicistically", neither by reconstructing hypothetical events nor by indulging in florid or pastoral rhetoric? Barth focuses on the Word, fully and exclusively, that its full splendor might radiate out to the reader. Who but Barth has gazed so breathlessly and tirelessly on his subject, watching it develop and blossom in all its power before his eyes? One would have to go back to Thomas Aquinas to find a similar spirit, one free from the constraints of every tenseness and narrowness, combining superior gifts of understanding with goodness of heart. In Barth, this graciousness occasionally takes the form of a tinge of humor; but

more often we see it displayed in his extraordinary sense of timing, of just the right tempo, a sense of due rhythm.

Barth really makes us believe that for him Christianity was a radiantly triumphant opportunity. He manages this, not so much because he possesses the gift of style or writes well, but because he bears witness, sober witness, to a reality that epitomizes style, since God is its author. Barth is the very antithesis of Kierkegaard here, who sharply divided the aesthetical from the religious and ethical. But, for Barth, the religious sphere is aesthetical because it is religious, because it is in itself the most authentic.

This refutation of Kierkegaard, already evident and fully formed in the early Barth, is attributable to a final contrast: for Kierkegaard, Christianity is unworldly, ascetic, polemic; for Barth, it is the immense revelation of the eternal light that radiates over all of nature and fulfills every promise; it is God's Yes and Amen to himself and his creation. Nothing is more characteristic of these two men than the way they stand in relation to Mozart. For Kierkegaard, Mozart is the very quintessence of the aesthetic sphere and therefore the very contrast to a religious existence. He has no choice but to interpret him demonically, from the perspective of Don Juan.

Quite different is that view of Mozart by one of his greatest devotees, Karl Barth. If in earlier times he compared the entrance of Christianity with that of the Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*,¹⁷ that allusion was only an accident of free association. But when he later claimed that "Mozart, the Incomparable, created the best music the world has ever known",¹⁸ this was asserted in the most solemn tones. For the sake of his love for Mozart, Barth could even forgive a mountain of sins in so dreadful a theologian as David Friedrich Strauss:

It seems to me a fact well worth our pondering that, in the midst of so fatal a love-song that Strauss sang to "culture", nonetheless in all his variations Strauss keeps confessing "that for our age Mozart assumes the same place in music that Goethe does in poetry, namely, of being what the Greeks call *ho panu*: the universal genius beside whom the greatest achievers can be distinguished from the rest of men only by the fact that this or that later individual talent or side of art has developed farther along, or even one-sidedly, from what *they* first gave us." Anyone who sees that, of him may much be forgiven.¹⁹

And before Barth begins his doctrine of chaos (which is so often confused with the good “shadow-side” of creation, for whose sake creation has so often been denied), he turns his attention once more to Mozart, the better to set the right tone:

Why is it that this man is so incomparable? Why is it that, for the receptive, he has produced in almost every bar he conceived and composed a type of music for which “beautiful” is not a fitting epithet: music that for the true Christian is not mere entertainment, enjoyment, edification, but food and drink; music full of comfort and counsel for his needs; music that is never a slave to its techniques nor sentimental but always “moving”, free and liberating because wise, strong and sovereign? Why is it possible to hold that Mozart has a place in theology, especially in the doctrine of creation and also in eschatology, although he was not a Father of the Church, does not seem to have been a particularly active Christian and was a Roman Catholic, apparently leading what might appear to us a rather frivolous existence when not occupied with his work? It is possible to give him this position because he knew something about creation in its total goodness that neither the real Fathers of the Church nor our Reformers, neither the orthodox nor the liberals, neither the exponents of natural theology nor those heavily armed with the “Word of God” and certainly not the existentialists, nor indeed any other great musicians before or after him, either know or can express and maintain as he did. In this respect he was pure in heart, far transcending both optimists and pessimists. 1756-1791! This was the time when God was under attack for the Lisbon earthquake, and theologians and other well-meaning folk were hard put to defend him. In the face of the problem of theodicy, Mozart had the peace of God that far transcends all the critical or speculative reason that praises and reproves. This problem lay behind him. Why then concern himself with it? He had heard, and causes those who have ears to hear, even today, what we shall not see until the end of time—the whole context of providence. As though, in the light of this end, he heard the harmony of creation to which the shadow also belongs but in which the shadow is not darkness, deficiency is not defeat, sadness cannot become despair, trouble cannot degenerate into tragedy and infinite melancholy is not ultimately forced to claim undisputed sway. Thus the cheerfulness in this harmony is not without its limits. But the light shines all the more brightly because it breaks forth from the shadow. The sweetness is also bitter and cannot therefore cloy. Life does not fear death but knows it well. “Let perpetual light shine upon *them*”—yes, even the dead of Lisbon. Mozart saw this light no more than we do, but he heard the whole world of creation enveloped by this light. Hence it was fundamentally in order that he should not hear a middle or neutral note but the positive far more strongly than the negative. He heard the negative only in and with the positive. Yet, in their inequality, he heard them both together, as for example in the Symphony in G-minor of 1788. He never heard only the one in abstraction. He heard *concretely*, and therefore his compositions were and are total music. Hearing creation unresentfully and impartially, he did not produce merely his own music but that of creation, its twofold and yet harmonious praise of God. He neither needed nor desired to express or represent himself, his vitality, sorrow, piety or any program. He was remarkably free from the mania for self-expression. He simply offered himself as the agent by which little bits of horn, metal and catgut could serve as the voices of creation, sometimes leading, sometimes accompanying and sometimes in harmony. He made use of instruments ranging from the piano and violin, through the horn and clarinet, down to the

venerable bassoon, with the human voice somewhere among them, having no special claim to distinction, yet distinguished for this very reason. He drew music from them all, expressing every human emotion in the service of this music and not the other way around. He himself was only an ear for this music and its mediator to other ears.²⁰

Indeed, one will do well to keep in mind Mozart's melodies while reading Barth's *Dogmatics* and Mozart's basic style when searching for Barth's basic intention. It is in this way that one should read, for example, those pieces that seem like the powerful finale of a symphony: the end of Barth's doctrine of election with its absolutely masterful "concluding fugue" on Judas and Paul,²¹ or the equally radiant conclusion of his doctrine of creation in God's Yes to the world,²² or the three chapters on God's perfections,²³ or that astonishing triple fugue on faith, obedience and prayer that concludes the doctrine on providence.²⁴ In all these cases, one will have to admit that the similarities with Mozart are in no way accidental or external.

Indeed, we can even boldly say: whoever is unable to hear Barth with these ears simply has not heard him. Barth does not refine in ever subtler detail individual statements and concepts but rather opens up everything in his vision to an ever-greater horizon, an approach that is visible even in the details (here again, his method is like Mozart's). Barth paints frescos, which like all religious art of course are not without their dangers: drawing in exaggerated dimensions when translating the eternal into the temporal. And there is the prolixity to which, unfortunately, his *Dogmatics* noticeably succumbs.

But such external faults do not obscure his sense of the proper internal relations required by the object. Above all, this means that objective theological realities have determined what questions he has asked, the problems he has chosen to treat, the way he has gone about dealing with them—all have been dictated by the issue itself. And this is God's revelation. Neither personal inclination nor the historicity of a question or a theological tract justifies any departure for Barth from this fundamental rule. Where revelation casts its light, there too must theology find its central concern. What is merely peripheral to revelation and only indirectly illuminated must

not be made a central theme in theology or an independent area for research.

Faith is always obedience, even when it is seeking insight and understanding; it is never permission for us to give vent to our hunger for novelty. And many questions that human curiosity tends to ask of revelation are rejected by revelation, exposed as false and irrelevant. But the themes that God poses and reveals for our understanding cannot be pondered enough. That Barth kept to these limits, that he held such constraints to be the highest form of divine permission to be free, this constitutes the purity of his theological draftsmanship and the beauty of its execution. And so we see: the second reason for engaging him in dialogue is intimately tied to the first. It is like the objects of technology: they are beautiful to the extent that they are perfectly functional and impartial. In impartiality there is a kind of asceticism that, in conforming itself to the Idea, can present itself in full purity.

Chapter 4

BARTH'S STANDPOINT

In trying to outline, at least provisionally, Barth's fundamental positions, we can venture to summarize his standpoint in three key theses:

1. Karl Barth consciously and consistently takes his stand midway between liberal Protestantism and Catholicism.
2. From this position, Barth feels he can not only expound revelation according to its real content but also critically judge and delimit the real thrust of liberal Protestantism as well as Catholicism.
3. And this center or midpoint where Barth takes his stand must be understood as radically christocentric: that is, an approach that interprets all secular and worldly relations and realities in terms of God's self-interpreting Word, Jesus Christ.

We will take up each of these points in turn:

1. In the first volume of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth has characterized his work as a kind of middle road coursing between two erroneous paths. But this is no "middle-of-the-road" compromise, a balancing out of two opposing errors, but a two-edged protest against the pietistic-*cum*-rationalist modernism on the left and Roman Catholicism on the right.¹ In this way he is repeating the method of Erich Przywara, who developed his Catholic position on the analogy of being as the medial position between pantheistic naturalism on the left and theopanistic Protestantism on the right. But Przywara took this image of the middle path more seriously than Barth, for he saw these two extremes as irreconcilable precisely because they were kept apart by the middle term and could only be brought into harmony by a radical reconciliation with the middle

(which they were unable to do on their own creaturely terms). Whereas Barth sees these two extremes as basically one: for they both ascribe, either to “the pious individual” (Schleiermacher) or to an “immaculate” or “infallible” or “holy” human being, a place that properly belongs to God alone. That is why Barth can sardonically invite the two opponents to come to terms with each other, since there really is not anything essential keeping them apart. For they have already come to “terms” in the theses of “natural theology” to which they both subscribe.

Yet it still does not distort Barth’s position to say that he takes a middle road between them: he admits that liberal Protestantism is indeed a form of Protestantism. And if this merely terminological connection scarcely seems to be much more than a negative one (both at the least are *not* Catholic!), nonetheless, this very frail thread has still withstood all load tests thus far (and what weight it has had to bear up to now!). Barth in fact has faced the toughest test of all:

If I had become convinced that the Schleiermacher-Ritschl-Troeltsch interpretation of the Reformation were indeed the *right* one, that this was the *real thrust* of what Luther and Calvin tried to accomplish, I still would not have become a Catholic, even if I had had to bid farewell to what used to be the evangelical Church. But, if I were forced to choose between these two evils, I would in fact rather become a Catholic.²

But even this extraordinary threat is meant only to underline his hope that these two forms of Protestantism would come to realize their true unity once more. This same hope prompts Barth to import and appropriate Catholic tradition and dogma: so that Protestantism might once more become true to itself, truer perhaps than it had ever been before in its history. *Church Dogmatics* continuously and tirelessly points out those historical byways along which Protestantism strayed, deserting authentic reform and degenerating into such forms as “Scholastic orthodoxy”, “Pietism”, and “Idealism”. And Barth is honest enough in this “psychoanalysis” of immense flair to admit openly that this false development was not just fatal but virtually inevitable.

Accordingly, Barth felt confronted with an almost superhuman task. He saw “how *frightening* the historical situation is, how vast the *chasm*, how immense the task facing the Protestant theologian, how

justified one must be when confronting this reality to throw up one's hands in despair, or (look, they are waving at us from the other shore!)—become a Catholic.”³ He saw his task as akin to “stopping a runaway car”,⁴ or—even harder—bending the rudder of history to prevent this four-hundred-year catastrophe from happening again. Even the bitterest of smelling salts must be used to reignite a liberal Protestantism that has now become so “pious” and innocuous.

Feuerbach's example proves where Schleiermacher leads to, whose primitive decision of sublime inability to make a decision, whose idealistic ambiguity, is evident for all to see.⁵ And Feuerbach leads directly to Strauss, whose *Life of Jesus* is the handwriting on the wall for all future psychologies of the life of Jesus.⁶ And just as inevitably comes Overbeck, in whose withering protest against Protestantism one feels for the first time true wind blowing in the sails of the barque of the Church.⁷

Barth never ceases denouncing the now meaningless and ineffective protest of a Protestantism whose Jesuitical “refinements and accommodations of Christianity have far exceeded the Jesuitical evasions of the Catholics.”⁸ Here is Barth at his most scathing in his critique of Protestantism:

Is modern Protestantism anything but a Catholicism distorted by various, not terribly significant heresies?⁹

How can we confront Rome, if we have not yet faced among ourselves the question of what we stand for and represent as non-Catholic Christians?¹⁰

Seen from *within*, there exists little cause for the struggle against Rome today, but oh, how much house-cleaning we have to do in our own house!¹¹

If Protestantism is nothing more than pious tradition or an innocuous eclecticism or a liberal cult of personality and interiority,¹² and no longer that precinct of the Church where the *Solus Deus, sola scriptura* and *sola fides* are heard and understood, then one might well wonder whether Catholicism contains more of the original intent of Luther and Calvin than the heresy of liberal Protestantism.¹³ At least there one still finds a living and “strong awareness that the real and primary concern of the Church is purely and simply God himself

in Jesus Christ”.¹⁴ There still lives in Catholicism “the notion of mediatorship and service”.¹⁵

“And based on this belief that Jesus Christ is the subject of the Church, the Catholic Church still dares to claim *authority* for herself, . . .”¹⁶ and authority “is not a shibboleth from a ‘sorcerer’s’ Church but belongs to the very essence of the Church as such”.¹⁷ “In other words, our protest against the Roman concept of authority is not vaguely similar to that of the modern intelligentsia; between us it is a quarrel of neighbors.”¹⁸ “Protestantism protests, not against, but for the Church. . . . The Protestant Church really does mean *Church*, not less but more, not weaker but stronger, than the Catholic Church.”¹⁹

This is not the place to pose the difficult question of how Barth, given such views, could establish any real authority inside the terms of Protestantism or how he could even speak of “Church” in the strict sense of the term.²⁰ The crucial point at this juncture is to see that with all these statements Barth is trying to get closer to the real substance of the Reformation, which at this point in history and quite accidentally has been better preserved by the Catholic Church than by the decadent forms of liberal Protestantism.

Barth, however, in no way wants to cut off all the ligatures that bind him to the tradition of Schleiermacher and liberal Protestantism. Not only does he make no bones about his complete admiration for all of Schleiermacher’s work, he even criticizes Emil Brunner for summarily dismissing this “rich, complex and sophisticated man”.²¹ Schleiermacher “undoubtedly accomplished *his* goals extraordinarily well”, and we may refuse to go down his path only if we partake in a “theological revolution that in its depths and energy is truly no less powerful than the Reformation itself.”²² Not only does Barth seek in his own theology to bring out the points of contact between Schleiermacher and himself,²³ but he seeks to trace the lineage that leads from Schleiermacher’s theology of experience through Wilhelm Herrmann’s existentialism to his own theology of faith.²⁴ Though Barth is extremely critical of the way liberal Protestantism is developing, he is never tempted to “throw the baby out with the bath water”.

But with Barth and liberal Protestantism, it is much easier to see what he means by the bath water; it is not so easy to specify what the baby is he wants to affirm. For the time being, we will discuss only the first aspect. The second is much harder to determine and will occupy a good part of the rest of this book.

All those who are familiar with Kierkegaard or with Hegelian Idealism will recognize the family resemblances in Barth's own way of thinking. How could it be otherwise, since Barth studied at Marburg and had Herrmann for his teacher—who took a rather strange middle position between the famous German Idealist and Kierkegaard's existentialism. So why should Barth's theological style not be closer to that of the nineteenth century: after all, he never encountered the Greeks or the Scholastics until much later. However one wants to interpret this relationship, we can confirm its influence because of the number of times Barth has been suspected of being a crypto-philosophical Idealist. The accusation is facile and will not hold up under scrutiny. But the apparent similarity of their styles lends credence to the charge. More of this later.

But this much is clear, why Barth has rejected liberal Protestantism: in all its main doctrines it has moved farther and farther away from revelation. While Catholicism indeed is a "distortion, but nonetheless a distortion of a substance it has not lost" but has preserved, Protestantism—at least in its final phases—has now moved so far from authentic Christianity that all that remains is the name itself. God's revelation, coming to us from outside and above in order to elect, save, sanctify and redeem man, has been replaced by a growing interest in subjectivity. Pietism was the first, if veiled, expression of this trend. Idealism further prepared the way, and then in Feuerbach we have the fullest enunciation of the theory of the "religious" person's self-redemption, the reduction of faith to the "highest possibility" of reason, and of revelation to the "highest possibility" of history. And from there it is but a short and inevitable step to interpreting Jesus' "awareness of God" as but the highest possibility of human religiosity.

For Barth, this whole river empties out with total inexorability into the idolatry of the "Aryan Christians"²⁵ and into neopaganism in general. If Schleiermacher is already the "Niagara over whose rim

the main rivers of theological thought for at least two centuries comes roaring down with frightful relentlessness",²⁶ then the later transposition of Christianity into a version of nationalism and racial idolatry is but the "last stop" on that "halting journey" that began with Schleiermacher and coursed through the whole of the nineteenth century.²⁷ Barth can summon the German Church to the struggle against liberalism with such vehemence precisely because these connections are so perfectly obvious to him. This is why he pronounces his "unconditional and unhesitating No to the spirit and letter of this doctrine [of religious subjectivity]" and thinks that "it would be better for the evangelical churches to become tiny remnants hiding out in the catacombs than for them to make peace, even from afar, with this doctrine."²⁸

Nonetheless, while Barth vigorously rejects the whole *content* of liberal Protestant theology, he still allows for the possibility of adopting certain formal elements (we will discuss this in more detail later). Something similar can be seen in Barth's attitude to the enemy on the right, only in reverse: here Barth finds himself in agreement with many specific items of dogma—the very ones he feels were so painfully missing in liberal Protestantism; but the mysterious formal structure at the foundations of Catholicism, which for Barth permeates, determines and infects everything Catholic, ultimately prevents a rapprochement with it.

As we will soon come to hear, the guiding and all-determining formal principle has been christened by Barth as "analogy of being". In so designating this principle as the touchstone for everything Catholic, Barth is in essence adopting the usage first adumbrated by Erich Przywara but that quickly found general acceptance in the literature. But Barth is also explicitly accepting Przywara's own estimation of analogy of being as an expressly *formal* principle, something Przywara was the first to do.²⁹

So it would hardly do to lay on Barth's shoulders the responsibility for transforming the principle of analogy into a kind of key for understanding the distinctively Catholic. This happened in the course of Przywara's ambitious plan of drawing in modern intellectual life, and ultimately every conceivable outlook, and incorporating these into the structure of the Catholic world view. We will have to keep

this in mind if we are correctly to understand Barth's struggle against the analogy of being as *the* formal structure of Catholicism. What Barth has done with this principle, with what justice he sets *it* up as the main focus of his opposition, will occupy us in the course of this study. For the moment, we need only recall that Barth positions his *Dogmatics* between two flanks: on the left, he rejects the *content* of liberal Protestantism while admitting its formal principle; and, on the right, he rejects *the formal* structure of Catholicism while showing a deep appreciation for the content of many of its doctrines.

2. Now that we see Barth's ties with the formal principles of modern thought (particularly of Idealism) and knowing that he develops his theology consciously rejecting the formal principle of Catholicism (assuming it has one), we should already expect his own thought to be quite visibly and strikingly determined by such formal structures. His thought is not "positivistic" in the sense of earlier orthodoxy or in the manner of the biblicism of the post-Reformers' generation or of recent exegesis (a positivism of "original intent"). Barth's thought is that of a systematic, *constructive* thinker, even if he explicitly rejects the idea that systematics (as philosophy understands that concept) is appropriate for theology.

Barth scales mountains. He has chosen for his standpoint a summit so high that faith can survey the whole meaning and plan of the divine economy. *Formally* considered, this is very similar to the stance adopted by a Schleiermacher or Hegel, although Barth never leaves the standpoint of pure theology and never sketches out a philosophy as such or a metaphysics that could bridge the divide between theology and philosophy. What Barth has in fact done is to invert the Hegelian intent but in the Hegelian manner: as Hegel tried to absorb the assertions of theology into a more comprehensive philosophy, Barth orders all the paths of human wisdom, philosophical and religious, around the central core of a purely theological point of view.

In the very measure that Barth's thought is exclusively and strictly theological, he is able and willing to confront philosophy as a whole as well as the various types of philosophy in the course of its history: from Descartes through Leibniz and Kant, the Idealists,

Schopenhauer and Feuerbach, to Nietzsche, Heidegger and Sartre, there is hardly an important thinker to whom Barth has not devoted a detailed *excursus* in his *Dogmatics*. Because Barth's *Dogmatics* has a strictly formal structure, it can raise universal—that is, “Catholic”—claims. And for that reason, the tension between faith and knowledge, theology and philosophy, is constantly alive and operative. And that is why his *Dogmatics* must try likewise to formalize the Catholic claim and to finesse the discussion, so that formal issues become all-decisive.

3. The center where Barth stands is radically christocentric. What this means will become clearer later in this exposition. For the moment, it will suffice if we but realize that with this standpoint Barth intends to distance himself from his two opponents, who seem to subsume Christ within some more overarching category. Schleiermacher abandoned Christ as center in favor of a general religious awareness. Consequently, Christ is but the loftiest example of a religious life in principle available to all. There is thus a category more determining than Christ. In this way Schleiermacher simply stopped being a believer in the strict sense of the word and became a fellow traveler of the philosophers.

But such Idealism was not the only school being charged with the betrayal of the gospel; so too was every form of thinking that wanted to subsume God's revelation in Christ under some other category, some schema of “foreunderstanding” that stands ready to “explain” the Christ-event. And the strife between such schools is immaterial: it matters not that personalism replaced naturalism, or historical categories replaced ontological ones, or existentialism won out over essentialism. All that changes is the philosophical starting point. But the question is never raised how theology can really accomplish anything with this array of philosophical possibilities. Hardly surprising, then, that Barth feels as equally obliged to distance himself from his earlier friends in the existentialist movement as he had once done with his teachers in Marburg.

By now Barth's objection to Catholicism should also be clear: he accuses it of possessing an overarching systematic principle that is merely an abstract statement about the analogy of being and not a

frank assertion that Christ is the Lord. This principle presupposes that the relationship between God and creature can already be recognized in our philosophical foreunderstanding (of natural theology). This means that God's revelation in Jesus Christ seems to be but the fulfillment of an already existing knowledge and reality. Perhaps this need not imply a metaphysics that sets itself above faith itself, but Christ's place as the fulfillment of salvation history is still reserved "in advance": in an ontology that exists prior to the order of revelation and cannot be shattered by it.

The Catholic world view, then, recognizes two summits, and revelation and its claims are thereby relativized. Christ can still be the fulfillment of the natural order and even exceed its expectations (*gratia perficit et extollit naturam*), but he cannot be the ultimate foundation of the whole world order.

This quite provisional outline of Barth's standpoint is based on Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, or at least on those seven volumes and five thousand pages that have appeared at the writing of this study. There may well be key themes from his earlier writings that have not had their influence here. In any case, this massive work represents the mature and certainly definitive configuration of his whole theological intention and intuition. It is also the form of his thought that should most concern Catholic theologians who want to initiate a really significant and fruitful discussion with Barth.

Most of those who take up Barth usually try to enter his world through his *Epistle to the Romans* and other early and more accessible writings. Accordingly, after completing this introductory overture to Barth, we will have to devote one part of the first half of this study (Part II) to Barth's development. In this section, we will not only set forth the individual phases of his journey but above all establish that the final form of his thought as contained in the *Dogmatics* was already but the working out of the intention and entelechy of his entire, and highly dramatic, career.

We will follow Barth through all the various stages of his thought. Along this path we will notice Barth continually jettisoning imperfect expressions in his search for the definitive way to express his basic intuition and to remain true to it. In doing so, we will see him coming

into ever-closer contact with the tradition and with Catholicism, formulating his standpoint with ever-greater clarity and range, until finally he stands before us armed with an astonishingly powerful vision, demanding to be taken seriously as a partner in dialogue.

Chapter 5

THE CATHOLIC STANDPOINT

What is the standpoint of Catholic theology in relation to Karl Barth? The question is complex and by no means unambiguous. Indeed, one may well ask initially whether Catholicism as such (that is, independent of the exigencies of ecumenical dialogue) even *has* a standpoint in the way Barth does, from which he thought he could judge Catholicism. Even at this juncture, this must be denied, though we can justify this denial only later on.

Barth is an individual theologian of immense constructive power. The Catholic Church, however, is primarily a Church and not a theology. And Catholic theology itself is not the work of a single individual thinker. Historically speaking, it is a texture of successive intellectual forms that coexist alongside one another without prejudice to their internal integrity (just as there are large numbers of different Doctors of the Church). It is at least questionable whether one can abstract from these varieties of thought a common, specifically Catholic thought-form in the way we have seen such a form determine Barth's system.

For that reason, we will have to be continually returning to the issue of Erich Przywara, to the provocation he set loose in Barth with his doctrine of the analogy of being. The protest of the editor of the journal *Catholica* is well taken: Przywara is *not* the "Crown witness" of Catholic doctrine, let alone a modern Church Father, even of the Catholic doctrine of "*analogia entis*", if by that we mean that the undoubtedly ingenious formula introduced by Przywara has now become *the* key to Catholic doctrine incumbent on all to use.¹ We must not forget that Przywara formulated his doctrine during Barth's early thought, that is, against Barth's dialectical theology. Thus it will hardly do to use this teaching as a counterweight to the later systematic Barth of the *Church Dogmatics*. Before this shift, his dialectical method was quite abstract and schematic, as therefore was Przywara's analogy. If then we are to use Przywara as our way of responding to Barth's *Dogmatics*, we will have to adduce evidence

from his later, and quite impressive, writings. And even that must not be regarded as *the* Catholic form for thinking through these issues.

Let us assume, then, that there is no single Catholic approach, and that there need not be. This does not dispose of the question: How are we to respond to Barth's theology? Here we have a thinker, as we have seen, who tries to present the deepest drive of the Reformation in a way that can incorporate modern, Idealist and existential thought and yet at the same time is not averse to the earlier theological styles of the Fathers and Scholastics. On the contrary, these views too Barth tried to incorporate into his thought.

How are we to answer this bold venture, which addresses us so directly, questions us so earnestly and so urgently compels a response from us? Is Robert Grosche right when he says that "his theology poses a question to us Catholics that we cannot evade. The old answers of habit will not suffice"?² Are we who are in the forefront of such a discussion—where Barth himself has put us!—sufficiently armed and ready for such dialogue, or must we first prepare the way for a later direct dialogue?

Generally speaking, it would seem that the conditions for such an encounter of mutual understanding are not all that unfavorable. This is because, first of all, the founder of "existential theology" soon abandoned this path. While existentialism, in both philosophy and theology, was quickly degenerating into a jejune trendiness, Barth was moving toward Anselm and Thomas Aquinas, unexpectedly finding affinities with Scholastic theology. In fact, he even went so far as to say that "the fear of Scholasticism is the hallmark of the false prophet. The true prophet will not shirk the challenge of submitting his message to this stringent test too."³ Seen in this light, Luther's "irregular" dogmatics struck Barth as "dangerous",⁴ and he explicitly said that he thought it was a "healthy development" when Catholic theology returned as a whole and quite systematically to Thomas: "What more important task could there be for a Church under siege from without than internal consolidation, which it is the function of theology above all to achieve?"⁵

But while Barth was moving in this direction, most of the Catholic avant-garde was going the opposite way. Skittish about Scholasticism, they ventured into parallels and openings in modern

thought. In the dazzling light of Scheler's hints, they discovered the categories of the personal; Husserl gave them a concrete phenomenology even for matters religious; and Heidegger pointed them to the radical historicity of finite existence. So intense was their admiration for Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoyevsky—and even for Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Rilke—that these figures almost threatened to become modern Church Fathers, so that the great tradition was seen through their lenses.

Unfortunately, this crisscrossing countermovement cannot be regarded as a fruitful complement to the direction taken by Barth or as the precondition for a happy encounter. The results of this work were confined too much in purely literary or philosophical concerns; it never really ripened enough to produce any specifically *theological* fruit. Indeed, the whole trend between 1920 and 1930 can in retrospect be described as a flight from theology. Scorning a manual theology that could no longer satisfy, the writers of this decade, however, did nothing to replace that theology with anything of equal merit. It was all the fashion in the prefaces of books of that period to claim that the last thing one was doing was raising any serious theological claims. Brief essays that put the future of theology under a magnifying glass and expressed dismay at what they saw were all the rage.

Those Protestant theologians of the time who were meanwhile trying to establish the scientific foundations of their discipline did not find this to be a very edifying spectacle. Whoever wants to look at this “revolutionary” time in Catholic thought from the harsh but perhaps not unjust point of view of a Protestant evangelical could do no better than read the assessment of Ernst Wolf, which can be a rather humbling experience.⁶

In any case this period now seems to be drawing to a close. Today's bolder souls know well that they can no longer evade the stringent demands of true theology. They know how difficult the task is, how superhuman are the demands for a dogmatics that would answer to the challenge of the new vistas now opening up. They cannot close themselves off to the fact that while many of the finest minds have devoted their attention to Kafka, Rilke and existentialism, Karl Barth has consistently focused on the “one thing necessary”: to

speak of Jesus Christ and him crucified, that is, in accessible yet strictly theological terms. Like a mountain climber, he has unerringly moved step by step up his chosen path, with an energy that only the technicians of our culture seem to command these days, to the point where he can finally see the completion of his work. His persistence in pursuing dogmatics continues to pose a quiet, urgent question to Catholic theology.

Only by openly admitting how daunting this challenge is can we begin to estimate how ready we are to answer Barth, at least provisionally. I say “provisionally” because Barth is still at work shaping his thought. Moreover, there is an inherent dynamic to his work, reflected in the transitions that mark his thought (a theme we will discuss in Part II). This is the dynamism of the individual thinker; and, as we know, the individual always outweighs the many in importance. In the realm of the spirit, mere number carries little weight. Even the true tradition of the Church, as well as the whole Christian cause, rests, not on the masses, but on each individual as individual.

They are the ones who see—often in complete obscurity—the very question that occupied Barth, even if their approach or starting point is different or if they think another solution is called for. These are the thinkers who abjure religious journalism for the sake of hard theological work. One can of course accuse them of being “uninfluential recluses” in contradistinction to those who like to dub themselves part of the “really important dogmaticians”, as Emil Brunner once did. But such a characterization only merits the wrath of a Gottlieb Sohngen:

I cannot see what benefit could ever come from such a distinction. Liberal Protestants were never, and are certainly not now, “uninfluential recluses”. Did anything special come from their theology? But is it any different in the field of Catholic theology? To be sure, we have grown accustomed to understanding by “truly significant” theologians those Doctors of the Church who have been declared such by the Church. In that case, Augustine and Bonaventure as well as Thomas Aquinas and Bellarmine would belong to this select company. But then it will no longer do to impute “insignificance” to those Catholic theologians who maintain Augustine’s and Bonaventure’s way of looking at natural theology (that is, the contemplation of the actual condition of fallen man), using the idea of “insignificance” in the only way it could be theologically meaningful: that they are following authorities who have had no significance for the Church. And if these theologians form a minority in today’s Catholic Church (and that is in fact the case), the import of this should not be

disguised. For it can only mean there is a theological minority for the healthy maintenance and growth of the theological tradition. Protection for this theological minority is in the interest of a Catholic theology that is concerned with the truth of the case and not with the rights of a school, even less with that political maneuvering or assertion of power outside the field of theology. At stake here is no less than the fate of controversial theology.⁷

It is in this sense that the present disputation has been conducted. As is every theological labor in the precincts of the Catholic Church, this *disputatio theologiae* is first of all the effort of an individual working within a very disparate and loosely organized group or movement that feels drawn to a dialogue with Barth. What is said here, then, is said with an empathy, a sense for what others in this group feel. And it would be misleading to think that this movement touches only a few souls and is not a sign of the times.

We declare ourselves ready to dialogue with Karl Barth and equipped for the task ahead. While we firmly adhere to the legal boundaries of Roman Catholicism, we are a group ready to take up the fundamentals of Barth's christocentrism—each member from his own presuppositions—and we are prepared to follow it through. Here is a group where dialogue is not only possible but is a process already well under way.

Chapter 6

NARROWING THE FOCUS

Since it is a sheer impossibility even to begin to describe, criticize or give a positive Catholic counterproposal to Karl Barth's *Dogmatics* (much less of his whole corpus) within the covers of one book, we will have to limit our theme and narrow our focus. If one surveys the vast scope and the many themes of Barth's thinking, looking specifically for their suitability for ecumenical discussion, two major thematic motifs immediately spring to mind. The first motif usually emerges more in the tractates placed at the beginning of the *Dogmatics*, while the second can usually be found in the later volumes. I am referring in the first case to that thematic cycle centering on creation, Incarnation and redemption to which Barth gave his unique christocentric stamp. The second motif centers on the thematic cluster of Church, sacrament and Christian life. These latter themes are directly dependent on the first constellation, and their characteristic stamp is due to the decisions taken earlier.

It is a striking fact that without any doubt Barth is much more creative, original and at ease in treating the first cluster of themes than he is in the second, where his heart does not seem to be fully engaged. In his doctrine of the Church (which of course he has not yet fully developed at the writing of this present study), he is rather pallid; his doctrine of the sacraments is derivative; and only in his ethics does the old color, so evident in his treatment of creation, providence and redemption, seem to return to his cheeks.

What accounts for such unevenness? Perhaps it is due to Barth's own personal temperament or to his affinity for Calvin. Catholics would do better to focus on the first thematic cluster if they want a productive and fruitful dialogue with Calvinism. But if one's interest lies more in the area of Church and sacraments, one would do better to seek a Lutheran for dialogue. Hence we will be concentrating in this book above all on the first set of themes. Only at the close of this study will we touch upon, and then only tangentially, some of the questions in the second cluster.

This delimitation of our theme might at first seem arbitrary, as if we are trying to evade precisely those difficult and burning questions that seem most to divide. But, in this case at least, appearances are deceiving. If we broach the problems of methodology and first principles spelled out in Barth's first set of themes, tackling them first, we shall have gone far toward resolving the questions in the second cluster.

When Barth explained what kept him from the Catholic Church, he always described the contrast in terms of formal structures. A particular church gains its identity because it is built on the basis of a certain view of revelation, of faith, of Jesus Christ, which entails a certain kind of church. Indeed for Barth, the formal issue is what justified the schism in the first place: because we are not one on this point, there is no way of abolishing the tragedy of division. And that is why we will direct our whole attention to this first set of issues.

This does not mean that, should a conversation on formal issues prove feasible—against Barth's constant protestations to the contrary—and bring a real possibility of agreement, that agreement on material issues would naturally follow. Specific doctrines in ecclesiology must be discussed on their own terms too, but at least the threads linking the two sets of issues would have been severed. That would by no means make discussion on church issues superfluous, but at least we would have helped to remove the excess theological baggage that so burdens the chances for mutual understanding.

One can of course ask beforehand whether the "systematic thread" can still be as tautly drawn after the appearance of the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* as it had been before. The picture of the Church as depicted in the essays around 1925, the first draft of his dogmatics and the great Prolegomena presuppose to a great extent concepts that can no longer be found in the same way in the later volumes. Thus Barth's ecclesiology is at the moment an open question, and we will simply have to wait for its treatment within the structure of the *Dogmatics* to judge what consequences for ecclesiology Barth will draw from the change he has effected.

On the whole (and this is of course quite paradoxical), Barth will be getting closer to Catholicism as he develops the first set of

themes, while a development of the second will mean a distancing from us. But even this divergence will later dissipate, at least partially, if we are talking about the radical consequences that Barth thinks he can draw from his formal principle.

But however much Barth is aware of these consequences, for us they mean that if partitions in the first set of themes collapse or at least become transparent, then decisive grounds for the split in the Church can no longer be adduced.

Touching on the topic of politics: we will discuss this issue only peripherally, symptomatically, as it were. It will occupy our interests only indirectly, as part of the context of dogmatic questions. Of course the relation is mutual: for Barth's political positions can be traced back to their origins in his thinking on dogmatics, and his dogmatics is already capable from the beginning of generating practical and political consequences. The more deeply one becomes acquainted with Barth's thought, the more evident become such connections—in both directions, so that one is both the effect and the cause of the other. And perhaps we can once more admire how Barth has also remained true to himself here too: that his earliest [political] positions—spiritual and secular in one—have been maintained as good as unchanged through all the transformations and developments in his thought, up to the latest writings.

Chapter 7

THE FORMAL PRINCIPLE OF THE CONTROVERSY

From the very first moment Barth's standpoint became known, it was clear that he wanted to distinguish his position from Catholicism on the grounds of a formal principle (Erich Przywara's influence is especially striking here). This immediately means that we must take seriously the nature of the battle facing us. When the issue is merely one of content, one can fight on equal terms and can struggle over the same issue using the same weapons. In the heat of battle one can even exchange rapiers, like Hamlet and Laertes.

And yet here the fight goes on. The reason the totality of issues is so heated, but also so cloudy and obscure, is precisely because behind the material issues there always lies the animating formal principle:

The battle is so serious because neither side can seriously deny that it is really *the same object* we refer to, but at the same time we can find no way to find unity over its right concept. . . . The dispute is therefore so pressing and urgent because we see the *same* reality in different *ways*, even if we dare not say that, by God's eternal and unfathomable decree, the same reality is looking *at us* in such different ways. Thus, because we see so differently (*aliter*), we also end up seeing, at least partially, something different (*alia*). And thus the dispute over the How (*quale*) comes to affect in fundamental ways all the secondary divergences over the What (*quantum*): for example, on the hierarchy of functions in the Church, whether the Church is fundamentally a preaching or sacramental Church, over the relationship of the bearers of ecclesial power to the rest of the People of God, over the extent and range of Church authority, over the special predicates of magisterial and jurisdictional power of the Bishop of Rome for the whole of the Church, and so on. All these questions are crucial and hotly debated, but they are so because we have already been fighting basically over something quite different.¹

This important passage has captured the very crux of the difficulty in this whole dialogue. If anyone for instance wants to jump into the swirl of battle without due consideration of these realities in order to do battle over the set of *alia* (the distinctive doctrines separating us), he will certainly have his work cut out for him; but in the end perhaps it will all have come to naught. It could well be that the primary

problem still stands untouched, because in the whole dispute it has never been thematized. According to Barth, the primary problem is a formal or, if one prefers, a “modal” problem (that is, the *aliter* is more decisive than the *alia*).

Now of course form and mode do not exist in a vacuum but must always have a content; we know of form only through an encounter with a substance *in concrete*. So it will hardly surprise us if Barth will justify his accusation that we see matters otherwise and “falsely” by pointing to the quite concrete material doctrines and opinions to which we do subscribe. Not that he dismisses them as such; but these are regarded by him primarily as *symptoms* of that modal difference in *outlook*. As we shall soon see, the same fundamental objection can be put in different ways. It resembles that Hydra² whose severed heads keep growing back from some mysterious power, a power that obviously is not affected by all the outer wounds inflicted on it.

This is what makes dialogue so uncommonly difficult: that the truly crucial issue is a formal one but one that is accessible to us *only* in the material doctrines that divide us. For we could clear up all material questions as such without ever resolving the fundamental formal dispute, and our opponent could then retreat behind this most crucial of issues. Put bluntly, the Catholic approach “smells” Catholic, and this is bound to offend Protestant instincts.

On the one hand, the formal dimension really can be grasped in specific *material* issues (this speaks against any attempt to throw up our hands in despair, as if all differences ultimately come down to an irrationally chosen first principle). The dogmatic differences are quite evidently before us, even if they are but symptoms of a wider problem, and remain accessible to sober theological research. This mysterious formal principle thus appears in this light as a universal, as a regulating principle, which explains and arranges the order and nature of our respective material dogmatics. For that reason, dialogue over the two “forms” of Christianity must involve a sober and fact-based discussion of fundamental theology.

And yet, on the other hand, we must immediately bracket these remarks and set a large question mark after them. For the formal dimension is, as such, precisely *not* the material content. For if it is

already true in the secular sciences that we can have no direct intellectual intuition, that we encounter the necessary only indirectly in the contingent, then that holds all the more true in fundamental theology. The “principle” of theology is the *content* of revelation. But the content of revelation can never be cut off from the act of revealing, that is, from the God who freely and sovereignly chooses to reveal himself. And this is a dimension, therefore, of which man—even and all the more so, believing man—cannot be the measure, the way he is of the principles of secular sciences.

If there really is such a thing as theology—as both sides in this debate presuppose—then we must face the question of fundamental theology, which culminates in the question of how we can specify this doubly indirect principle. Here too both sides are agreed: we know that God has revealed himself by veiling himself, in disguises, as it were; that is, in a way that is fundamentally different and dissimilar to the way objects confined to this world are given to us. God’s way of giving himself is by way of a givenness for a self-surrendering faith. It is important to realize that the understanding that faith seeks (the *intellectus fidei*) can never get beyond this indirectness, although faith can come to a real understanding, that is, a true insight into this principle.

Now we can pose the decisive question to all dogmatics, for we now have the criterion for judging all the specific statements of content-determined dogmatics: Has the specifically *theological* principle been seen, recognized, respected and preserved as the root and source of the whole system? This formal, if imponderable, principle will then determine our discernment of spirits, telling us whether a theology is authentic or not.

This finally lets us see what Barth’s main complaint about Catholicism is: it could only be that it lacks that specifically *theological* animation in its principles because it thinks it can get by “simply” with a principle that is only indirectly scientific [in the German sense: appropriate to its object—trans, note]. In fact, it is this very problem of “theological indirectness” that Barth has in mind when at this juncture he draws the most decisive of lines separating the two confessions:

I regard the doctrine of the analogy of being as *the* invention of the Antichrist and hold that *precisely because of this doctrine* one *cannot* become a Catholic. At the same time, I believe that all other reasons that one can have for not becoming a Catholic are shortsighted and frivolous.³

These startling remarks have aroused a great deal of unjustifiable surprise or ridicule. Such reactions would be understandable if it were only a question of some particular material doctrine of Catholicism and not an attempt to formulate the decisive formal consideration that is the basis of everything distinctively Catholic.

Now of course it is incumbent upon Protestant dogmatics, if it is to be truly a dogmatics, to attempt for its part to describe and thematize its own formal determinants. Barth's whole life career has been spent in this attempt. It is not important what label we choose to affix to his "principle", whether we give the name "dialectic" as the characteristic form of his earlier writings or feel that he has expressly formulated the term "analogy of faith" in his later writings as the counterconcept to "analogy of being". What matters first of all is locating that site where the decisive battle must be joined. And that site will be a *formal* one, where issues of fundamental theology are joined: no easy terrain for a clear outcome, perhaps, but *the* crucial juncture nonetheless.

The difficulty here arises because "concepts without intuition", as Kant says, are empty. Indeed they come to light only *in* intuition—that is, in our discussion, in those material doctrines that divide us. We can even venture to say: the dispute will never finally be resolved by treating formal issues alone. If we do that, we will infallibly start to talk past each other. We can flatly deny Barth's charge against the analogy of being, namely, that it tries to "overpower" God (since the analogy of being is precisely the "principle" that was formulated to exclude and immobilize any such attempt to usurp God, and that from the very roots). Conversely, the countercharge that the analogy of faith is basically no analogy at all but will sooner or later have to lead to an "identity" with God and thus to a new attempt to "overpower" God can also be denied from the Protestant side, since its whole purpose is to protect God's freedom from the clinging grasp of man.

In any case, a final understanding cannot be expected if we stick to purely formal issues, if we do not put ourselves into constant contact with the whole breadth of concrete dogmatic teachings. The discussion can only move forward if we simultaneously move back and forth between a priori principles and a posteriori doctrines.

Barth's accusation against the analogy of being is but *one* formulation of his basic objection to the distinctively Catholic. He raises this objection⁴ at every point where specific doctrines clash. For instance, the polemic against the Catholic concept of tradition as a second source of revelation moves directly to a consideration of the formal determinants of this doctrine:

This theology of *and* has many ramifications but *one* root. Whoever says "faith *and* works", "nature *and* grace", "reason *and* revelation", must also, and as a consequence, speak of "Scripture *and* tradition". This *and* is but the expression, *one* expression, for the fact that God's majesty has already been relativized in his communication with the human race.⁵

This Catholic passion for couplets is thus only a new symptom of the analogy of being, "an analogy that tries to synthesize from the standpoint of the onlooker, to survey and see through what is not given to us to see."⁶

We can see the same difficulty in the doctrine of *sole fide*. The Roman Catechism explicitly says "*Solum fide intelligimus*" [we understand only by faith]. On that both sides seem to agree. But Barth replies:

One can say with equanimity: If we could agree on the meaning of these three words, then there would be no division in the Church, . . . for then *everything* else, papacy, sacraments, dogma and rite, could then be discussed. [But then he goes on to say:] An upright Catholic and an upright Protestant cannot agree on these three words, and that is why discussion of the other issues is impossible.⁷

Why? Because, according to the Protestant view, grace "remains grace", and man "has not the least control over it" because it is a one-way relationship "without reciprocity".⁸ Whereas, with the Catholic, talk about "cooperating with grace" (culminating in a doctrine of Mary as Co-Redemptrix), man becomes a "secondary subject" and in his "merits" can raise a "claim to grace" (which is a contradiction in terms!).

Barth saw a particularly crass example of this attempt to “lay hands on God” through the analogy of being in the doctrine of *scientia media* (which to be sure is a teaching of only one school and is not obligatory for all Catholics). Barth asks:

Is this not an attempt to set up a system that encompasses both God and creature; is this not an attempt to see them as both being on the same level and then relating them to one another on that basis? What else is this but an attempt by the creature to take the measure of his own abilities and to declare himself in control both of himself and of God?. . . This attempt is but the ground and foundation of the whole Roman Catholic system in all its details. It is the basis for its doctrine of grace, sacraments, ecclesiology, Scripture and tradition, the Roman primacy and the infallibility of the Pope, and above all of Mariology.⁹

And from here the next and final step is inevitable:

What else can this doctrine of the self-subsistence of the free creature vis-à-vis God be but the theological form of that deep-rooted human hostility toward God’s grace as such, which we call sin? What else is this doctrine but a theological recapitulation of the Fall all over again?. . . We should not forget that Jesuitical casuistry has been the basic Roman Catholic form of modern humanism and is deeply implicated in an enterprise that from the outset smacks of the *denial of God*.¹⁰

And again, when dealing with the Catholic teaching on a “natural” in contradistinction to a supernatural providence, Barth speaks of an attempt at “double-entry bookkeeping”:

Whoever keeps nature and grace, creation and covenant, the revelation that comes from creation and the one unto our salvation in separate ledgers and ultimately carries the resulting tension inside the Trinity will find the book of grace no help at all. When we absorb the latter terms into the former like this, we have already decided that *the* book from which knowledge of the Creator and creature can *de facto* be gained has become the book of nature—and only that. For no one can serve two masters.¹¹

And, under the motto of “laying hands on God”, we may finally consider all that is distinctively Catholic: the gracious effect of the sacraments defined as *ex opere operato*, which makes of them “an impersonal process, independent of God’s decision and man’s faith”;¹² in the doctrine of the “indelible character” of grace and the Pope’s official title of “Vicar of Christ”, which “takes away the possibility of grace being removed, and Christ’s own decision disappears in the decisions of this human authority”;¹³ in the claim of

the Church to be the authentic and infallible interpreter of Scripture, which means “she surveys the whole from her magisterial heights and thus is no longer subject to the Bible’s dictates.”¹⁴ She becomes a self-governing Church, but “self-government is a, indeed the, great prerogative of God.”¹⁵ It is thus presumptuous and “outright disobedience” for the creature to assume such a role.

The same holds true of the Church’s attempts to tie down revelation in “doctrinal decrees” that try to bind “what God has elusively revealed into human images, concepts and judgments with the claim that everything that has been so constrained and conserved must be held as true despite the fact that these revealed truths have also been *hidden*.”¹⁶ In all these issues, one drama keeps playing itself out: the “naturalization of grace”,¹⁷ “the presupposition that the Church is continually and inherently bound to a creaturely form”, the transformation of grace into “a physical event”, a “reified thing”.¹⁸

Only a fool would deny that each one of the accusations *could* be on target. The Church would not be a Church composed of Jews and pagans, or at any rate of sinners and tax-collectors, if this itch to “lay hands on God” (which indeed is just another term for sin) did not occur in her each and every day. And since the sinners we are referring to here are such precisely as members of the Church and so affect the Church in all they do, so we must admit that there is no side or aspect of the Church that cannot be an occasion for such disobedience.

The only real sin is resistance to revealed grace. But the question is not whether in all these possibilities there are not occasions and invitations for abuse in the Catholic “system”. These exist everywhere the human medium conveys God’s revelation. This also holds true for the Protestant “system” (as Barth would not hesitate to admit). The question is much more whether the totality of the specifically Catholic doctrines, the Catholic “Plus”, *clearly* and indisputably represent the manifestation of a principle that is itself *clearly* and unavoidably a violation of grace, an attempt to control God, and is thus *clearly* and unequivocally objective “sin”.

To establish such a connection entails great difficulties, doubly so when we operate according to the presuppositions of Barth's theology. It is difficult, first of all, because, as Barth says, in all discussion of content and specific doctrines there lies, however indirectly, the formal principle. Over and over again Barth will be forced to develop his theology "at a hair's-length nearness to Catholic theology",¹⁹ fully alive to "the danger of meeting up with certain false statements of Roman Catholicism".²⁰ For example, he will often draw his portrait of the analogy of faith in a way that will scarcely be distinguishable from that of the analogy of being, so that it will be exceedingly difficult for him to stop at the border he has drawn and call the one formal principle "Christian" and the other as belonging to the "Antichrist".

As long as one only speaks of the "danger" that lies hidden in our principle, so long as one finds this danger in material doctrines too and offers specific analyses, we will listen and, when required, take it to heart. But if one proves to us that the distinctively Catholic element as such in its formality is corrupt, yes even sinful, then we can no longer hear this or feel ourselves being addressed anymore. Sinners we are, insofar as we abuse the grace of God as it has been revealed to us in its forms shaped to the world. But being formed to the world is never in itself guilty of sin.

We can go farther and say: forced by the one-sidedness of heresy, the Church of the Counter-Reformation after Trent had to put the accent on works and institution. But this was done, not as a counterconcept to free grace; rather works and institution were understood as its highest form, the most daring deed, the most breathtaking venture of grace itself. Doing good works is faith in its second potency, and institution *is* God's trusting selfsurrender to the world in second potency. By assuming this form, the Incarnate One has truly chosen the narrow path. The doctrine of the triumph of God's grace in man's freedom, of the sovereignty of the Word in the very act of preserving created nature: this doctrine stands on the very edge of the sword. For now both things are required: while fully affirming human being and work, to give honor to God's grace in everything.

To be sure, it is true that if *this* salt loses its tang, it will become the very definition of staleness and can give no Christian taste to the world. But still: Why should that be the guilt of the Church or of the principle itself? Protest against the Church is too easy. Who among those who love the Church is not already acquainted with this possibility? Who among us has not been tempted even once to jump out of his own skin? (A Protestant is a Catholic who has leaped out of his own skin.) But we then recall that it is now high time we jump out of our own skin and not out of the Church. That might be *our* “great negative possibility”.²¹

But, according to Barth’s own presuppositions (now quite explicitly Catholic!), the formal argumentation becomes more difficult than ever: “By existing in the public sphere and therefore in time and in the world as such, the Church can never evade the possibility of a total or partial defection from Jesus Christ.”²² We ask: Can this defection be clearly discerned in the Church’s external statutes and institutions as such? Or; according to Barth’s teaching, is not unbelief no different than faith itself, “a continuing pattern”, a “physical event”, a given fact? “A Church can nonetheless become a non-church amidst a complete preservation of her external bonds and while fully maintaining tradition and orthodoxy.”²³ And does not even the Catholic Church do this?

But we reply: Does the Church—knowing as she does that she has been founded by Christ—not have the right to regard herself as true? Can she relativize herself without abrogating her obedience to her Lord? And where would such a self-relativization ever come to an end? The “absoluteness” that the Catholic Church must claim for herself really represents her obedience, her refusal to countenance any detriment or constriction to the sovereignty of the freedom of God’s grace. The Church has never equated the place of her visibility with that of the elect and justified. And the certainty that she possesses depends entirely on her mission and charge. For every member of the Church, even for the infallible Pope, the essence of the Church is the *promise* of salvation and not its “guarantee”. The Catholic knows nothing of this attempt “to lay hands on God”.

That is why it will never do to pursue the abstract path of merely juxtaposing the two formal principles taken in themselves alone; in

any case, it will never take us to a fruitful encounter. Not that we could renounce the aid of this abstraction, especially at the beginning. Throughout this work we shall continually be calling on formal perspectives for direction and guidance. But that alone will not suffice. For Christianity is no abstract affair. It is God's own cause in Jesus Christ, who is the most concrete of all. He is so concrete, so unique, so personal and so free that not only can nothing be abstracted from him but, even more, nothing can in any way be "formulated". He himself as this concrete, unique, personal and free being simply *is* his own form, the form of his revelation and the form of the creation that has emerged from him and from whom it takes its being.

After completing his Prolegomena, and based on this insight, Barth turned his back on the whole formal question in order to wrestle with the true object, the one thing necessary: the living God in the living Lord, Jesus Christ. If the question of form has its justification within a dogmatics, then it does so only in the outer courtyards, with the Prolegomena. It would therefore be a distortion to want continually to return the discussion of the later dogmatics back to the formal question. Our conversation would then miss the point. And that point is: Jesus Christ.

But in what sense Jesus Christ can be the *concrete* form of Christianity and also of dogmatics without forcing dogmatics to be subsumed into a biblical positivism but rather assuming its validity as a unique science from this principle: this can only be established as the dogmatics unfolds.

So Karl Barth is absolutely right that the problem of analogy in theology must finally be a problem of Christology. And the only question still pending for the moment is what analogy might still mean outside of Christology.

PART II
THE FORM AND STRUCTURE
OF KARL BARTH'S THOUGHT:
EXPOSITION

Chapter 1

ON INTERPRETING BARTH

Before we proceed to consider Barth's development, we must make a point about interpreting his work as a whole: This work is so extensive, varied and multifaceted that we will not be able to find our way through this vastness without a guiding thread; we must journey into this immense work presupposing some overall design. But this guiding thread cannot be a rigid rule. Barth's thought changed considerably in the course of the years, and so the overall design we espy must be flexible enough to account for these changes.

There are basically two ways of approaching this problem of bringing order to so vast a life work: we can explain the later work in terms of the earlier, interpreting his later output as the outflow of the earlier sources; or else we can interpret the early work in terms of the later, as the sprout whose true identity is revealed only in its later unfolding. Both alternatives are rooted in life itself, and so we know that there can be no question of a rigid choice between them. Life is determined by its initial conditions, and yet it achieves its identity only in its full development.

Nonetheless, these two approaches reflect different types, or styles, of thinking. Many people write one fundamental work and then spend the rest of their lives drawing out its implications. Others gather elements together and try out different forms until they finally feel they have found definitive expression. Still others, like Goethe, seem to mock any attempt at a determinate and clear interpretation.

How should Barth be interpreted? Should the *Church Dogmatics* be understood in terms of his Romans commentary or vice versa? Like the Big Bang that initiated the universe, is the immense work of his later years but the expansion of the first intense, explosive insight of his early years, the long-reverberating echo of thunder after the initial flash of lightning? Or—to change the metaphor—is his early work a chaotic, cacophonous prelude, much like the odd sounds orchestra members emit when they tune their instruments before beginning to play the masterly music of the symphonies? Is his

Church Dogmatics the symphony and the early work but the tuning of instruments? Or, to put the issue less metaphorically: Do we discover in Barth's later development essential themes that simply were not there in his earlier writings (so that the earlier books have been for all intents and purposes superseded), or do these themes yet lurk, however obscurely, in the early work?

Put in this way, the question can be definitively resolved only by presupposing a thorough knowledge of the whole of Barth's output (still unfinished at this writing!) together with a sense that this vast work is amenable to overall judgment. Even if such a judgment were possible, it would require a long acquaintance and deep familiarity with the whole of Barth's writings. This seems at first glance impossible to justify. And so, even though we have adopted a method of interpretation in this book from the outset, we cannot adduce convincing proof ahead of time that this is the right path.

Nonetheless, and bearing in mind this stipulation, we can still say quite firmly: any attempt to explain the *Church Dogmatics* (and Barth's later writings in general) solely in terms of *The Epistle to the Romans* is an outright absurdity; in fact, it is an insult to the author. For more than once Barth has distanced himself from his Romans commentary, as he had already made clear in the foreword to the fifth edition (1926); moreover, he has from time to time warned his readers not to take literally what he wrote there.¹ Indeed, he has given up the whole conceptuality determining the early work, including even the word "dialectic". And it was precisely because he felt that the first draft of his *Dogmatics* still contained too much from an earlier stage of his thinking that he scrapped this attempt and began the work again from scratch.

To put it briefly, he has consciously turned away from the abstract and systematic (or, as the accusation went, from the "crypto-philosophical") approach of his early thought in order to lay hold of the one great theological object in all its purity where it presents itself: in the revelation of Sacred Scripture. Strange to relate, however, there have always been those who have been deluded about the intentions of the *Church Dogmatics* and have chosen to see it as nothing more than a larger version of his Romans commentary. Between 1920 and 1930, several important theologians

(for example, Tillich, Reisner, Althaus, Heim, Oepke, H. W. Schmidt, Messer, Siegfried, to name just a few) ignited a lively debate in abstract philosophical terms about the theses of Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, and the positions they adopted were quite understandable for that decade. But one must begin to wonder when one finds Friedrich Gogarten penning his hotly polemical piece *Gericht oder Skepsis* from this same point of view as late as 1937. Particularly weird was Gogarten's reasoning: he would constantly object to what Barth was really saying as necessarily contradicting his own opinion for no other reason than that Barth's view was no longer in agreement with those in his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans! And things get particularly grotesque ten years later when Cornelius van Til's *The New Modernism* (1947) appears, which not only tries to explain the later work in terms of the earlier writings but bases the whole of Barth's theology on a philosophy that supposedly lies at the root of all Barth's thinking.

But we will also find very little in the Catholic literature that does not indulge in this somewhat simplistic and in any case rather convenient "source-interpretation". This is especially true of the work, so admirable in many respects, of Jerome Hamer, O.P. (1949), which is entirely taken up with the *Prolegomena*, reading it in the light of Barth's earlier work and disregarding how much the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* either correct or move beyond the positions adopted in the *Prolegomena*.²

But we should also add this other proviso: the other approach—the one that simply puts Barth's early work in the shadows and sees it as a thing of the past, wanting only to concentrate on the fruit of his mature years—can only lead to a very imperfect understanding of the very works on which it wishes to concentrate. There can be no doubt that Barth's latest works are, in a very real if hidden sense, his earliest works as well: the intense explosion into the *Church Dogmatics* is ultimately but the unleashing of an intellectual power that was there from the very beginning.

But we will understand this reciprocal relation between the earlier and later Barth only if we regard *The Epistle to the Romans* and related writings of that time less as a "doctrine" than as a "symptom", that is, as incipient expressions of a deeper intention. Many

commentators have referred to the “metaphysical cast” of the Romans commentary, and Barth himself has pointed to the “remarkable crust of Kantian and Platonic concepts”,³ which must first be stripped away in order to unearth the book’s real point. That was why in his retrospective essay of 1938 he could admit that he had to probe much more deeply. What he meant was that this further plunge into the depths of the one theological reality must consist in a “christological concentration” freed from the “final residue of a philosophical and anthropological foundationalism as the basic framework for explaining Christian doctrine”. This stripping process, he said, would let him say “everything much more clearly, unambiguously, simply”; his confession of the Lordship of Jesus would shine through more directly, and at the same time he could say things “more freely, openly and comprehensively”. But, nonetheless, in doing this he felt he was but “following along the same path as ever”.⁴

Looking back from the *Church Dogmatics* to *The Epistle to the Romans* (especially the strange and fantastic first edition of that sensational book), we will be astonished to see that Barth’s real concern in his first period was the same as that of his maturity, all appearances to the contrary notwithstanding. Admittedly, the *Church Dogmatics* sets forth its vision in simple, classical German rather than in the abrupt and expressionistic language of Barth’s “dialectical period”. But that is precisely the point. What this means is that in all fairness we must admit that dialectics was not an end in itself but only a method: a means and pointer meant to arrive at the end in itself. It served its purpose at the historical juncture of its appearance, but, when it began to be confused with the end itself, Barth saw how fatal this would be, and now it has become by and large expendable.

And yet even here we must not jump to hasty conclusions. Behind the expressionism of the Romans commentary is more than a stylistic innovation arbitrarily chosen. Perhaps an inherent part of this language is the cry of one who has seen something that no one else around him has seen. Perhaps in this “existentialism”, Barth was trying to express the inexpressible, to bring the eternal flow of time to a standstill. Perhaps he was deliberately trying to bring ridicule on

himself by seeking “to catch a bird in flight”, well knowing that “motion itself, divorced from the thing in motion, becomes just a theme, a thing.”⁵ *The Epistle to the Romans* had its own historical background and specific issues. Its conceptual armory might strike us as rather crude now, but it was in no way incidental. It was really trying to say the unsayable, to use concepts that were consistent and yet also referred to the *pure event*, the pure actuality that is the very essence of revelation.

Even back then the analogy of being was already the archenemy. But that does not mean we can describe Barth’s path simply as a movement from dialectics to the analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*). Of course, there has been such a transition, and it is correct to see it; indeed it is crucial to understanding the development of Barth’s thought, and we will have to take up this issue in the following pages. But we should remind ourselves that not all the gunpowder has exploded in the powder keg of Barth’s early dialectics; we are not out of danger yet! And so when we come to interpret the later work, we must remember that Barth never gave up that first flash of insight: his desire to create a theology, not of being, but of *happening*.

We must agree with Jean-Louis Leuba when he warns against a static “systematic” interpretation of the *Church Dogmatics*. As he points out through numerous examples, such a reading soon leads to absurdity and bitterest disappointment. What is called for is a “prophetic” and not a “systematic” interpretation. If Leuba is correct in asserting that it is not Being but present Event that is basic and all-decisive, then we must interpret the *Church Dogmatics*, not in terms of his Romans commentary, but in terms of this fundamental category, for it is the deepest thrust of his whole thought. At least we must keep this possibility open.

At this point we can say little more on methodological questions. The main lines of our reading of Barth will follow his own chronological development, that is, from “dialectic” to “analogy”. After showing how this analogy reached the fullness of its concrete form as Barth understood it, we will then ask how much “analogy” overcame “dialectic” or how much, on the contrary, “analogy” managed to preserve and carry along the latter.

Chapter 2

THE DIALECTICAL PERIOD

1. *The Epistle to the Romans*: First Edition

When Beethoven's First Symphony was first performed, no one could have suspected what paths would eventually take him to the extraordinary Ninth. And when that strange book called *The Epistle to the Romans* was published in Bern in 1919, no one could ever have suspected what the second edition would look like three years later. Only now, looking back, and benefiting from the completely different conceptual and imaginative framework of his later years, do we see that the first edition had been playing the same theme *pianissimo* that would later be hammered into our ears with that uncanny, sudden *crescendo* in the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*.

And this theme is: dynamic eschatology, the irreversible movement from a fatally doomed temporal order to a new living order filled with the life of God, the restoration (*apokatastasis*) of the original ideal creation in God. This "movement" of a doomed world, which still knows its true origin but cannot get back to it on its own, is due solely to God's graciousness in Christ. In Christ, God has implanted life in the whole of the cosmos; this life is a seed that will dynamically sprout and spread irresistibly until everything is transformed back into its original splendor. This will not take place in plain view but will work itself out eschatologically.

Undoubtedly, this is a message meant to proclaim glad tidings. The vision is enthusiastic, and in its own way it unrolls the scroll of God's saving economy. But it makes use of a conceptual framework that owes more to Plato, right-wing [that is, religious] Hegelianism and religious socialism than it does to the Bible, Luther or Calvin.

Regarding Plato: for the great Athenian, the schema of the world can be described as a threefold movement of Being in Idea, a falling away from the Idea and then a return to it. The Christian use of this (by Origen) consists in a double modification: Being is understood as

“spirit”, and the fall from Idea as “psyche” or “sphere of the soul”, in the (supposedly) Pauline sense of that term. Reminiscence, the recalling of our original homeland (*anamnesis*), does not itself have the power to restore what has been lost, it is only a “longing”, a “void”, a “crisis”; in religious imagery, it is an “inferno” from which the lost psyche is saved by the descending Logos, who makes “contact” with this realm.¹

This twofold modification, however, does not get to the root of the issue, any more than it did with Origen. What goes unchallenged is this whole notion of “Being in the Idea”, that original existence, the only true and authentic existence, is “Being in God”. In this first edition we read that this Being is “immediacy” (15, 73, and so forth), “immediate, direct relation” (106), “immediate union” (202). Originally God was fully revealed, so open that there was no mystery in his essence. Only the Fall “made a secret out of the divine” (60). And, to those born again in Christ, it is “no longer a mystery” (420). Only the Fall, that is, “the flesh, makes the human—which is supposed to be one with the divine—into the merely human” (55).

The “divine in me” (207), “the original divine nature in humanity” (61), empowers humanity to become “a divine race of beings” (18) that “sees things as God sees them” (94) and creates an ultimate *identity*: humanity is thus a “particle of God’s universal power” (237), for “it is not we who are at work, but it is God who is working in and through us” (194). And Barth then invokes (245) Goethe’s famous line:

O World Soul, come penetrate and saturate us!
[*Weltseele, komm uns zu durchdringen!*]

In other words, when God sets out to restore mankind, “his own good Spirit now takes over from the flesh” (60). The redeemer becomes “the life-foundation for every human being” (71-72). Thus, by recalling his “origins”, man—who has fallen away from God—*simultaneously* recalls his own “transcendental being” (19, 59, 121) and God (“become what you are” [413]). But what can only be “Idea” without “power” (35, 52), a “logic without dynamism”, what was once the hollow shell of religion, philosophy and culture, is now filled once

more with the power of life-giving vitality in a pure “event” (213) whereby “possibilities” are transformed into “realities” (44).

What then does the Fall consist in? “There is only *one* sin: man’s desire to set himself up against God.” Man falls from the immediacy of being with God. He “resents living directly, simply, purely in the Spirit like a child. . . . He would like to be like God is: self-subsistent and self-important in his own right” (128). Sin *is reflection*, and reflection is sin. The two definitions that Thomas Aquinas gives of sin and reflection in fact sound confusingly similar: sin is *incurvatio super se ipsum* (a turning in on oneself) or *conversio ad creaturas* (adhering to creatures), while reflection is *reditio super se ipsum* (a return to oneself) or *conversio ad phantasma* (attending to mental images). And Barth simply equates the two. To be a self and to recognize oneself as such means distancing oneself from God, and this distancing is sin. The *distance* between God and creature is the Fall of the creature from God. And now we see why analogy—which is the very expression and acknowledgment of this distance—is equated with the Fall.

The human being who has been separated from God’s Spirit becomes “flesh”. This new “circumstance” (Origen’s *katástasis*)² is the very definition of guilt. It is the source of multiplicity, the “splitting up of life into two types of existence, the divine and worldly” (131). Hence comes the “contrast between life and ideal” (54), and from this division of Being comes time (59). But all of this means the draining away of life, and hence it is death (57), “illusion”, “lying”, “the veil of Maya” (59), “nonbeing” (219), “chaos” (222), mere “appearance” (242).

It should hardly be surprising, then, if this theology lacks the concept that is unavoidably entailed by that of analogy and distance: the *concept of nature*. In the Barthian view, nature—by definition, what has been set at a distance from the Creator—teeters between ecstasy and catastrophe, between total identity with the Creator, without distance or mystery, and a falling away from him in absolute nonbeing. Pantheism manages to dissolve the creature both into God and into nothingness. In this theology, God is “the innermost, if scattered, ‘nature’ of all things and of man” (34). Hence the grace of Christ is an order that is “inherent to our being and not extraneous; it

is natural and not strange" (221). It is our "natural law" (229), the "natural foundation of the whole of existence" (114), our very "nature in God" (220). But suddenly the gears shift and "nature"—which is *now* our nature and thus is as totally foreign to the first definition of nature "as water is to fire" (54)—can be only "unnatural" (190). The pantheistic concept of nature necessarily becomes dialectical.³

At this point, there is an inevitable transition from the Platonic and Eastern Christian notion of "identity" to the Reformation insistence on "contradiction". And so Origen and Dostoyevsky encounter Luther, Calvin and Kierkegaard; and the rules of engagement for this clash are the whole point of the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*.

Theological Hegelianism of the right offers no really completely new motif to Origen's brand of Platonism. It stresses the side of universal restoration (*apokatastasis*), dynamism, *elan vital* (120, 219, and so forth), as part of the direction of movement in world history or "proto-history". Furthermore, it underlines the turn from religious subjectivism, from Romantic Pietism, to objectivity. Subjectivity, reflection, the whole sphere of consciousness represent "the Fall" as such. The odyssey through the "hell of interiority", through the "inferno of Pietism" (whose last agonizing cry resounds most in the second edition of *Romans*), reads like a page of Hegel's phenomenology.

The clear implication of all this is that turning to Christ means to turn away from oneself, to forget the I with its constant attempt to live on its own. It means living outside oneself, in the "eternal objectivity of the True and the Good" (197). This "objective spirit" (252), however, is the Holy Spirit, who leads us into the "realm of the absolute spirit" (80).

Moreover, this is all tinged with the unique accents of religious socialism. As reflection, subjectivity is "individualism". To turn away "from the cursed isolation of the *individuum*" is to be redeemed "for an organic incorporation into the new humanity appearing in Christ" (229). God saves us by "expropriating our private property" (72), indeed "our unholy individuality" (218). In fact, the variety we find in individual humans is only "the facade of existence" (101). The

kenosis really means nothing else but the “elimination of the personal” (423), and this is actually the real revolution (234).

And, what is more, we hear from Barth that this doctrine has been the teaching of the truly “spiritual men” (239, 402), indeed of the whole “aristocracy of the spirit” (47), “from Moses to John the Baptist, from Plato to the socialists” (46). These were the truly free spirits of power. They were truly superior to others but they pointed the way, because they did not use their superior power in the spirit of rugged individualism but “as power for sustaining the weak” (421). The weak have long needed religion, piety and above all churches, but the strong have long since exposed these things as illusory (262). Leaving behind all the “standpoints of religion, church, school, Judaism, Christianity, morality and idealism” (181), they exercise patience even as God does. They serenely let the Kingdom develop “organically”, whose “midwives of God’s grace” (188) they are.

What a book! What extraordinary opening chords announce the theme! And their vehemence! These are the chords of a radical philosophical mysticism that takes seriously the historicity of the world. Barth here intones the motif of a tremendous universalism that is at the same time liberal and socialist.

Barth claims in the preface to the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* that the whole structure has been razed from the ground up so that from the old building “not one stone, as it were, has been left standing on another.”⁴ If Barth had not inserted that little phrase “as it were”, we would not have had to pay such close attention to the first edition. Perhaps Barth has upended the stones *too* much and was not careful enough of his materials. And would it even be possible to do away with such themes, such passion?

2. *The Epistle to the Romans*: Second Edition

In the fire of Overbeck, Nietzsche, Dostoyevsky and Kierkegaard (and the Reformers, who by now in this light look a bit strange), the gunpowder has been ignited: the possibility of contradiction—which was already latent in the notion of “identity”—now breaks out to the surface. The second edition is like “dynamite” (238),⁵ coming dangerously close to Nietzsche; it “revolutionizes religion” (237), it is

the “cry and the silence” (238). We have now truly fallen into the “hell” of religion (230f.). We must smell “the stench of death to the point of death that is wafted from the summits of religion” (259). We are to be dragged through the heights and the depths to make us finally believe that our existence is not nature but the somatically experienced contradiction in our inmost being; it is the impossibility that we ourselves are.

The people to whom Paul wrote his letter seem to have been “very free and expansive spirits” (520). Even Barth’s own commentary is a book for “very free spirits” who, like Nietzsche, are beyond free-thinking “liberalism”. They are those rare souls who “look for untruth in everything” (289) so that they might unmask every untruth. They are nihilists in their theology, but in that same theology they are “omnists” too. “The strong man, because he is strong, stands against no one and behind all. He does not criticize (he is too critical for that). . . . He does not take center-stage but slips into the background. He is nowhere because he is everywhere” (509). As a pure eschatologist, he stands beyond all human possibilities, without falling prey to “that dangerous titanism of freedom” (502). Deeply anti-religious, he realizes the necessity of religion for all—even himself. He is both question mark and exclamation point, standing at the very periphery (515), “no longer man but sign, merely a raised finger” (203), and for that very reason “unimportant, unnoticed, unheralded” (221). He is “this extreme, extrapolated standpoint that is *no* standpoint at all” (512), and so “he does not place the least value in his radical talk or his radical posture” (513). “He is truly special because he does not come across as anything special” (490). And even this self-effacement is the real “test by example” (489). He is serious here and is not simply playing at roles. What then is left for us? Apparently nothing (508)!

Unless it be God. For though absolutely imperceptible, God should become visible in this groping. The “infinite qualitative difference” (xiv) should be demonstrated. “Distance” should be created, a place for transcendence. We should drop “any attempt to divinize man and humanize God in the form of Romantic immediacy” or “to wipe out the distance between the two” (145): “Inauthentic immanence and unradical transcendence of all stripes, every relativizing of the

relation of God and man, this whole intermediate realm must be seen for what it is in its true nature: sin" (82).

Religion is defined as the creature's attempt "to grab hold of the Creator". It is the attempt to draw a boundary line between man and God. It is the Law given to provoke sin of which Paul speaks. But, by presuming to draw this boundary, it thereby oversteps the boundary. "The religious man is a sinner in the clearest sense of the word" (152). For he does what he dare not do: establish his own relation to God, which simply sets him against God. "He *must* at every moment stand at the heights and fall to the depths; be Moses and Aaron, Paul and Saul, God-inspired and God-benighted, prophet and Pharisee, priest and clericalist. At every moment he must be the highest indication of the positivity of the divine hidden inside the human reality *and* the clearest outworking of human negativity and resistance to the reality of the divine" (213).

The deepest core to the religious pathos of man, even when it seems most to be thriving, is the pathos of the cry, "You shall be like God!" And indeed, when we experience the depths of how questionable our existence is, "what else could we be if we are honest with ourselves but a religious people" (234; 218)? And if that is what we are (and we are! [44-45, 225]), then why not step "to the very precipice of this possibility, where, humanly speaking, only the question itself remains" (237)? Here is the diacritical point where man is nothing but a cavity (5, 9, and so on), a minus sign, a conical funnel converging to the point where he is finally on the verge of recognizing God as God. "The one and only possible presence of God in the world is revealed in the recognition of that fundamental separation between God and the world" (65).

But not even this point means salvation. "Even an 'abundance' of renunciation, of hunger and thirst" (121) can become the "triumph of a new phariseeism" (84). "Negative" works can themselves become the occasion of a new kind of works-righteousness, leading to a fiercely haughty pride: "Am I not at least permitted to rest content with the fact that I am discontented?" (224).

Behind this dialectic we can without too much difficulty recognize traits of the first edition, however blurred. The pathos of the absolute distance between God and creature, which seems to be a new motif

from the influence of Kierkegaard and the Reformers, entails a latent and never thematized presupposition: none other than the original notion of *identity* that pervaded the first edition. Once more, we hear the chords of “reminiscence” (*anamnesis*) (21, 188, 212, 224); of our “lost immediacy to God” (212), our “eternal source” (225), our “existence resting in God” (188), “immediate union with God” (146). And once more we encounter the notion that the Fall is but the self-consciousness of the creature:

Man was *not* meant to be for himself what he is in himself: a second reality alongside the Creator. He was *not* meant to know what God knew of him and mercifully kept from him: that he is *only* a man [229]. . . . The moment of eternal creation, when God as God and man as man were not two realities but one, is now past and cannot be called back [233].

Once more we read that the law of distance, the law of analogy, is sin (233-34). To be a creature is coterminous with being guilty (12f., 31, 112, 149, 150f., 169, 235). And once more redemption in Christ coincides with the return to unity. In Christ, it finally becomes clear what being human means before God: death, hell, abandonment by God (73, 136, 186, 216, 264, 284). So Christ takes the place of Adam—and Adam is each one of us (148f.)! “The dualism of Adam and Christ. . . comes to be only by suspending itself. It is totally a dualism of a movement” (155). It is the mystery of the *one* predestination “that lies hidden in the duality of Adam and Christ in order to reveal itself in their ultimate unity” (154).

This movement seesaws back and forth from the Former Eon to the always-approaching, eschatological New Eon; the movement is constant because the balance possible between them is always being superseded. In other words, the fall into hell occurs independent of, if not before, the Fall of Adam [*supralapsarisch*], but of course the same holds for redemption: “There is no fall from God in Adam, no sentence of death, that does not have its origin at the point where man has been granted life through being reconciled to God in Christ” (143).

Only against the background of a presupposed original doctrine of identity is the whole dialectic of *The Epistle to the Romans* possible at all. The pathos of distance that resounds so powerfully in the second edition does not change that fact. Once more, identity entails

the elimination of the concept of nature. Once more, nature coincides with grace: in the immediacy of their origin: “where everything natural is by that very fact also holy, because *the holy too is natural*” (229). And the very personal nature of the human spirit also coincides with Christ, the New Man (279-80), or with the Holy Spirit, whom Barth defines as “the invisible *new* subject constituted beyond all continuity with the psychologically accessible subject, the human / that exists and stands before God” (134).

On the other hand, nature just as necessarily coincides with the condition of sin as such, for sin denotes “the eternal transcendental disposition of the human world” (149). Naturalness and creatureliness are substitute terms for “transitoriness” (159). “Natural” simply means what is “within the world, profane, ‘materialistic’ ” (51). In this realm, “spirit”, “personality”, are now in Feuerbach’s sense an illusion of the “flesh”, an “ideological superstruct”, that is, a flesh that refuses to be flesh. For “flesh means disconnected relativity, nothingness, nonsense” (246).

The coincidence of the concept of nature and grace necessarily leads to the coinciding of the concepts of nature and sin. The road leads straight from Baius to Jansen: the law of life, the entelechy of nature, is “Eros” (419), the “concupiscence” of sinful, instinct-driven love. Once more the lines of the Gnostic East meet up with those of the Reformation: they become one in the concept of “pathos”, which equates guilt and nature, drive and decadence. And once more, only one ethic remains: Move on! Come out of yourself! Give up the lofty aspirations of religion (165, 215, 221)! Be totally transparent (263)! Give up the attempt to be different from God that is the very definition of sin (226, 271f.)! Return to being what a creature is supposed to be: a “shadow permitted only to follow in the divine light” (228-29).

The irony in this is that, in this ultimate radicalization of the contradiction in the definition of nature, the room for the relative continuity of the socialist world view has meanwhile disappeared. The overcoming of the visible Church (which by definition is as necessary as it is impossible) by the invisible Church no longer happens under the rubric of the “Mystical Body”. For all “organic” concepts of community come from below, from the kingdom of *eros*.

The “invisible I”, *agape*, “the Holy Spirit” are all “pure act” (257); their unity is purely qualitative. Hence, our neighbor is “neighbor” only through his qualitative otherness (427[^]). It is only as a pure “person” and not as an “individual member” of the race that a human subject gains entrance to the authentic invisible Church.

But, even if the social aspect seems to recede before the Kierkegaardian “pathos of the individual”, yet it is still latent. The Fall and redemption are total, universal events. The *individual* cannot be of ultimate importance where the unity of predestination establishes the solidarity of all with all. Dialectic in this context thus means that movement that sweeps everything along with it, a movement in which “God consigns all to disobedience that he might have mercy upon all” (Rom 11:32).

We have been hard on the second edition in this brief sketch. And maybe even unfair. We have taken thoughts out of context that were meant to illustrate Pauline theology. But our point was not to show how much this book agrees with Paul but to point out precisely those points where Barth diverges from Paul and to cite his reasons for doing so. Barth’s Christian radicalism is super-Christian, too Christian [*überchristlich*], and thus is unchristian. Ironically, it too is a form of reflection through and through (by absolutizing a methodological moment into *the* standpoint, the subject matter itself); and thus *it* is the real *conversio ad creaturam*!

The end result of this relentlessness is to stretch out all the mysteries of God on the rack of this method, to tear them apart in the harsh glare of dialectics that gives to them an immediacy that paradoxically destroys them as mysteries. Clearly, Hegel is still at work.

This is most obvious when we see how the very heart of Christianity, its most crucial doctrine, the Incarnation, becomes impossible. Where the divine only touches the world “like a tangent to a circle” (6), where the infinite qualitative difference is the only way of defining the relationship of God and world, then there can be no such thing as a *life* of Christ, but only a *death* of Christ: only that can give ultimate meaning to the Incarnation: “Christ’s life becomes visible to us only and alone and exclusively in his death on the Cross” (136). “That is why dying must be the meaning of Jesus’ life,

because on this side of death the only human possibility is the possibility of sin.” “The ultimate meaning in this death, the death in this death, is God” (186).

3. The Task of Dialectics

If we try to give an account of our results so far, it will first seem to be one of great ambiguity. Of course, it is certain that we are dealing here with something of great moment and explosive power, that a penetrating philosophical vision and language have been introduced into the field of biblical revelation. But the question immediately arises: Is the only purpose of this language to develop a new and as yet unused and highly effective *means of expression* for bringing to light the truth of revelation, whose invention was unavoidable in light of the challenges of liberal Protestantism? In other words, is this new way of speaking purely at the service of the Word, and does it acknowledge itself to be so, or, on the contrary, is revelation made subordinate to a philosophical system?

Is this Platonism, this actualism, this mysticism of identity only a pointer and a method, or is it the whole point of his theology, which has to be taken literally? Or, to use the terminology of J.-L. Leuba once more: Is Karl Barth to be interpreted prophetically or systematically?

If we subsume the philosophical elements under the now-fashionable catchword “dialectic”, then it is a question of finding out the meaning, justification and proper limits of dialectics inside theology. A great deal of discussion has already gone on along these lines from every direction.⁶ We can take a shortcut through this discussion by gradually unfolding the possible meanings of theological dialectics and seeing which meaning has the most power and range. And after that we will ask which of these possible meanings are the ones that best fit Barth.

The word dialectic (*dia-lektiké*) refers to a form of speaking that sets one work against another (*dia* in the sense of “against”) and, in this necessary and unavoidable clash, finding a way or pointing to a direction (*dia* in the sense of “through”) past the immediate confrontation.⁷ If we put the stress more on the first moment, the

clash of opposites, we will be speaking of a predominantly static and dualistic dialectic, in the manner of Kierkegaard. But, if our stress is on the second moment, on finding a way through the clash, we will be speaking of a dynamic and triadic dialectic, in the manner of Hegel.

Dialectical argumentation, which tries to reach its conclusions through the give and take of statement and counterstatement (*sic et non*), was a development of the human mind for use on purely intraworldly issues well before theology came on the scene. It would be good at this point to take a moment to explain the significance of such argumentation. We may distinguish three stages of motivation in methodic dialectics:

1. There is first the *subjective* motive of the speaker, or the one seeking to know. Human knowledge is ineluctably limited. It is abstractive and not intuitive. It does not “possess” its object as it really “is” but as a mere fragment, broken by the dualism between percept and concept. Yet, in the claim of real, objective knowledge, it nonetheless claims really to have met the object as it is. Negotiating this challenge means that the knower must always try to fill out what is already given. In order truly to know, one cannot simply rest content with what has already been known or with concepts already formed. As Hegel used to say, “The known is, as such, the unknown.”⁸

Thus, thesis gives rise to antithesis, as we test and probe our assertions for their truth value. Because the thesis is finite and offers only one aspect of the object, an antithesis is called for that can bring forth some essential, perhaps even necessary, addition to the thesis. From Heraclitus and Zeno through Abelard and on to Kant and Hegel, this form of *dialegesthai* is a common procedure and of itself entails no prejudgment on the nature of the object.

2. The inadequacy of human knowledge vis-à-vis the object has its counterpart in a definite superiority of the *object itself*. The “object” of knowledge is not the real thing standing over against us in itself; rather, it “hovers” over its objectification (Husserl). Indeed, every act of objective knowing presents the object, but not in all its fullness. It

still remains but an *aspect*; and thus it contains in itself an *indication* of a totality we can never fully grasp. For all its achievements, knowledge is essentially self-transcending and open-ended; for all its direct access, it is still indirect. At its very foundations, knowledge is open to other possible surprises and instructions coming from the object. Knowledge does not only “see”, it “hears” and “hearkens”. No “transcendental deduction”, no Idealism, can close the cleft between percept and concept, through which something new and startling can always emerge in the subject.

3. The impossibility of entirely grasping the object becomes more pronounced as the object itself ascends higher on the scale of being, that is, as the object itself starts to become a *subject*. The individual is ineffable, not simply because individuals cannot by definition be compared fully with one another (or because we have reached the outermost branch on the tree of Porphyrius, the *atomon eidos* [indivisible idea]), but more importantly because the subject is a free and *self*-determining being. There is no way we could ever foreknow all the possibilities and aspects of a free subject.

In this case, the object that is a subject (who thus possesses reflexivity and therefore intimacy) must freely open himself in order to be known by an other. He is no “thing” but a “person”, even though he possesses many properties of a thing by virtue of his being a member of a cosmos, a species, a race. At this point, the *dialectic* of knowing changes from being a monologue of the knower into a *dialogue* with the other subject.

Here we deliberately exclude the problem that will have to be discussed later, the introduction of which would only confuse the issue, when we are trying to achieve a certain methodological clarity: whether we can “crown” this whole ascending process with a fourth level, where the person opens up to the highest—the divine—level and the dialectic / dialogue (defined so far in philosophical terms) finds its highest justification. In such a case (and here we are following the analysis of Scheler and his disciples), the relation to God would then be the highest and most extraordinary instance of personal relationship in general.

But this problem entails another one: whether creation can be interpreted as a “personal self-manifestation by God” that can objectively occur independent of his personal self-revelation in Jesus Christ as well as be subjectively perceived and understood without the benefit of the event of Christ. However we may answer these problems, one thing is sure: as soon as we leave the three levels discussed above and enter upon the field of revelation as it has really occurred, dialectic becomes completely necessary:

1. God’s revelation given to man in Christ is that event in which God above all pronounces the decisive Word about himself. Hence it includes God’s decisive Word about man and the world. It is a Word that only God can utter. Even though it “came into the world” (Jn 1:9) and took on form (*morphe*) in the likeness (*schema*) of a human word (Phil 2:7), it nonetheless does not appear as simply the word of a human mortal as one word alongside many others. It is the most distinctive Word that “was with God in the beginning” and indeed “was God” (Jn 1:1).

This Word has taken on human form,⁹ indeed is “flesh” (Jn 1:14). But this happens to reveal in this figure the God whom “no one has seen” (Jn 1:18). In the commensurability of the human word there appears the incommensurability of God. What cannot appear does appear.¹⁰

To this revelation of the hidden God, to this gracious self-disclosure, there can correspond in the human person who first encounters it no adequate, natural faculty of accepting it. All that exists in the human person is a “potentiality” that is itself a grace: faith. God’s free address is no more derivable from or attributable to what man otherwise knows than man’s acceptance of it can come from any other authority than this very obedient acceptance. For its justification and motivation can come only from this address itself.

Of course: God’s Word speaks to us in human form and thus in the form of human speaking, thinking, in “concepts and percepts”. These things are commensurate to our nature, and thus our faith also has a form (*morphé*), a likeness (*schéma*), to our apperceptive reason. Thus as believers we can therefore “understand” and try to deepen this understanding. But insofar as the Word being heard is the “Word

from God”, indeed is “God himself”, our “understanding” of human likenesses, letters or concepts is not of itself an understanding of the Word that comes from *God*, of God as Spirit. In and of itself, reason is not faith. God’s Word *appears* in the human word about God in order at the same time to *conceal* itself as such. God “becomes flesh”, without the flesh, as such, becoming God.

So man is primarily a being called (by grace) to hear and believe God’s Word. But, as part of this call, he is also summoned to proclaim this Word “even to the very ends of the world”. He must repeat this Word in additional words of his own and seek to understand this Word by using additional concepts of his own. This is the task of *theology*. As a human activity, it is not itself revelation, but it lives its life from the Word of God, which is its object in the objective order (*fides quae*) and its principle for knowing in the subjective order (*fides qua*). This specifies the irreducibly paradoxical situation of theology. Here we encounter the “enigma at the heart of theology”:^{[11](#)}

1. Its one criterion is *the Word of God*. But it cannot exercise control over it the way other sciences do over their axioms. Because God’s Word is an act of revelation, it is the personal act of the God who bears witness to himself. This is a free act that can never divorce itself from the content of revelation.

2. Theology’s criterion is *contingent*, time-bound and historical. This means that it is ineluctably tied to this world. Hence the obedience of its faith is radically transformed into a faith in Christ at work in the Church, in Scripture, dogma and tradition.

3. Theology is a science *of faith*. That is, it operates by virtue of an act from which it can never be fully abstracted. This act of faith is different from anything else and yet remains as a human science nonetheless.^{[12](#)}

Thus if theology abandons its objective and subjective criterion, or even only one of the two, then it abandons its own most authentic nature. The hidden root of theology, from which it draws its life and justification but which cannot be captured in scientific terms, is faith. But the root of faith is not faith itself (as self-evidence) but God’s speech to man: here is its one criterion. But God is hidden in his revelation, otherwise he would not be God and faith would not be faith.

This is where *dialectics* enters the picture as a theological method. Theology needs dialectics to serve as a continuing *warning* of what it is doing, as a *corrective* to remind theology that it has been speaking of God in Christ, by virtue of the mandate conferred by God in Christ, and yet has been doing so at a distance from God in Christ. (This kind of dialectics is analogous to the first use of human dialectics described above, but as an analogy it far transcends the human application.)

So dialectics is “not a new theology, at least primarily, but, as it were, an illumination shining on theology from without”.¹³ It is a siren warning theology not to take things for granted, keeping it from a too-easy familiarity, a blithe assumption that it has heard all this before.¹⁴ “God willing” should be the watchword: in theology we cannot come to rest on a Yes or No for more than a moment. Both have their season and both illumine the other, but we must move beyond both to point to the ineffable mean.¹⁵ Or to put it more moderately:

Dogmatic thinking is *diallogic*; it asks and answers, answers and asks, and only in this movement does it gain knowledge. One could also say: only by moving from thesis to antithesis does it reach a synthesis. In short, dogmatic thinking is dialectical thinking.¹⁶

2. Thus dialectics is meant to serve as a *pointer*.¹⁷ Like the Baptist, it takes on the role of herald, “preparing the way of the Lord, not because of its innate skill but by virtue of its mandate of startling the hearer into full attention.”¹⁸ Its method is indirect, but “indirect does not mean that its message is ambiguous or ambivalent, speech that cannot ever give a definitive answer. It simply means that the answer clearly and surely points toward someone else’s answer.”¹⁹ This mandate of dialectics is analogous to the *second* function of human dialectics described above, which seeks to move beyond the immediate clash of opposites to a more overarching synthesis. But once more, this analogy requires that theological dialectics far transcend the same function in purely human thought because of the transcendence of its intended object.

This object, however (God’s own speech in human form), is in itself no contradiction at all but a genuine possibility established by

God. And so the Yes and No of dialectical argument must model themselves on this inherent possibility. If they were to take themselves as the measure of possibility, they would never allow God to take on human form and speech! Dialectics has something to offer, not when it is “consistent” with itself, but only when it is directly determined by its object, “consistently” patterning itself on it. Dialectics can be recommended only when it is *objective* in this sense (as opposed to an attempt to judge its object from some neutral point of view). But true to its dialectical spirit, it will simultaneously recognize in gospel simplicity that no one can be absolutely “objective”, that existential thinking remains “an indispensable requirement of theological thinking”.²⁰

This simplicity is “in a way the ultimate and most necessary attitude demanded of us in the Church”.²¹ This simplicity transforms dialectics into a *serene* and hushed dialectic, as befits our journey “along the always hidden and silent pathways of God”.²² It becomes a form of service, truly a holy theology *of God*. It becomes the angel with the flaming sword standing guard before the aseity of God.

Barth has spoken of this aseity in his work on Anselm with exemplary theological objectivity.²³ In this book he returns to the old threefold “dialectic” of medieval theology (the *via positionis*, *via negationis*, *via eminentiae*), though with certain reservations.²⁴ What we should notice in this context is that the *via eminentiae* is not a kind of synthesis “above the fray” that towers over the clash of affirmation and negation.²⁵ Rather it shows its eminence in a fundamental *openness* in the face of the clash between thesis and antithesis. And so it gives the priority to negation (as the expression of the *major dissimilitude* of the analogy), a move already begun with the Areopagite.

The dialectical character of theology “continually requires further completion. It must in principle remain open.” The verb *dialegesthai* implies that there is “a web of radically incomplete thoughts and sentences that point beyond themselves to the ineffable reality of God’s speech to us, which alone can fill up what is missing in our speech.”²⁶ Thus the methodological contradiction becomes a *pointer* to God, who contains within himself no insoluble paradox or logical

contradiction, even in the mystery of his trinitarian nature.²⁷ God is a mystery, not a paradox.²⁸ In the final analysis, then, dogmatic theology can expressly use the dialectical method on all its objects, not just in its critical and prophetic moments but also in its constructive, objective work:

Dialectical thinking is a process of saying one thing and then countering it with another. It moves from question to answer and back again so that the conversation never breaks off. . . . Essentially, there is no final word. . . . Both sides of the dialectic must be incorporated in thought—irreconcilable but also inseparable, a word and its counterword: faith and obedience, heteronomy and autonomy, authority and freedom; the presence of the Holy Spirit addressing us from without and within; Incarnation of the Word and outpouring of the Holy Spirit; reconciliation and sin; history in Adam and history in Christ; history of origins and history of revelation; the Word of God in Bible and pulpit and the word of man in the same text and sermon. The prototype from which all this derives and that finally makes all of dogmatics necessarily dialectical is none other than the reality of God and man in the one person of the Redeemer Jesus Christ. But those who do away with this “and” and who can think only *one* thought when they hear the term God-man, only they can openly avow they are *non* - dialectical theologians.²⁹

The great opponent here, above all, is Schleiermacher, who works only “in vague tensions and ambiguities”. For him the opposition between grace and sin is only relative. In other words, one can find some superior point of view to stand above this contrast. But, for Barth, dialectics is nothing other than the intellectual replica to the obedience of faith. It respects rather than denies the superiority of the object being referred to by thesis and counterthesis. For God’s ways are superior to man’s thought. Barth cites numerous examples of the relation of personality and aseity in the concept of God. Moreover, he points out the dialectical relation between transcendence and immanence, of divine and creaturely freedom in the doctrine of creation, justification, sanctification, of the visible and invisible Church, of visible sign and secret reality in the sacraments.³⁰ And this is because the “and” (that is, the refusal to subsume one side of the tension into the other) has become the hallmark of dialectical theology.³¹ Dialectical theology is expressly designed as a theology for a journeying People of God who are merely on their way to God but not there: a *theologia viatorum*:

“God’s own Word, his theology, is undialectical. But we are mere humans.”³²

God has manifested his inconceivability most of all by becoming a man and showing that the human is inherently good and innately compatible with God. As a pointer to this God, dialectics will refuse to regard the negation of finitude as the most suitable way of reaching this God; nor will it look on the effort to strip away all “anthropomorphisms” as the surest access to the knowledge of God. Here Barth’s doctrine of God has happily dealt a death blow to the many vestiges of Neoplatonism that still adhere in Christian theology, which, in contrast to God’s downward movement into the *morphe anthropou*, tries to ascend on its own power by systematically stripping away the features of our innate finitude.³³

God stands *on the far side* of our notions of finite and infinite. Thus the temporal and the finite can in and of themselves become a parable of God himself, as the Incarnation shows. But, true as this is, the light we gain from the *via positiva* does not mean a distancing from the *via negativa*, which would short-circuit the dialectic. We must once again recall that this revelation by God, which truly makes God known in faith, is a revelation of his *nature*: that is, of his aseity and incomparability. Every positive assertion heightens the assertion of negation.

3. Just as dialectics will try to protect the divinity of God, so too it will seek to protect the divinity of his *Word*. For Barth, God’s Word “is *the* objective reality because it is *the* subjective reality of all, namely, the subjectivity of God. God’s Word means: God is speaking, and nothing could be more concrete than that. But this divine *concretissimum*, precisely because it is such, cannot be predicted or repeated afterward in our language. What God says is never known—indeed it is not even true—apart from himself.”³⁴

Theology tends to forget this time and again. It siphons off the content of revelation and shucks the form. But, by doing this, it also eviscerates the content, which cannot be separated from the form. Revelation ceases to be revelation when it is summoned to the bar of reason or of the various human sciences as a kind of universally

available truth. Origen knew well that in this temerity the Passion of the Logos was being repeated.

Repeating the *third* task of human dialectics, but analogously, that is, on a much higher—because theological—plane, dialectics must defend the specifically *divine* quality of revelation. It will remind every school of theology that, behind and in all forms of objectivity, the infinite subject shines through, that a more “objective”, uncommitted contemplation is not just a harmless abstraction but a disobedient flight from the face of this subject. The only sufficient response that God demands to his revelation is faith: that is, the total commitment of one’s own existence to the truth of revelation.

However existentially dialectics may try to operate, it can never replace faith, even for a moment. “When it considers its true object, dogmatics is a form of thought fraught with existential implications and responsibilities. The object of this science and art tolerates no other approach than that of *service*. Every kind of reserve by which one separates one’s life from one’s thinking means that one has opted out.”³⁵ As a consciously adopted method, it can all too easily fall into the trap of becoming the opposite of what it intends to be. Instead of being a moment in a seriously committed Christian life, dialectics can dissolve into a plaything that neutralizes the high stakes involved in the Christian message.³⁶

The pointer-function of dialectics gains its only standard when it is used in the service of a specifically *theological*—that is, in a Christian and ecclesial—sense. It must *bear witness*. In Christ’s own witness, we meet the miracle of grace “where we must understand his *self* (which forms, as it were, the material of his service) as an aspect of his form”.³⁷ Thus, as a witness to God, Christ’s whole existence is “dialectical”. He is indeed a person, but he is no longer accessible to our view as a person. He is both “in himself” and “outside himself”. As Spirit, he is the “matter”, the staging place of revelation.

This existence is the opposite of that dialectical game-playing that never results in a decision. And in this way it directs “every authentic theological dialectic to commit itself in words and in deeds to its true end: a highly undialectical Yes or No.”³⁸ This type of Christian existence remains the measure and standard of Christian thought

and its methodology. This is its true object to which it must conform itself.

4. We have discovered in this chapter that the three functions of dialectics in human thought and language find their analogue in theology too. But does that exhaust the form of the specifically theological? Indeed, have we even touched on it at all? Do our assertions in this regard not hold true for every philosophy that takes for its theme the relation between the absolute and the relative?

As a matter of fact, we have not yet spelled out what the early Karl Barth regarded as the distinctive mark of theological dialectics. Two things radically distinguish Christian revelation from every philosophy about God and creature. These two things are quite distinct from each other—indeed, they are contraries—and yet they are closely related to each other, for in their uniqueness they condition each other while heightening their differences.

The first thing is the absolute actuality of God's revelation. This is an actuality that is in no way comparable to any worldly actuality because it is, to use Scholastic terminology, the presence of the *actus purus* in the act of revelation. According to Barth, the actuality of revelation means this: that everything in it is absolute deed, absolute decision, absolute creation, absolute sovereignty and freedom. Hence it is the revelation *of the divine* in God. Whatever one may think of the similarity and dissimilarity between God and creature on other grounds, only one thing is certain (and this insight comes from revelation alone): the divine element, the *actus purus*, in revelation is *not* an analogue but is incomparably the prerogative of God.

This sharp blade of the absolute cuts through everything and thus cannot be expressed in a neutral concept of Being, applicable to both Creator and creature alike. On the contrary, through the event of revelation, it invades the world and seizes and overpowers man. Simultaneously, the other edge of the blade reveals man as a sinner, totally alienated from God and thereby and to that extent deserving of damnation. Whatever he may have in the way of worldly goods and property, all his pluses and minuses stand, to the extent he is a

sinner, within the bracket of the most important minus sign of all: the fact of his unbelief, disobedience and divine condemnation.

The searing fire of God's "aseity" does not grab hold of a "neutral" creature but one who is actively opposed to God's holiness. It encounters a creature who *chooses* not to know and who is therefore cut off from and cursed by God. Therefore, God's Word meets a creature who has nothing to say about this event of revelation, not only because the creature has encountered God's incomparability but because the creature's active opposition to God has robbed it of all chance of responding to the divine Word with a word from its side that is even in the least appropriate.

And so the two sides of the Christian event now attain their final sharpness against one another: God's infinite holiness invades the medium of total sinfulness like a white-hot iron hissing in a pool of water. The total ungodliness of the world finally comes to full light in the event of God's self-disclosure. In its encounter with the world's total sinfulness, God's incomparable perfection—which already stands beyond any possibility of similarity, because it reveals the dissimilarity in all its fullness—is removed far beyond any possible or conceivable attempt to contrast it with finite realities. And this encounter is no neutral event, which gains its meaning only later by something else. From the outset, it is the encounter with infinite grace, giving infinite forgiveness and justification to the creature. In the act of God, the abysmal sinfulness of creation is stripped bare, but this happens only because this abyss is shown to be a counterabyss: the precipitous heights of God's adoption of us as his children.

One will have to admit that this description of Barth's theology of the event of revelation does not of itself require a split in the churches. Indeed, he makes the use of such sharp dialectics understandable. It even seems to be called for—for two reasons: because of the sheer facticity [*das Aktualische*] of the event and because of the contrast between grace and sin. Not only that but every creaturely word seems all too common, and therefore unsuited, to dare handle the absolute incomparability of the event of revelation or to give echo to it in its own speech. What human word could possibly express the unprecedented struggle between grace

and sin, between the absolute Yes of God and the definitive No of the world?

For Barth, the encounter with revelation inevitably raised the question of *style* in theology. He knew that the task of theology was not only to say something proper about the content of revelation but also somehow to convey to us how utterly, stupendously dramatic the event was that is now reaching our ears. Even style, indeed style above all, belongs to the truth of what is being said. And the style that Barth chose is dialectical in a twofold sense.

It is first of all the style of Kierkegaardian dialectics. That is, it emphasizes the “static” moment of dialectics, the “infinite qualitative difference” between God and creature. Above all, it stresses the aseity of God in the very act of God’s self-disclosure. It uses every means in its armory to set off God and creature from one another by a radical stress on the exalted holiness of God and the appalling sinfulness of the creature. Its great fear is that theology will confuse God with the creature—or even worse, that it will have the temerity to assume an easy familiarity with the things of God.

This type of dialectics was rediscovered in the febrile and tumultuous years following World War I, the era of Expressionism. This goes far in explaining the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*: it is theological expressionism, especially in methodology. The distress that Barth felt he put eloquently: “Is even a single one of my words *the* Word that I am searching for, that in my distress and longing I would like to utter? Can I speak without having one word cancel out the other?”³⁹

There is a tragedy here. “We find ourselves in the highly unusual situation of having to speak about that of which we cannot speak.”⁴⁰ Our location is “no real *standpoint* at all but a mathematical point on which we cannot gain any footing”.⁴¹ How can the preacher compel someone to hear the gospel when God himself cannot force it? “Caught on this narrow crag of rock”,⁴² he begins to feel vertigo, the vertigo of a temptation to consider the impossibility of his situation as definitive, to understand dialectics, not as a corrective, but as the *essence* of theology, to explain away the mathematical point as a true *standpoint* and thereby to shuck off the unbearable burden of his mission. The preacher thrashes about in despair, and yet in this

despair what he cannot show is to become visible. But no! How can emptiness be a real pointer? Why can it not just as well mean the opposite: nothingness?

At this juncture the second, *dynamic* moment of the dialectic comes to our aid, which Hegel and German Idealism readied for our use: if revelation truly declares the whole world to be guilty and worthy of damnation before God, if it is that act whereby God sends his grace in Jesus Christ and restores the sinner to righteousness, then Christianity is the miracle of total reversal and transformation. This means that the ground of all being and history is precisely this unique event, an event that could never be anticipated or derived from another principle but that itself determines and decides everything: the very movement *of God* from No to Yes. This is the “self-movement of the truth” to a degree that was not even given to Hegel to know!

This brings us to the very limits of the dialectical method used by Barth in the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*. Is this twofold method of static and dynamic dialectics a sufficient one for making clear what happens in revelation? Or, strange as it may seem, does the opposite happen: Does dialectics fail as the exclusive means for gaining (and expressing) theological knowledge at the very point when it proclaims the failure of other methods? At just the point where dialectics sees itself as the absolute, we once more encounter absolute identifications (whether static or dynamic). First, God is identified (in all his aseity!) with his revelation. Then the creature is defined as the pure opposite to God and thus is identified with nothingness. And finally, when the creature is retrieved by God through revelation and brought back to God through a dynamic movement (which is an absolute, because divine, movement), creation is then equated with God himself, at least in its origin and goal.

These equations, identifications, levelings, are to be found in both editions of *The Epistle to the Romans*. The irony is that at the very place where Barth wants to do pure theology, where human thought has no more room for maneuver unless it be dialectical and “superseded”, here we encounter the unexpected (but also unavoidable!) irruption of a very unbiblical philosophical pantheism

(or more precisely, theopanism). This ultimately becomes evident in Barth's use of dialectics itself: its very exclusivity necessarily serves to be its own undoing. "The dialectical way is by far the best", says Barth.⁴³ And yet a few pages later he goes on to aver that "the dialectician is as such no better than the dogmatician or the critic."⁴⁴

The experiment of the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* was to try to push dialectics to absurd limits, until dialectics rendered itself void *for* dialectical reasons.⁴⁵ But this only resulted in the great irony that dialectics—which took itself to be *the* proven method—was not only not better than dogmatics and criticism but decidedly inferior to them. In its radical infallibility (as radical fallibility!), it actually betrayed its own self-imposed mission: to speak only of God and not to call attention to itself. Its loud avowal, "I cannot", is actually disobedience. As if it were making its relativity an absolute, as if it really were not relative!

The Epistle to the Romans is the very thing against which it itself raged and thundered: a pinnacle of human religiosity. Its insistent cry of "Not I! Rather God!" actually directs all eyes on *itself* instead of on God. Its cry for distance gives no room for distance. Perhaps, shuddering at the dreadful pain of its flagellations, we could admit that it is right—a hundred times right! But the very blow tells us of its guilt. The real scandal is the mystery of God, which cannot be evaluated in language, even indirectly. There is no suitable method for describing the "infinite qualitative difference between God and man", even if only negatively. Dialectics cannot replace theology. It must be content to serve merely as a corrective. As the moment of indirection, it can itself be only indirect.

Therefore, to express what he really wanted to say in *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth had to learn a new way of speaking from what he had used in the commentary. He had to change the method, the way of expressing himself, his style and even the content. Although he had wanted to do pure theology, he unexpectedly ended up doing philosophy. To make what he was doing truly theological, he had to introduce something into his theology that might at first seem as "abstract" as philosophy itself: analogy.

Pure dialectics dissolves those subjects between whom the theological event takes place: God and creature. God's aseity is

dissolved in the event of his revelation and abolishes itself. On the other hand, the creature has no self-subsistence of its own vis-à-vis God. It either collapses into God (at the origin and goal) or becomes pure contradiction to God (in sin) and dissolves into nothingness. No wonder then that the identity of the creature with itself in the event of justification is strongly emphasized at one point⁴⁶ and just as vigorously denied at another.⁴⁷ Even the creature was actively abolishing itself.

Barth's deepest proclivities required, if he were to save himself and remain true to his deepest instincts, that he find another way of expressing himself from what he used in *The Epistle to the Romans*. Barth indeed made his way to analogy slowly, but his turn to it was irrevocable, and he followed it through to its very last consequences. But, in turning to analogy, he also emphasized those elements that were necessary for preserving the basic insight of his first work and thereby for proving wrong its critics (who certainly were not lacking).

Barth's later journey is a paradoxical rehabilitation of *The Epistle to the Romans*, insofar as it now becomes clear what this strange book was *trying to say all along*. In retrospect, we now learn that this book was not trying to be a philosophy decked out as a theology but a theology dressed out as a philosophy, yet easily detached from the latter.

But now that the word "analogy" has been introduced into Barth's theology, the question once more arises—this time on a quite different plane—of the Tightness and limits of dialectics.

Chapter 3

THE CONVERSION TO ANALOGY

1. Early Anticipations: *Prolegomena to Christian Dogmatics*¹

If we look back on the long and very complex history of changes from 1922 to 1932 that led Barth from *The Epistle to the Romans* to the *Church Dogmatics*, we will readily notice the most important document of those transitional years: his first attempt to sketch a full-scale dogmatics. As it happened, only the first volume of this projected work appeared (in 1927), subtitled *The Doctrine of the Word of God*. Even though the author later became dissatisfied with it—because he felt that too many shards of his Romans commentary clung to it—and started over, it is an important transitional document nonetheless, for it represents an immense step forward and looks entirely to what lay ahead.

No document better serves to explain the crucial change in outlook Barth underwent, and none better anticipates the direction he would take. Because of its brevity and concentration (at 450 pages, it is far more condensed than the great *Prolegomena* of the *Church Dogmatics*, which swelled to an immense 1500 pages), because of its lively and lovely diction and its positive and irenic style, it remains one of the best introductions to Barth's thought.

In working one's way through this book, one must take special care to hear exactly what Barth is really saying, as opposed to what the reader thinks he "has to be saying". Again, one must also give priority to those passages where Barth takes great pains to express himself clearly and not interpret these passages in terms of those spots where obscurity and weakness of argument might still be present.

Above all, we should concentrate on the essential point of the book: finding that *principle* that distinguishes Christian theology, on the one hand, from philosophy, metaphysics and religion in general and, on the other, from the Word of God, of preaching and of Scripture. Having become entangled in the most intricate

methodological questions in *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth now steers clear of his former strange bedfellows on the left and right and resolutely heads for the real subject matter itself: the actual content of dogmatics.

Now rejecting every open or hidden abstract philosophy and metaphysics, Barth's one concern is solely: the concrete Word of God as it became man in Jesus Christ (261). This is no "law" but a miracle that breaks all laws (272). It is utterly unique, so unique that the human knower could never attain any standpoint for anticipating or knowing it: it is pure event.

Everything converges on this point and ramifies out from it: the triune God is revealed to the world in this event of his Word that touches history in Christ. The event enters history but does not thereby cease to be event; it is continually "happening", continually commandeering and calling to decision (262). This event is ever new because of the working of the Holy Spirit in Scripture, who gives it as lasting testimony but makes it ever new: "Therefore, even today the Word of God happens in the Bible, but apart from this event it is not the Word of God" (63).

In the Word of God, God is the subject, utterly free and supreme, entering into no correlation, no "circle" of human consciousness, unrecognizable by and unknown to the a priori of the human spirit, never resembling an "object" (96), eternally beyond the sway of nature and history. God's is a sovereignty that interprets *itself* in the act of revelation, proclaiming the triune nature of the Godhead (126f.). God is a Thou, but not in relation to any created Thou.

We immediately notice that Barth has introduced the doctrine of the Trinity in the very *Prolegomena* to his dogmatics. Why? This establishes both God's full sovereignty and prevents one from relating divine personhood to a created consciousness (170). Clearly Barth is trying at the very outset to protect himself against the archenemy: Schleiermacher's theology of "consciousness". In his revelation and nowhere else is God accessible to man; but because he reveals himself as triune, he is, as the One revealed, always perfectly free. In the event of the Word is the *whole* God revealed: "There is no part of God's reality that has not been revealed in his

revelation” (137). Behind revelation there are no more unopened doors, there is yet no hidden, unrevealed mystery in God.

It is surprising but quite characteristic that Barth used this notion to attack the idea that there can be a second, “natural” revelation. Revelation must be total or it is not revelation at all. And since God has totally and irrevocably revealed himself already, there can be no room for another alongside it (136).

On the other hand, Barth does leave room—this is a brave and unexpected development—for the later Reformed, extra-Calvinist² possibility of a revelation in creation that is not simply covered already by the revelation of the Incarnation. Barth recommends this extra-Calvinist thesis because, as he says,

it thereby becomes clear that the Word of reconciliation is also the Word of creation, which is not abandoned but renewed and confirmed by the Word of reconciliation. The *regnum naturae* is also the Kingdom of the Son, not just the *regnum gratiae*. In the realm of nature, the Son is, as the Word of creation, not yet the Incarnate One. . . . The *logos asarkos* is not a second (though chronologically first), natural, perhaps partial revelation. There is in fact only the one, total revelation effected by the *logos ensarkos*. But the Word of creation (the *logos asarkos*) has not lost its function as creative Word because of sin but remains the necessary presupposition of this one total revelation that takes place in the Incarnate One [271].

Of course, this total revelation occurs within the veil of this flesh (222) and so remains indirect and “screened” from man, since it can only be grasped in the event of hearing, believing and hearkening to the Spirit who gives us these gifts (290). Although revelation comes strictly from above (81), it nonetheless enters into world history via the Incarnation and its implied economy (230f.). The flesh Christ assumed is real flesh (254f). His kenosis does not mean any change to his divinity, but it does say that he really took on the human mode of being. Of course, this does not imply that man could take up a position over against God but that, in the Incarnation, we truly become children of God.

This Christ was, in Paul’s words, “made sin” for us: “He does not want to remain above the fray, so he submits himself to the contradiction of human existence and accordingly suffers the punishment for it. But since he is truly God, he cannot commit sin, though he bears it; nor does he further the contradiction in which he has implicated himself” (266). Thus we cannot claim that divinity and

humanity are so related in Christ that they correspond to Yes and No, thesis and antithesis, statement and contradiction. Otherwise his humanity would not be authentic, and sinful humanity would not be redeemed through his Incarnation.

Just because we speak of a dialectical unity in Christ does not imply the contrary. This expression rather should be understood as referring to a “unity in diversity, as a unity that happens in the act of revelation” (223). Barth explicitly refers here to the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon and declares his agreement with it (224, 229).

But this issue of the capacity of God and man to be united in Christ raises another question: Is human nature a suitable medium for God’s revelation? Barth affirms that it is: the I-Thou relationship between two human beings presents two implications: (1) the reality of an I, which is a true subject, which we cannot plumb and which cannot be voided; and (2) the reality of an authentic encounter, where “one human being can actually pierce through that impenetrability to ‘get through to’ another human being objectively, perceptively and conceptually, who yet remains indissolubly a Thou who is like himself” (219).

Barth will later call the I-Thou relationship in man an “analogy” with that between God and man, which will then imply the possibility of a revelation. This will then become the basis on which Barth will later construct his doctrine of the *imago Dei* that will then provide him with a point of contact [*Anknüpfungspunkt*] for God to meet man (revelation will address the *imago*).

The event of the Incarnation comes alive for man because of the work of the Holy Spirit on him and in him. Through the Holy Spirit, man is enabled to accept the Word of God, to believe and to understand through that belief, to live and to work in accord with it. Barth puts great value on the activity of the one who has thus been graced (294), for “the encounter with God entails a claim on the whole of our life-acts” (295). Accordingly, Barth will stress the interconnection (not identity) of faith and obedience, or faith and works (325[^]). Here again he opposes Schleiermacher and insists that authentic, sober knowing and willing (and not some vague “feeling”) are the true bearers of faith and obedience. “To live as a human being means to know and to do. If there really is an

interrelation of man to God, then it must involve thinking and doing” (323).

By concentrating the entirety of revelation, and indeed the entirety of the actual relation of God and man, on the event of the Trinity revealing itself in the Word, Barth clearly indicates against which enemy the *Prolegomena* is mainly directed: not against Catholicism, which scarcely even appears except at the periphery, but against Schleiermachian Idealism. Against this approach, Barth waxes at length, above all in the polemical chapter on religion called “The Great Confusion” (301ff.). But in this polemic we find in embryonic form all the later objections that Barth raises against Catholicism. When he accuses Schleiermacher and the liberals of Catholicizing tendencies, this clearly implies, however tangentially, that he thinks that Catholicism has been infected with the same Idealism that he has so strongly attacked and rejected here.

As a “human a priori”, religion is the archenemy of revelation. It falsifies human nature by attributing to it a capacity for lofty journeys of ascent, even of divinization, instead of emphasizing its true, sinful condition before God. It falsifies God, who is no longer a free subject but is turned into a projection of human religious potential who becomes accessible to us through the medium of religious feeling. It falsifies the sharpness and acuity of revelation as a real deed between God and man by letting everything swim in the vacuous fog of mystical contemplation. Instead of “dialogue, drama and struggle”, it dissolves the whole relationship into a cosmic soup of generalization and pantheistic musings where there is no longer any real I-Thou (308-9).

It is the unquestioned assumption of religion that “the human being in self-consciousness is one with the divine being” (307). Inside this identity, where “God and man are nodal points on an ellipse” (313), there is some room for “tension”, but it never occurs to human religiosity to account for this because of the contradiction between sin and grace (458).

Nonetheless (and we are astonished to hear this), religion “rests on the ultimate and deepest potential of the human soul” (316). But this potential is not *an empty potential*. It has already been realized without God, it has disobediently shut out God’s revelation and is

“the ultimate and deepest act of contradiction against God” (316). And yet it remains actively open as a possibility. Indeed it is man’s deepest potential, and so there is no reason why it is not as open to redemption as everything else in human nature:

If the sinner can be justified and sanctified, so can his religion. In the *abstract* and according to its own lights, it may well be the very height of rebellion against God. But by virtue of God’s justifying and sanctifying grace, it can also signify—and be—communion with God. Without God’s aid, however, and considered in abstraction from it, religion is the very pinnacle of sin, no matter how deep and upright it might be from a human perspective. But by virtue of God’s grace, in the *concrete* reality of revelation, there can be an acceptance of religion, human piety can qualify as faith and obedience, and intended reverence can be accounted as true reverence (317).

At least in contrast to Barth’s Romans commentary, with its wholesale attack on religion as man’s ultimate rebellion against God, one now notices a new tone: religion can be saved within the precincts of faith.

Nevertheless, certain motifs or accents from *The Epistle to the Romans* still crop up in the *Prolegomena* and are the reason why Barth withdrew it and started anew. The reduction of everything to the act of the revelation of the Word—an approach that dominates the whole book—hides a twofold danger. For one thing, it does not really overcome the old dialectic between identity and contradiction. God, in his pure act, is identity; man, whose created nature is not clearly distinguished from his sinfulness, is the locus of contradiction. And as a preacher or hearer of the Word, man experiences himself as “impossibility”, as “contradiction”, because he knows he has been met and judged by the one *non*-contradictory Word, the Word of God, who is “the Lord of all opposites” (70).

Kierkegaard is thus summoned as witness against Hegel (72). The *homo viator* (the pilgriming Christian) stands “in the real dialectic of life” (71). But again this is understood in such a way that the (Hegelian) supersession of opposites (in Christ) makes this real dialectic so serious and so unavoidable: “What makes a question a real one, serious and not vain, is the answer” (76). “Revelation brings out the dialectic of our existence” (188).

Barth has not yet entirely freed himself from an existentialism that he took to be the presupposition, or at least the correlate, of

revelation; that is, which could serve as the modern form of “natural theology”. However toned down, the experience of contradiction is still the pointer to a reality that transcends contradiction.

As we mentioned, there is also a second danger that is intimately connected to the first danger of leaving the dialectic of identity and contradiction unresolved: and that is Barth’s reduction of revelation to only its act- or event-character. Barth is so mistrustful of every form of continuity because he thinks it could then lead to an easy assumption that revelation is simply “out there”, always readily available and objective. But this mistrust undercuts the christological motif: he cannot really yet develop the kind of Christology that Chalcedon unfolded.

To be sure, all the later motifs are already there, if only suggestively. But the emphasis is entirely on the free activity of the Word and not, as in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, on the fact that Christ became *man*. So strong is this emphasis on the free activity of the Word in terms of the Incarnation that it even eclipses the fact that Christ *became* man.

So Barth has managed to explode the Schleiermachiian “ellipse” (313), but only in favor “of the closed circle of *Deus dixit*” (319). But this only threatens the reality of the creature, who is in real danger of being reabsorbed back into the totality of divinity.

The necessary correctives, the countermotifs, are mentioned clearly enough, but they are invoked more than actually used as effective regulatives, which alone can make invocation of these themes successful. Barth does not yet state clearly and emphatically that creation is not a contradiction in itself but rather is first of all a legitimate, good and divinely willed *counterpart* to God. It is characteristic for Barth that he came to a balanced Christology earlier than he did to a balanced doctrine of creation. It is from Christ himself that he will eventually learn that it is a good thing to be a creature, that not to be God is not a disaster or a contradiction in terms but a good in and of itself.

In this first volume to his projected dogmatics, Barth has consciously endeavored to excise all crypto-philosophy from within theology proper. Of course, he knows full well that everyone brings some kind of philosophy along with him, whether consciously or

unconsciously, whether fully thought out or only embryonic, even if it be only the garden variety philosophy of common sense:

No one ever has the right. . . to preen and boast that at least *he* has purged himself of Hellenistic influences, that *he* has not diluted the New Testament with his own world view but simply lets the Bible speak for itself. That is simply not true. . . . Luther and Calvin both had their respective philosophies: both were Platonists (while Luther was more a Neoplatonist, Calvin's Platonism was of the old school). And Zwingli was more modern than either of them. Indeed, without the Renaissance pantheism of Pico della Mirandola, there would not even have been a Zwingli. Our most recent New Testament scholars cannot conceal that they have been to school under the tuition of the phenomenologists. Nor do we wish to deny that Kierkegaard's anti-Hegelianism is a philosophy too. So if one is going to insist on seeing Idealism as the age-old foe, replacing it with the "*real*" dialectic of I-Thou" as the key to unlock the mystery of the Old and New Testaments, then one is simply joining the endless ranks of those who "interpret" the Bible through the lens of a "world view". We all wear such glasses, without which we could not see at all. . . . In this sense, we all indulge in allegorical exegesis, that is, we need some kind of key, some schema, as a vehicle for "working our way" into the biblical world. . . . Accordingly, we forbear to do battle to save theology by waging war on one or another brand of philosophy or by replacing them with our own version of this or that philosophy. If Platonism obviously did not keep Augustine, or Aristotelianism Thomas Aquinas, from being a good theologian, there is no reason why one must be, or cannot be, an Idealist to be a theologian. Using the same philosophical presuppositions, a person can hear the Word of God aright or amiss. Philosophy is not a "danger" to theology because it is philosophy or because it is this or that philosophy. It becomes a threat only when theology forgets the *relative* influence it should have when we hear the Word (404-6).

Over against such philosophical schemata, which Barth was well aware of (as we saw from the above quote) and which he endeavored just as much to relativize, he counterposed what he called a "biblical attitude". This means for him, first of all, the attitude of obedience to the Word of God that should characterize the dogmatic thinker and that has its analogue in the reverence for the ecclesiastical tradition that we will discuss below. It is, in his words,

the attitude of the prophets and apostles. It is the very opposite of that attitude of those neutral, distant, observing philosophical heads of our time. It is the stance of witnesses, of people who proceed from the startling line of "Thus saith the Lord." This is their absolute presupposition, and it no more ceases to remain operative in their lives than does a waterfall cease to come crashing down from a mountain stream (436).

It is a completely unapologetic outlook (437):

It is a way of thinking that the dogmatic theologian must learn through practice just as we learn anything else. It is a way of approaching the exegesis of Holy Scripture that takes getting used to: we gradually learn it the way a new-born infant accustoms itself to the air and learns to take in food (437-38).

But we should recall that this is fundamentally an *attitude* and so is the farthest thing from a “material biblicism”. Barth’s whole strenuous effort was to train himself in this form of thinking that basically consisted in nothing but proceeding from the Word of God. He never wanted to evade the issue, “as if God could be known without God, as if he could be known secondarily if he were not already the first and without shame to be acknowledged as such” (437). The whole of Barth’s subsequent thought was intended to comprehend biblical revelation in all its purity.

2. The Breakthrough

Just as Augustine underwent two conversions, the one from gross error to the true God and to Christianity and the other (much later) from the religious Neoplatonism of his early writings to an authentic theology, so too in Barth we may find two decisive turning points. The first, his turn from liberalism to radical Christianity, occurred during the First World War and found expression in *The Epistle to the Romans*. The second was his final emancipation from the shackles of philosophy, enabling him finally to arrive at a genuine, self-authenticating theology. This second conversion was a gradual process, indeed a struggle, that lasted nearly ten years, ending at about 1930:

Actually, the real work that documents my conversion. . . from the residue of a philosophical or anthropological. . . grounding of Christian doctrine. . . is not the much-read tract against Emil Brunner³ but my 1931 book on Anselm of Canterbury’s proofs for the existence of God.⁴ I wrote this book with the greatest love, but, despite my affection for it,. . . it remains the least read of all my works.⁵

But the most important book that documents how Barth was leading up to this change is the *Prolegomena* we have just been considering and that is so rich in later implications. But this work does not stand in isolation. On the contrary, if we wish to understand all the ramifications of Barth’s development, we must take into account

these numerous important essays, which at times emphasize some themes even more clearly than the *Prolegomena*. But beyond such programmatic clarity and concentration, they all have in common with the *Prolegomena* a recognition of the pitfalls that beset the very starting point of the Romans commentary, which this time Barth was determined to avoid.

Formally speaking, Barth did indeed hit upon the right starting point, but we still see him occasionally vitiating it, not out of inconsistency or distraction, but because he was still fascinated, overpowered even, with the philosophical ideology and schematism of *The Epistle to the Romans*. The best way of characterizing this ideology is by describing it as a dynamic and actualist *theopanism*, which we define as a monism of beginning and end (protology and eschatology): God stands at the beginning and the end, surrounding a world-reality understood in dualistic and dialectical terms, ultimately overcoming it in the mathematical point of the miracle of transformation.

As we have seen, this monism of the Word of God, which invades the hostile world and is expressed in such Idealist categories as mediacy and immediacy, object and objectlessness, threatens time and again to swallow up the reality of the world. Though the world (which does after all stand in relation to the Word of God) is certainly something and not nothing, it looks so forlorn and hopeless under this harsh glare that one might just as well wish it did not exist.

As we have mentioned, Barth finally came to feel the deeply unchristian tenor of such a panorama and strove with all his might to overcome it. From all sides he tried to deflect such consequences while keeping to his original table of categories. We can summarize these efforts to save the world order under three groups: (1) the attempt to save culture and philosophy; (2) the attempt to save ethics; and (3) the effort to save the Church.

1. *Culture and Philosophy*. The two essays that most pertain to this theme are among the most insightful that Barth ever wrote: "The Church and Culture" and "Fate and Idea in Theology".⁶ Both essays amplify concerns that have preoccupied Barth from the very beginning of his career but had in the meantime slipped into the

background. In particular, the “monism” we mentioned had always been for Barth the outward sign of a tendency to think in terms of a world-encompassing universality. In the first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*, this found expression in various ways: by emphasizing that the Church was called to minister to the stranger in her midst, by introducing the conceptual world of socialism in his analysis and by continually raising the issue of the solidarity of all human beings with each other.

Barth has never had anything to do with that cribbed view—so Jansenistic in outlook—that insists that the radiance of the Word of God falls only upon a smug and select circle of the faithful. When Barth looked at the circle of believers, he saw beyond them, knowing that all are implicated in the event of revelation. This was also the ultimate concern of Schleiermacher, who, according to Barth, certainly “wanted to fashion a theology of *culture*, but still he wanted it to be a real *theology* of culture.”⁷ Barth never did want to break with Schleiermacher totally, and least of all here.

a. The essay on “Church and Culture” speaks of both domains in their interrelationship: just as the Church has a cultural aspect (“her work from the very first moment can be nothing other than cultural work”),⁸ so too we are required to look “also at culture in its inner theological aspect” (368). Because the Word of God comes to the world in the Church, she makes this Word her Alpha and Omega; “it is the event whose legislation overrides all other empirical and transcendental principles in the Church” (369). And so what Fichte, and German Idealism in general, established as the highest, if invisible, operative principle, in Barth is the Word of God breaking in on the principles and laws of this world through the Church. It is, first and last, *the* law of nature.

Now what stands between this “first and last”, this Proton and Eschaton, is the world. Thus the world’s identity is set and determined by the Word. And the same applies to the Christians who live within that world: established as creatures, defined as Christians—and thus as men (369)—they are reminded of their limits, and henceforward they are addressed as beings who have been so limited (370).

But “limit is not at all merely a negative concept but a highly positive one” (383). In relation to the Word, “limit” does not connote simply a deficiency but rather a capacity for the Word (375), a “transparency, a chance to share” in the promise of the Word (387). All this is true, and holds true even though Barth still describes this intermediate domain of “nature” or “culture” in dualistic terms, just like he did in his Romans commentary: nature as the realm of body *and* soul, spirit *and* nature, subject *and* object, internal *and* external. All these dualisms necessarily cry out for a synthesis; but their very inability to find such a unifying principle proclaims their finitude and creatureliness all the louder. Forgoing the possibility of unity, these dualisms show that it is not culture but only the Word that can bring unity and harmony (370).

Once more we hear the underlying half-beats of an anthropological and existential method coming pounding through. But we also pick up something new. Once more Barth has borrowed from extra-Calvinist speculation when he insists that “the Kingdom of Christ does not begin with the Incarnation and is not to be limited to it. The divine Logos fills heaven and earth” (387).⁹ Let us listen more carefully to Barth’s exact words:

We do not intend to assert that there is a self-subsistent, real relationship between God and nature, God and history, God and reason. What we mean is that when the Word of God is spoken and heard in the world of sinners, it strikes against a potential in the world of nature, history and reason that sin has not destroyed. It rests on a legitimate claim—God’s claim on man and not the reverse—which takes effect through his reconciling work. The Fall can indeed obscure these effects but cannot render them invalid or ineffective. . . . This is an indispensable presupposition for his Kingdom to dwell among sinners. In the Incarnation of his Word, in Christ’s reconciling work, this presupposition takes on new vitality. Natural theology lives on in revealed theology; and we find the truth about God’s creation contained and brought to light inside the reality of divine grace. This is the truth meant by the famous line that grace does not destroy but perfects nature. One can even define the meaning of the Word of God by saying that it brings powerfully to light the forgotten truth of creation.

But indissolubly linked with the true nature of creation is the Promise. God has promised us a life of union with him, a life that is not precluded by the search for unity but that cannot be attained by it. For sin has not destroyed God’s image in man to such an extent that man has ceased to be a person created and loved by God. Sin does not turn man into a stone or a torso of his former self. Even as a sinner, man is still man; and God speaks to him in Jesus Christ. Thus humanness is Promise. And man is capable of sharing in this promise. The human race has been restored to life through God’s active reassertion of his claim in Jesus Christ.

And what has been promised to man is precisely what the concept of culture signifies: perfection, unity, totality as a creature and human being in the human world, just as God in his world is perfect and whole, Lord of nature and spirit, Creator of heaven and earth [374-76].

This position is clear and consistent. All it lacks is an explicitly formulated christological foundation to become the definitive doctrine of the great *Church Dogmatics*. If he had only kept to this position unswervingly, Barth could have spared himself the rift with Emil Brunner, during which this position was temporarily obscured only to be revived all the more clearly later in volume 6 of the *Church Dogmatics* (390-91). And if he had only drawn out the implications of this doctrine, then his polemic against Catholicism might have taken another, more nuanced turn.

For here we encounter Barth talking about a natural theology justified—indeed, necessary—inside revealed theology. The obvious consequence of this is that even created nature has been restored in God's redemption. We hear Barth speaking of an objectively undestroyed relationship of creation to God, even though subjectively the sinner cannot realize it. We even hear Barth speaking of an undestroyed image of God in man who is still capable (the *potentia oboedientialis*), as man, of responding to the Word of promise.

Of course these motifs could meanwhile never be developed, as they have been strangled in the cradle, as it were, by Barth's monistic framework. In one passage, he equates the realm of culture with that of the Law (378). And the "commandment of the natural law" (which for Barth is the very definition of humanity) coincides with the positive law contained in the Word of God (380). And so culture, and by implication nature and law, remain bonded to a Beyond they can never know and yet establishes their very being (381), just as that same unattainable Beyond has, with the Church, come into the world only as a promise.

And so culture becomes once more the "untheological aspect of the Church" (385), a statement that contradicts the definition announced at the opening of the essay. And if Barth concludes by sharply delineating the eschatological boundaries of all cultures, he

does not do so in service to this divine-human relation, which for him can only occur in terms of the wonder-working Word.

b. The second article, on “Fate and Idea in Theology”, takes up, and much more deeply than before, the question of the relation between philosophy and theology. Just as culture is the “external side” of the Church because the Word of God really enters into history and, more importantly, because the Kingdom of the Word (as Redeemer) reveals this Kingdom as the Creator’s, so too does theology live from within philosophy.

Theology is the penetration of the Word of revelation into the realm of human thought and thus of all human problems, both intellectual and existential. Theology therefore penetrates into the various schools of thought, perspectives and metaphysical systems that seek to portray worldly reality. Just as it goes without saying that there is culture, so too we say that philosophy does exist. And once more it too is qualified, confirmed and set within limits by theology. Indeed, insofar as philosophy is the unavoidable way we conceive the Being of the world, theology cannot develop in any way except as a—qualified but nonetheless real—philosophy.

Philosophy mirrors the dualism that is inherent in worldly Being with its own “tension” between Realism and Idealism. Ultimate reality can be experienced (in Realism) as what is simply given through its overpowering presence; it is so overwhelmingly there as reality and fate that thought never presumes it can manipulate it. Or reality may be experienced (in Idealism) as that on which thought reflects and over which it tries to raise itself in order to grasp the reality it meets in consciousness. Thought does this, it feels, in its “originality and superiority toward mere Being”, in the priority that spirit has over nature and nonobjectivity over objectivity, since it is the origin of all objectivity (328).

In the long run, these two forms of thought with their different starting points cannot get along without each other. One might prevail at one time, the other at another (338). But this merely manifests the inconclusiveness and creatureliness of human thought. Barth’s conclusions here are similar, indeed to the point of

being identical, with those of Erich Przywara. But Barth radicalizes this situation from two sides.

On the one hand, it is quite legitimate for human thought always to strive for unity. So in the struggle between Idealism and Realism, each of the opponents will try to subsume the insights of the other into its own system. But it is entirely illegitimate for human thought to anticipate the verdict of unity, which can come only from God's own Word, which alone *is* unity. Otherwise, the Word, when it comes, will find the place it is meant to occupy already taken. Before God can reveal himself as unity, man has already anticipated that unity out of his own resources. Before God can say who he is, man has already imagined for himself a concept of God. He has already equated the "real" or the "ideal" of his thinking with God. This clearly unmasks the absolute presumption, the radical sinfulness of human thought.

This does not mean that philosophy is *necessarily* an expression of this sin. So long as it leaves empty the spot that only God can fill, so long as it refuses to stay fixed at any one position, then there can reign "between theology and a strictly conceived philosophy. . . not just a well-intentioned neutrality, not just peace, but—at least for theology—a richly instructive working relationship. But when a philosophy seeks to be a theosophy, for whatever reason, then there must be war, indeed a virtual War of Long Knives" (341).

Theology has no choice but to make use of the concepts and categories fashioned by philosophy—how else could it think about revelation? But it must guard against simply equating the content of revelation with the content of philosophical concepts. It will try to understand the God of revelation using both the Realist concepts of fate and the Idealist critique of objectivity, but it must always be aware that the object of its concern is not the object of the philosophers.

The living, triune God is not to be identified with *the* concept of Being, which the philosopher considers to be the highest and loftiest of all. Nor is the event of Christ's irruption into history to be identified without further ado with the philosophical concept of history, however "vital" and "existential" that philosophy of history might be. Similarly, the nonobjectivity of the God of revelation is not simply identical with

the nonobjectivity of the principle of all worldly Being, which is the thesis of the Idealist critique.

But because theology must always make use of philosophical concepts and thought styles, it must test and discern what content is operative: Is it the living Word of God or some philosophical first principle?

Behind this first radicalization of the Realist-Idealist distinction (with which Catholic theology could declare itself in agreement), stands the second: philosophy's open-endedness, its inability to form a complete synthesis. This can only follow upon the communication of God's Word.¹⁰ And so we meet with the thesis that philosophy fundamentally derives from theology. Philosophy can be nothing other than a secularized theology that no longer understands itself: "All philosophy has had its origins in theology" (314).

Once more, Barth's flat monistic reductionism comes into play here. In this view, philosophy becomes nothing but a theology alienated from itself and grown weary of remaining obedient to its true source. For Barth, this obedience can only be conceived as that owed to the free Word and to its manifestation in history, which cannot be forced by any thought system. But this means that philosophy transmutes the ultimate source of all knowledge—faith and obedience—into knowledge (345).

It then becomes the task of theology to heal this breach, "to bring about in the domain of human science and thus in the form of discursive knowledge *the* form of knowledge in which those antitheses do not occur that are the very definition of discursive knowledge" (336). Theology is given this role because it is "the one, the unified perspective hovering over the contradiction of my existence and my thought" (347).

Clearly, once we assume this, there is no way to halt the reduction of everything toward "identity". On the one hand, philosophy and theology become indistinguishable from one another in the temporal order, because even the Word of God veiled in Christ can no longer be distinguished from profane history. On the other hand, true theology becomes entirely transposed into terms of Barth's relentless actualism: theology depends on the presence of a faith that cannot really be detected, and faith depends on a free divine

choice, which is similarly undetectable. And so all that we can do is join in a chorus of praise for predestination (347).

As before in the first essay, what is lacking is a fully developed Christology capable of supporting the irresolvable tensions in Barth's system. To be sure, he has postulated one as his foundation, but *de facto* it is never really operative. The most Barth can bring himself to say about philosophy is that, when authentic, it is "a reflection on the reality and truth of man *at whose borders the thought of God can only come across as a question*" (340). Such cribbed praise has a hollow ring.

2. *Ethics*. Barth's reflection on ethics during these years marks the second way by which we may specify the transition that led him from *The Epistle to the Romans* to the *Church Dogmatics*. Three essays in particular can serve as the milestones of this development: "The Problem of Ethics Today" (1922), "Keeping the Commandments" (1927; to which "Justification and Sanctification" [1927] is the sequel) and finally, on the other side of the threshold of the *Church Dogmatics*, "The First Commandment as a Theological Axiom" (1933).¹¹ These three essays basically try to get the same point across, but it is indicative of Barth's development that he resorted to different strategies in each essay: first he dressed his thesis in anthropological and existential clothing, then in the garments of the theological actualism of his transitional period and finally in the christological raiment that was to become him the most.

The first lecture, "The Problem of Ethics Today", stands completely under the same ban of all philosophical categories as did *The Epistle to the Romans*: "The problem of ethics is the pressing question confronting man's whole temporal existence" (125). Assuming for a moment that the question of truth can be divorced from that of ethics, we could perhaps concede that the question of truth is an issue that one might approach like a spectator, from the sidelines. Perhaps, but certainly not ethics. In the ethical sphere, man is ever the doer; at every moment he is interrogated and forced to choose (even when he does not choose!). He cannot stand on the sidelines and treat ethics abstractly. The ethical imperative breaks in upon temporal existence irresistibly, shattering it with its absolute imperiousness.

On the one hand, there is the very real world. Here “at least 90 percent of the human race bustles about, here people eat, drink, sleep, procreate and the like. It forms the broad basis for an ethics of rule”, the real world, “with its mostly thin layer of science, technology, politics and culture”, “this astonishing hypertrophy of our ingenuity over which is lacquered an equally thin layer of moral intentions that serve as little more than evasions” (144). On the other hand, we encounter an entirely concrete commandment whose pressing imperiousness Kant tried in vain to analyze from the formal side, while people like Ragaz and the chiliasts of the Radical Reformation thought they could put it into practice on the material side. But in spite of their efforts, this categorical imperative appears as no more than an empty Ought, disengaged from Is.

The one great result of this is that we find ourselves in a Utopian nightmare from which we cannot escape: Utopia becomes an absolute necessity, the unavoidable definition of all ethical obligation (143). In other words, we are caught between the absolute “thou shalt” of the categorical imperative and the “I cannot” of the human condition. And because it is a question of *ethics*, we cannot escape condemnation, as for example by reverting to the famous back-and-forth of dialectics! This impasse [*Aporie*] is stronger than dialectic (135). Though we are caught in this predicament, we can only experience it as our guilt, “as a result of the Fall that precedes all history and determines it thereafter” (145). We are *judged* by our situation (146).

Yet this must be so if we are truly to encounter God: “Would there be an origin to existents, a Creator of all things, unless, measured against him, all that exists would have to be disqualified as nonbeing alienated and fallen from God’s life, which alone is perfect and good” (147)? It is only when a ship runs aground that the sailor finally clings to the rock (153). Similarly, in the shipwreck of our existence, we learn that what counts is our “eternal double-predestination, the knowledge that we have not been cast off and rejected but saved and elected” (153).

The article “Keeping the Commandments” shifts this perspective, and this ringing existentialism of crisis disappears. The reader no longer sees the impossibility of existence and then on that basis

comes to experience the grace that makes all things possible. On the contrary, Barth's method is the reverse: in the light of grace we come to see the impossibility of human existence. Even here Barth keeps the emphasis on the inescapability of the concrete. But this concrete is no longer the "situation" of the acting person but the imperious content of the divine command. Nothing is more concrete than to stand ever anew under God's commandment. Standing before God's command is not a problem but a fact. Similarly, the content of the command in particular situations is no problem but a fact. A problem only arises when man distances himself from this most concrete of realities for whatever reason: whether because he is still progressing from forgetfulness to obedience or because he is foolish enough to think that he can critically examine these demands, *reflecting* instead of *obeying*.

The Word of God is never a purely formal Ought that can only be filled with content by man's own decisions. The moral law (or the idea of the good) is not itself the commandment but at most the inner meaning [*Inbegriff*] of the commandments. And the categorical imperative signifies only the unconditioned nature of the Ought, not the actual content—which only the commandment can specify. And man's conscience can *embody* the totality of consciousness as it has been touched by the commandments, but once more it is not itself the commandment.

The commandment is the Word of God. It is absolutely concrete because God himself, the Revealer, is the *concretissimum*, the most concrete reality of all. God is a living and eternal person who wants something quite specific *of me*. This is because God's love always stands behind the command-character of the commandment. And it is the nature of love to confer, along with the command, the promise of love and salvation. "Apart from the gospel, I have not even heard the law as law, as a Word that binds me." In the commandment "I am summoned to be who I am: that is, one who no longer chooses but *is chosen*" (217).

But it is in this very light of God's love and election that I see myself for what I am: disobedient, indeed incapable of obedience, a traitor to God. Every commandment is founded on God's absolute love, and therefore it can only demand love in return. But "when and

where has even one of our decisions ever been so characterized as truly aligned to God” (221)?

This brings us to the great paradox of the Reformation: we have been elected and loved *supra lapsum* before we decided not to love. So, fundamentally, we only commit sins that have already been forgiven (222). But we take hold of this election in faith, which is not our work but purely the work of God in us. But God can accept us only when we abandon our own works (233). Considered from faith upward to the electing God, we are justified, but, downward to our own works, we are sinners. Neither term of the dilemma can be suppressed as long as we live on this earth. Nonetheless, the status of being *Justus* predominates over that of the *peccator*, just as there is a *prius* of grace over our temporal distortions of that grace.

(The supplementary essay “Justification and Sanctification”, written in the same year of 1927, gets no farther than this same paradox. Indeed, its main purpose is to fight against any attempt to dissolve the contradiction between grace and sin living inside the breast of every pilgriming Christian. Barth is particularly critical of those efforts that transpose the contradiction into the key of mere morality: these “solutions” are typical of Idealism and Catholicism and only “quantify” the problem by asserting that, as “grace increases”, “sin decreases” [293]. But for Barth the paradox of “both in their entirety and both simultaneously” [295] becomes bearable, not in terms of morality, but in terms of the overlapping eons in which all historical being takes part [292]. In the first eon, justification is decreed and thus is perfectly effected, while in the second our sanctification has only begun and thus need not be purely forensic [296, 301]. But real sanctification never occurs without our awareness that it is lacking: we must thirst for it and run to meet it at the first opportunity [305]. In other words, both sin and grace are in their own way eschatological concepts [309].)

The final article, “The First Commandment as Theological Axiom” (1933), however, does advance the argument. The concreteness of God’s commandment is no longer based solely on the urgent reality of his loving election. It is also based on the fact that God speaks to the believer in the precincts of the Church, as the God of the covenant and the Father of Jesus Christ. In other words, the

commandment “cannot be severed from its soteriological—or to speak even more concretely—from its christological ties” (303). This gives it its concreteness, which stands within and brings fulfillment to the course of history.

Barth’s ethic has always been, from start to finish, an outspoken “situation ethics”. In the first stage, however, it was an existential ethic of crisis that reduced absolutely everything to the divine. In the second stage, Barth tried to steer this ethic through this contradiction by stressing the absolute concreteness of God’s commandment: at this very moment God wants the concrete individual to render this specific act of obedience. But here too dialectics predominated: first in the Reformed radicalism of the *simulpeccator et Justus* that could only be resolved eschatologically; second, Barth continued to insist that the concreteness came solely from the Word and in no way from the specific historicity of the individual. Both these features of Barth’s ethic show that he had not yet reached the christological foundation that takes seriously the two natures of Christ, thereby giving history and temporal being their due.

But it is finally with the last essay of 1933 that we glimpse Barth moving toward this new principle, whose implications it will be the task of the *Church Dogmatics* to spell out. Meanwhile, Barth’s position on ethics remained similar to his views on the relation of philosophy and theology: “Christianity is not a system of ethics and has no special ethic of its own. Even as a Christian, one can only reflect on the same issues that every human being must ponder.”¹²

3. *The Church*. Barth’s most important statements about the nature of the Church occur in that transitional time between *The Epistle to the Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics*. During his years at Minister (1925-1930), Barth was in close contact with Catholicism. In those years he wrote three works in close proximity to each other, all of which were concerned to delineate his own concept of the Church over against that of Catholicism: “Church and Theology”, “The Concept of the Church” and “Roman Catholicism as a Question in Protestant Theology”.¹³ Relevant also are those sections on the Church in the *Prolegomena* and an article of 1931 called “The Distress of the Evangelical Church”.¹⁴

What is striking about all these pieces is that they come from a period when Barth had not yet found the ultimate basis for his theology. They stand or fall with the same premises as his Romans commentary: that is, those of dynamic actualism, which insists on the overwhelming concreteness of God's Word over against all other realities. Of course, they will be largely superseded by the foundation he will later develop in *Church Dogmatics*; but they determine his thought until then.

In *The Epistle to the Romans*, the Church can be nothing other than the culminating locus of dialectics: seen from God, she is the locus of his revelation, the empty vessel into which God pours his fullness, the "invisible Church of Jacob". Seen from the human perspective, however, the Church is the "visible Church of Esau", the locus of sinful pride where the divine is made human and the Event—which by definition can be no object—is objectified. "The Church is the great negation of revelation. . . . Atheism is the real essence of the Church."¹⁵

The guilt of the Church is especially immeasurable because she knows what she is doing; she is the realm of divine revelation. Yet, and for the very same reason, the Church is a necessity. Outside the Church there is no salvation, because in her we discover what we *all* are: sinners and darkness. "The Church is, as a totality and in all her individual members, the condition of each human being writ large: *homo Justus et peccator*."¹⁶ According to the *Prolegomena*, the Church not only thinks the self-contradiction but is it.¹⁷

Barth soon moved beyond such a catastrophic ecclesiology, especially under the influence of his dialogue with Catholics. But how? One solution suggested itself: he would accept all the essential marks of the Catholic Church but would rework them completely and radicalize them, using his method of theological actualism.

Thus, in "The Concept of the Church", he affirms the four marks or "notes" of the Church (*notae ecclesiae*). The Church is *one*, even as a visible entity; indeed her authority depends on this visible unity. She is *holy*, which is the basis of her "essential infallibility and durability" (281). She is *catholic* in the sense of being virtually universal and because of the "priority of the Body of Christ united with its Head over the individual members" (292). And she is

apostolic by virtue of the authority she exercises. Indeed Barth openly admitted that this authority is “documented in Matthew 16, and we have no fundamental reason for getting upset when the Petrine Church uses this text of ‘Thou are Peter’ as applying to Rome” (292-93).

As for the nature of this authority, of course it is a relative, delegated authority, as it is in Catholic teaching too (292). The Church can only be a “vicarious subject” (345). But even so, she is truly Church and thus is the strongest authority on earth, to which none other can be compared.¹⁸ On the other hand, the Church’s authority comes *from God*. And there is no better way of underlining this than to see the Church entirely as the medium and instrument of God’s action, which remains ever free, nonobjective and personal.

With this proviso we have of course simply returned to the old ideology of *The Epistle to the Romans*. The Church is only a “channel” (313); her “relative, temporal, formal” authority cannot in any way be set over against God’s claims. Thus, in the final analysis, the four notes of the Church, which Barth had just admitted are part of her, revert back to God alone insofar as God makes use of the medium of the Church in his sovereign freedom. In this radicalization, Barth thereby fails to specify what “actually” pertains to the Church (339): the mediation of the divine as “pure service” (343).

Actualism, with its constant, relentless reduction of all activity to God the *actus purus*, leaves no room for any other center of activity outside of God. In relation to God, there can only be passivity. So the Church is “holy insofar as she obeys, not insofar as she commands”. She is “infallible as she seeks for what has been told her, but what she says cannot lay claim to divine authority” (299). Once more everything collapses back into that unholy dualism of *Romans*: viewed from above, the Church completely coincides with God’s Word; but, viewed from below, all her attempts to give expression to this Word are radically fallible.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in these three essays we see Barth trying to get beyond this dialectic. We can see the camel’s nose peering under the tent when Barth, recklessly enough perhaps, speaks of how “the concepts of revelation, Church, faith, imply that, between God’s

eternal truth. . . and the religious opinions of the human subject, there is a *middle ground*, a *tertium quid*" (317). This radically alters Barth's objectivism. That is: no longer has he recognized only the priority of God's revelation, but he has also admitted, however surreptitiously, that there is an inherent ecclesial form to this revelation in the mind of the human subject.

But having made so crucial an admission, what could Barth do with it? How is the grace of God, if it is really to be described as pure event, to become grace to someone except as an individual and noumenal human subject? Is Barth not still being simply consistent with himself when he once more asserts: "The Reformation signifies the restoration of the authority *of God* over that of the Church; and this automatically implies the restoration of the freedom of conscience" (346)? When compared to the four notes of the Catholic Church, how can the Protestant Church not seem to be but dressed out in mere tinsel, possessing marks that merely hover about but do not really *pertain* to the Church's real identity? What else could Barth say but that the evangelical Church can only serve but not rule? can only search for her visible unity but never find it? can live only from God's promise but never its fulfillment? can move only between an impossible flight into visibility and an impossible flight into invisibility?

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Obviously, as long as the Christology of the Council of Chalcedon does not have the first and last word, it would be meaningless to talk of a Church with the four notes as Catholics understand them. Only from Christ will Barth learn that there is room for a genuine and *active* human nature alongside God. And indeed this human nature will be active precisely as a *human* nature even though it is grounded wholly on the act of revelation and will depend entirely on it.

Will not Barth's whole ecclesiology now have to be reconstructed from the ground up? Will what he had to say about the Church not have to be completely revised? Some might see the urgency of these questions but hold that there is a way out: the distinction between the *anhypostasis* and the *enhypostasis* of the human nature in Christ. When we speak of the Church, does this distinction not prove its utility? Is this not the actual model for a "body" whose head

is another, namely, God? Is the notion of *anhypostasis* not precisely what we need to uncouple Catholic authority, papacy, sacraments that work *ex opere operato* and every other form of Catholic works-righteousness and attempt to lay hold of God?

But to anticipate the answer, the *anhypostasis* remains the exclusive prerogative of the Redeemer, as Barth himself admits.²¹ This is so because Christ is precisely a divine subject and in no way a “schema” according to which we may conceive the relation of creature to God. For Barth, an ecclesiology or theological ethic based on using the *anhypostasis* as an ideal for redeemed man would erase the *distance* that divides the divine subject from all human subjects. But this only leads us back to that “drunken confusion” that we saw so characterized the theology, ecclesiology and ethics of *The Epistle to the Romans*.

Clearly Barth’s concept of the Church has been placed in a terrible bind. For, on the one side, he sets off Christ’s *anhypostasis* necessarily and definitively from every other form of union with God, even from “God’s gracious presence in the heart of the elect and called by virtue of their faith” as well as from “God’s gracious [ecclesiological] presence in Word and sacrament”.²² These two forms of union do not mean “that bread and wine are the same, that the believer is identical with God. The union of God and man in Jesus Christ, the God-man, however, means precisely this: that *this* man is identical with God. His humanity is only a predicate of his divinity.”²³

But on the other side it must also be said that “it corresponds to the *anhypostasis* of the human nature of Christ that the Church is absolutely forbidden in her very essence to want to become independent of Jesus Christ, to think and act other than as a sovereign reality in relation to him.”²⁴ But whoever takes seriously such a position (and Protestantism does, by rejecting the inherent *distance* of the Church to Christ) will soon fall into the trap of an ecclesiological pan-Christism. Such a doctrine of the Church forgets that the Church is not only the *Body* of Christ but also his *Bride*. That is, she is both in reality and in parable a “self-subsisting” relational *Other*. Of course this otherness is scarcely a “sovereign” freedom from Christ. On the contrary, analogous to the relation of creation to

the Creator but far transcending it, the Church's relational otherness to Christ is a freedom *of* dependence (this is why she is also the *Body* of Christ). But it really *is* a freedom, a freedom in which she truly and *officially* represents Christ.

If this aspect is missing, then so too is the aspect of distance. And a doctrine that compensates for this by stressing the sovereignty of Sacred Scripture over against the Church can never make up for this deficiency. So, from various sides, every impulse in Barth's thought is pressing him on to construct a new foundation for describing the relation between God and world. The concept of analogy has finally become simply unavoidable.

3. The Analogy of Faith

Barth did not suddenly replace dialectics with analogy. We cannot isolate any one particular text as *the* sign of this shift, for it happened gradually. Not even mentioned in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, the second volume (1938) merely notes it without having the opportunity to test it. But with the third volume (*The Doctrine of the Word of God*, 1940) and his contemporaneous essays (especially "Credo", 1935; and "Confessing God, Serving God", 1938), it starts to take on definitive form, so that the doctrine of analogy unfolds more and more clearly with each succeeding volume. Indeed so victorious does it become that by the time of the later volumes on creation, Incarnation and providence (1945, 1948 and 1950), it has become the central theme of his theology.

So one will look in vain for a fully developed version of this doctrine in the earliest stages of the *Church Dogmatics*. Our watchword must be "development". Of course, the first volume (1932) does energetically overcome the existential and anthropological starting point of the *Prolegomena* to offer a purely theological doctrine of the Word of God, that is, one firmly rooted in the Word of God itself. But the Christology remains in the background. Nonetheless, within this doctrine on the Word of God there does emerge in this first volume the concept of the analogy of faith, though cut off from even a trace of its connection with Christology.

The issue provoking this movement toward analogy is the possibility of man's predisposition [*Aneignung*] for faith. This potentiality does not rest on an a priori capacity innate in man for comprehending Being in general, by virtue of which he would be prepared to a certain extent for God's revelation. There can be no question of such an inborn predisposition that favors a decision for faith, for even this is given along with the gift of the Word and is part of its "loan".²⁵ That is, only by virtue of the free gift of grace does man discover a similarity to the Word that allows him to believe and obey it.

Thus, in contrast to the analogy of being, analogy of faith means two things: first, it is not an analogy that can be understood from the standpoint of an observer who surveys all before him and then synthesizes what he surveys. It is not Being as such that the creature has in common with God, despite their fundamental dissimilarity. Rather it is an *action* (inaccessible to all theory): it is human decision that is similar to God's action, despite their fundamental dissimilarity (1, 252).

Action, not being. Being is a general category, while action is a dimension that is so concrete no conceptuality can really comprehend it. And God is indeed pure act: pure acting and pure deciding. Through his action, creation itself comes to be actual-ized. And for this actualization only the concept of analogy suffices: "We have no choice but to resort to the language of analogy: we cannot speak of the resemblance being more than analogical. . . but to speak of less than a resemblance to God will not do either" (1, 252). This brings us to Barth's classical definition of analogy:

By the power of faith and its profession, the Word of God becomes a human thought and a human word, certainly in infinite dissimilarity and inadequacy, but not in total human *strangeness* with its model. The human copy [*Abbild*] is a *real* copy of its divine counterpart [*Vorbild*] [1, 254].

But secondly, analogy of faith also means, in contrast to the analogy of being, something else: the similarity of God to his creature is *one-directional*. It is fashioned from above, by the Word, which takes hold of the creature. For, though the similarity lies in action, this deed

proceeds solely from God. And insofar as it acts upon the creature, it does so by eluding it (1, 257).

Finally, the third volume of the *Church Dogmatics* says it outright: “The concept of analogy is in fact unavoidable” (3, 254). The relation between God and creature can in no way be one of identity. “Identity would either mean that God had ceased to be God or conversely that man had himself become God.” But the relation cannot be one utterly lacking in any resemblance either. “Such total dissimilarity would then mean that we could not in fact recognize God. For if we re-cognize God, this must mean that we see God using our prior views, concepts and words; thus we see God not as something totally Other. But in and with these human means of images, concept and words (the only ones we have), we truly do see God” (3, 253-54).

Thus the relation must be described as a *middle ground* lying somewhere *between* two extremes, and this we call analogy. This middle term cannot for its part be transposed to another level or reduced to a “partial identity” and a “partial dissimilarity” (3, 264f.). Though we must not fall into direct contradiction and say that the creature is dissimilar to God where it is similar, yet we must assert something only slightly different: that, in everything wherein it is similar to God, the creature is in fact *also* dissimilar. Analogy is an ultimate relational term: it cannot be explained by any more fundamental identity or nonidentity.

But the words that we use of God are not independent of the relationship *that God establishes*. Therefore, it is not something one already finds present in nature as part of its innate laws but is a relation founded on revelation. The truth contained in our concepts is—corresponding to their objects—a created, relative, finite truth. To pertain to God, *God* must produce from within himself the relation between temporal truths and his divinity. He chooses our truth to express his truth. But this action by God—and this is important—is no arbitrary act as the Nominalists would have it. Rather his act of appropriating our truths is founded in the fact that our truth already belongs to God, just as our being belongs more to him than to us, since we are entirely his creations, the product of his decision to create:

God's truth is not our truth, but our truth is God's truth. That is the unity of truth in him, who *is* Truth. What we do in seeking to know his creation through images, concepts and words finds its real truth in him as Creator. Whatever truth we express has first been expressed in him. God's truth is original, primary, self-sustaining and actual; ours is a subsequent, secondary, derived, abstract and unreal truth [*uneigentlich*: literally, "nonactual"].

In God there is no deception, but from us there is always error, for we are not only creatures but ones who have fallen away in sin from him! And yet in our error we are creatures who live from his limpid truth. We have no claim on him with our images, concepts and words, no claim that he must be their object. But God can lay claim to our images, concepts and words; he can claim to be *their* first, last and true object. In doing this, God is not suspending his own truth or setting up a theory of two truths. But he is in fact confirming *himself in them*. For just as certainly as our images, concepts and words refer to his creation (indeed are part of that creation), God the Creator *knows himself* in them all. They proclaim him, tell us what he is like, as does the whole of creation itself.

And so God as Creator, when he reveals himself, lays claim to us and thereby also to them. But this is no earthquake, no tumultuous miracle, but simply an act of restitution. . . . Our words are not our property but his. In disposing of them as his property once more, he is in fact now putting them at our disposal. . . . We misuse our words (or apply them as pale simulacra to their actual referent) if we restrict them to the standards of the mere creature. But if we use them of God, we lead them back once more to their original object [3, 258-59].

Now this apparently extremely Platonic talk about the authenticity of all truth in God's eternal self-consciousness is actually for Barth purely theological talk. Why? Because the relationship of analogy is established from above, by revelation's act of expropriation. In fact, this theological talk cannot help but refer back to the *relationship of creation* in order to demonstrate the legitimacy of this appropriation. But this reference to creation does not bring God's revelation into any kind of heteronomous dependency. For God rules over the being and truth of his creatures by virtue of the very fact that he created them. Barth even went so far as to use Scholastic terminology and to speak of the analogy of attribution (with God as the *analogatum princeps* and the creature as the end term; see 3, 268). But, if he did so, we must immediately add that this analogy has its ultimate foundation, ontically as well as epistemologically, in the act of grace that comes to us in Jesus Christ (2, 271). More on this later.

Barth, however, did not abandon the Protestant doctrine on justification, and so he insisted on speaking in this context of an *extrinsic* analogy of attribution (3, 270). Why extrinsic? Because the relationship that grace establishes between God's Word and the

creature is not intrinsic or inherent (*proprie*). The trouble is that this insistence leads to contortion and contradiction. For if it is in fact true that the “authentic” truth of the creature resides in God, then it is indeed *God’s* truth, created and established by God. This being so, this truth must be, not extrinsic, but intrinsic. In other words, it is the very expression of the creature’s essence that it be God’s creature.

Despite this insistence on extrinsic justification, in the same volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth comes to another important juncture in his development of the concept of analogy: he finally admits that creation vis-à-vis God is thoroughly good and positive *in itself*, that is, in its very being as not-God. For the first time Barth has to take seriously the *concept of the creature*. No longer need creatureliness be done away with, as it was in 1019, to make room for revelation and God’s own life.²⁶ No longer does Barth insist that the *event* of creation is alone blameless, which alone can make God and man “one” (this was the position of *The Epistle to the Romans* and corresponded to Eastern sophiology). Now Barth can say that *creation itself* is blameless in its freedom, its self-awareness, its relatedness to God.

Sin may indeed enter the picture; but it does so by setting up its workshop *in* this relation, in this freedom and selfhood, warping them into demonic rebellion. How could it be otherwise since freedom means the potential for trying “to be like God”? Sin *presupposes* freedom and selfhood, but it is not to be *equated* with them. This clearly implies that the sinful creature does not plunge into *nothingness* or chaos, becoming a mere shadow of a shadow, as would be the case if creatureliness coincided with sin.

In other words, the existence of a reality distinct from God cannot be a source of embarrassment solely because of its distinctness from God. “There can be a real world that is not threatened or extinguished by God’s absoluteness. On the contrary, the world has been established by virtue of his absoluteness. Far from being self-contradictory with the concept of God or shameful to it, the world is his confirmation, set up to give glory to his name” (3, 347-48). This mention of the concept of God is crucial, because it highlights that God does not possess his absoluteness primarily in his relation with the world but first and actually in himself. This absoluteness and

freedom, therefore, cannot be at all threatened by the existence of a world. God does not need to guard his uniqueness like a jealous hoarder. "He can leave room and time for the existence of another. And he can exercise his will over this other in such a way that the other is not absorbed or destroyed but accompanied, borne and protected" (3, 461).

"Creator and creature both exist, and exist together; but this does not imply there is any parity between them but rather a strictest superordination and subordination. Even so, they do coexist [*aber doch ein Zusammensein*]"²⁷ Yet this coexistence has nothing to do with any sort of pantheism (3, 351):

In the Credo, when we profess that God is the Creator, we admit not only God's transcendence but also the *immanence* of this so utterly transcending God. As counterpart to the world, God is *present* to this world he has created, not only *far* but also *near*, not only free in his relations to it but also *closely tied* to his creation. He sustains the creature in its relative self-subsistence and uniqueness, ruling it without suspending the freedom of the human will, either partially or totally.²⁸

If we have correctly understood God's true immanence as well as his true transcendence, then we will be tempted neither by a feeling that God is alienated from and at total enmity with the world nor by an outlook that deifies the world (3, 248). God makes himself visible *in* the world as the Creator who transcends the world, and by the same token he reveals his nearness to man by the very fact of his transcendence.²⁹

So Barth increasingly came to sing the praises of the goodness of creatureliness as such. This reached its great culminating moment when in his treatment of divine providence Barth could finally say the following:

God sustains his creature in a reality different from his own: relative and dependent. But in its relativity and dependency, creation is autonomous vis-à-vis God, truly there on its own, precisely because it owes its being-there to God alone. . . . Because it has not emanated directly from God's own essence but was freely *created* by God, the creature cannot dissolve back into God or abandon its own relational autonomy. When we confess with St. Paul that God will someday become all in all (1 Cor 15:28), we do not profess that eventually there will be nothing but God, that the "all" will no longer be. We simply mean that God will have finally revealed the end of the journey and creation will have reached its goal without ever ceasing to be different from God. In whatever form it takes, pantheism does violence and injustice not only to God but to creation too. . . .

The lovely lines in the Bible about Wisdom being daily enraptured and “playing” before God, dancing on the earth’s orb and taking delight in the family of man, certainly contain, for all their mythological language, an important insight. For the image is one of *playing*, a game in which two must play, with the Creator initiating and the creature responding. This is the real secret of Wisdom’s loveliness, her revelation of the free mystery of how God sustains the world. And so the human race can go about its work in the fields (Ps 104:23), creating music, poetry and philosophy, but also eating, drinking, rejoicing—and also, all too often, mourning. We can love and also hate a little, be young and grow old, all the while knowing that these are truly *our* experiences and activities, outpourings of the whole person and not some truncated being. We can live life with head held high, with a free heart and a clear conscience, proclaiming to God, “Lord, how good are your works!” (Ps 104:24). Only false gods degrade man. The true God allows man to be what he has made him [7, 98-99].

However much, therefore, creation may be dependent ontically and noetically on God’s revelation in Christ, it is just as true that we can glimpse *in* this revelation a *presupposition* lying at its foundations that makes revelation possible in the first place: “God’s revelation presupposes that there exists a world distinct from him in which he can reveal himself and that there is a someone to whom he can disclose himself. . . . The fact of revelation already tells us that God and man exist together; it is the witness of the reality of God’s creation. . . . The fact of revelation already says that there is a human person to whom God has turned in his revelation, affirming his existence and taking seriously his fate, addressed as God’s real partner and thus honored in his autonomy.”³⁰

The reality of the creature culminates in its being a *subject*, self-conscious and free, though only by virtue of grace and in strictest subordination to God. “God has bestowed his highest goodness on the creature by making its obedience and blessedness not simply the natural, automatic result of merely existing, the compulsory outcome of its very identity.” Rather, we see the goodness promised to the creature most clearly shine through in the fact that God’s grace and goodness “are effective precisely in the freedom of his creature” (3, 671, 673). Far from being passive, the interplay between God and man is most fundamentally an *active* event on both sides (3, 575).

But if this is so, we cannot avoid the consequence that man *takes part* in revelation as partner and subject, that revelation now touches him *inclusively* and internally. Revelation “draws in” (2, 257), “takes

in" (2, 259) the human subject. Yes, it is a new creation, a new "predicate" has been ascribed to man. But freedom too is necessary to accept this revelation, and so it too must be given to the creature (2, 280f.). Faith is indeed a grace that naturally "intersects" at no point of tangency on the human circle, a grace to which we therefore can make no claim. But it is no less for all that "our own decision that, as an act of our conscience, understanding and will, is required of us".³¹ Not only is there God's eternal fidelity, there is also man's faith; not only are there God's command and promise, there are man's trust and obedience (3, 571). And so, despite the need to respect the notion of distance (indeed, in order to respect it), we will have to speak of a "secondary subject"³² in the event of grace.

And so there really is such a thing as mutuality, though of course it is one that rests entirely on the prior and absolute one-sidedness of God's decision to create and sanctify. The creature is so dependent on God that it receives the ability not only to receive but also to respond. Or, to put it more exactly, the creature can respond because it has received the ability to do so. And it responds in such a way that its "autonomous" response remains the highest instance of its receptivity. And that implies theological analogy.

Chapter 4

THE CENTRALITY OF ANALOGY

1. The Christological Foundation

As Barth continued to publish succeeding volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, he gradually and without fanfare, but no less inexorably, replaced the central notion of “the Word of God” with that of “Jesus Christ, God and man”. What emerges as this great Summa unfolds is the insight that “God’s Word” is not the most comprehensive term for the essence and content of revelation. Word is in fact but *one* designation for the Son, and it is the Son himself in whom God has decided to unite everything in heaven and on earth.

But because the Son himself becomes man in the midst of his creatures, creation already has an essential connection to him, just as he has to creation. No longer does Barth have to maneuver around extra-Calvinist doctrine to prove that the Redeemer is also Lord over this (questionable, contradictory) creation. The perspective has been turned inside out: because Christ the Redeemer became man in time, creation in its entirety is something good from the outset. It is already justified. And, from the very onset of God’s decision to create, it is appropriate for God to choose man for his partner.

As we have seen in the last chapter, the concept of analogy has already led Barth to acknowledge a compatibility between God and creature. But now Barth establishes this insight on its ultimate foundation: the miracle of the Incarnation. And what better foundation could there be than this most improbable of all miracles! Because Christ is the measure of all things, no contradiction between God and the world can break in upon the depths of this compatibility. The first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* was still speaking of the “contrast”, the “contradiction”, between the Word of God and its configuration in the Bible, between proclamation and theology.¹ But this thought is now completely jejune, overtaken along with all theological methodologies built atop such contrasts. Now the

thought of the Incarnation takes over and determines all questions of method. At most, we can speak of a “presentation” of contradiction in the suffering Son of Man when he struggled with the Father on the Mount of Olives. But Barth has never in the least understood this presentation in any other way but as the highest revelation of the obedience of the Son, in which all contradictions are done away with. Were it otherwise, then Christ would no longer be the measure of all things, but Christ would be measured against the more overarching standard of God’s conflict with the sinner.

The first inklings of this christological foundation emerge in the second volume of the Prolegomena to the *Church Dogmatics*, where Barth sketches a preliminary Christology (2,134-221), which will be developed systematically from the third volume on.²

Volume 2 begins with a ringing affirmation that the teachings of the Council of Chalcedon still hold true and are binding, which implies the same for the concept of nature, *physis*. Of course, the concept cannot dissolve the lasting mystery of revelation and Incarnation. But, based on this mystery, it can depict it. Indeed the ancient writers had it right when they linked ethical and physical questions together and saw in Christ the whole of what man is, the entirety of human nature.

We should note here that nature in this context has nothing to do with how “modern Protestant thought conceives of nature: as the counterconcept to spirit”. This horror before the natural that is so typical of the spiritualistic moralism of our times entails “a strange kind of impoverishment and really hides within itself a horror of God’s revelation” or “of his divine nature”: “By refusing to recognize the validity of the ‘natural’ in revelation, one also refuses to recognize the category of being in revelation, thereby robbing it of its realism” (2,141-43).

Christ’s human nature is only real in the act of his being God. “The presupposition of his work is nothing but his potentiality for becoming flesh, human, a potentiality that every human being has” (2, 163). But Christ’s human nature is in every sense an authentic human nature, just as it has become since Adam’s fall (2, 165-69). But Christ bore this nature without sin (2, 170), learning obedience in the crucible of temptation. It is true that revelation never tries to spell out

what it means by this “learning” (Heb 5:7f.), “and it would be an effrontery to try to guess what it entails” (2,173).

The Church was right to condemn monothelitism, the doctrine that Christ has but one will, divine. If Christ is truly man, then it is clear “that we cannot deny that Christ had a will distinct from God’s, even though it was not autonomous from God” (2, 173). “In the battle against monothelitism, the early Church knew what she was doing when she distinguished and juxtaposed the divine and human will in the person of Jesus. . . . The freedom with which Jesus obeyed was genuine obedience. This was how he fulfilled the commandment; as Chalcedon would say, ‘without separation and without mixture’ ” (4, 673-74).

The passage in John that says “the Word became flesh” is ultimately two statements fused into one: it refers at the same time both to Being (a particular nature) and to Event (a part of history) (2, 174-87). For Calvin, the event—that is, the freedom of revelation—is always to be found in Being, whereas for Luther, Being is primarily manifested in history “the unity effected once and for all” (2,180). In Christology the concept of nature achieves an equality with the concept of actuality.

This nature of Christ is the authentic *truth* of human nature in God’s eyes. It grounds and justifies all human nature. “By accepting us for what we are, God sustains us” (5, 438). “A human being is human precisely because, as such, he has for his head the man Jesus. Because he shares in Christ’s own struggle and victory, he is as protected as he can be without being Christ himself” (6, 175). It is the sinless nature of Jesus Christ that guarantees human nature an unbroken continuity, over and above the discontinuity caused by sin. On its account, the sinner does not fall into the abyss (6, 338).

Even at the onset of creation, nature was given a promise: in Christ human nature has been so blessed that it can never irrevocably drown (5, 211). And whether man in his perversity chooses to realize it or not, whether or not he can realize it, the fact is that what he is and what he does in accord with his nature points toward redemption and lives for it (5, 214). However much *sin* may be a total contradiction of grace, *nature* cannot possibly be such because it is founded on Christ.

Barth has taken an immense step forward here, one fraught with consequences for his whole system. Indeed, he says openly:

Human relationships are all affected by sin, but they are *not altered* [Barth's emphasis] in their basic structure. And the inner essence of these relations is the created nature of man. Thus it is quite correct to say that the contrasts of sin, reconciliation and redemption do not affect [*berühren*] human *being* [6, 46].

Because of Christ we must talk openly and unashamedly about the “necessary and *constant* definition” of the human essence (6, 84). And it is the task of anthropology to shed light on this elusive continuum (6, 246).

In the course of developing this anthropology, Barth saw that he had drifted away from the usual Protestant doctrine on man: “And so we have not followed the usual practice in theology of first denigrating human nature as much as possible in order then to make God’s grace working in man all the more effective.” He was well aware that this inevitably entailed a rapprochement with Catholicism and humanism, with their respective natural theologies. But he would not let this deter him from his chosen path:

It is not by *nature* that man is hostile and opposed to God. He is of course in fact so opposed, but only by acts of rejection, by an abuse of nature. But all man’s perversity cannot make wrong what God has wrought as good by nature. . . . Sin indeed wreaks inconceivable havoc, but precisely because human nature is so good. . . . But sin never becomes, as it were, a second nature for which man need not be held accountable. Man has not become a stranger to God in his sin. His position vis-à-vis God remains what it was when God created him. . . . To dispute this would be to deny the continuity of the human subject as a creature, sinner and redeemed sinner [6, 330-31].

Even when he perversely rebels against God, man still possesses an indestructible *voluntas et natura* by virtue of which “he remains bound to live together, willingly, with his fellow human beings in the open freedom of his heart. His very nature blocks off any possibility of choosing otherwise” (6, 328). Moreover, we cannot overlook the fact that “many people who are evil and sinful, even in a Christian sense, are still capable of humanity, of dedicating themselves to others in a freedom of heart that could put many Christians to shame” (6, 336).

Barth thus moves beyond the fashionable dichotomy, the strict either / or, of *eros* and *agape*. *Tertium datur* (6, 337): there is a third element, humaneness:³

Humanitarianism and Christian love are really two different versions of love. Indeed, what good would it be for Christians to have all knowledge of God's forgiveness,. . . what benefit would they get from the holiness and justification of their new-found life or from their praise of God in worship or their zeal in his service if they lacked this basic humanity [6,339]? . . . [*Agape* is] the love that has within it [the potential for] humanitarianism [6, 340].

So too are *eros* and humanitarianism two different versions of the same love. A culture based on *eros*, such as that of classical Greece, retains an indestructible dimension of *humanitas*. Indeed, so pure is the humanism of Greece that we can see in classical Hellenism the "enlivening and comforting" vision of what the essence and *sine qua non* of the human is really like: the desire to be together in one community with one's fellow human beings. Let us listen to this important warning from Barth:

A certain agitation among theologians in the past few decades against Greek culture has not been a good thing. With their emphasis on *eros*, the Greeks understood that man is a free, open-hearted, willing, spontaneous, cheerful, bright and social being. . . . No other nation of antiquity, not even the chosen people of Israel, was granted the privilege of displaying so fully what humanity as an unbroken continuum means. . . . Much of the theology of the New Covenant is painted, not in Israelite, but in what are doubtless Greek shades of color, redeemed in the light of true love but fundamentally undisturbed. . . . The *agape* of the Christian would not be what it claims to be if it remained hidden to the transparency of Greek *eros*; when a person schooled in Hellenic culture encounters the Christian, he should feel a sense of solidarity to the very roots of his erotic being [6, 340-43].

This means that humanity is good in itself. Though it has been thoroughly abused by sin, it has not been destroyed. And grace confirms that goodness, even if only as a future possibility. This in sum is Barth's view of human nature. It is only logical if now the term "natural law" begins to occur; and this time no other perspective interferes, enabling us to relativize it (6, 581).

All these statements, Catholic in the fullest sense of that word, are possible only because Barth, strictly following Scripture, saw in Jesus Christ the "real ground of creation" (6, 580). Text after text in the Bible speaks of Christ as the Alpha and the Omega, the first-

born, the head of all principalities and powers, through whom and for whom all things were made. Because of these texts, it is exegetically impossible to understand an eternal divine Son or Logos in the abstract but only in his unity with the human being Jesus. Neither Paul nor John in his prologue wished to say anything but this.

Jesus Christ was always already there before and in the foundation of the world. His eternal presence guarantees that the world is good and that its nature cannot be destroyed: "Just as he is the guarantee of the Creator's fidelity, so too is he the guarantee of the continuity of his creation, the guarantee of its being maintained and preserved" (6, 627). There is no Origenist or Apollinarianist bias in the following remarks:

What does the "Son" and "Word" of God mean? It must refer to the one who, in accord with God's will and counsel, humbled himself from all eternity (that is, before the creation of all things). He gave up the outward trappings and use of his divinity, choosing instead to become flesh, the Son of Man, to bear for us in his person the curse of sin, even unto the Cross. . . . In view of his Son, who was to become man and bear the sin of the world, God loved the human race and with it his whole creation even before he created them. . . . He created the world *because* he loved it in his own Son, who stood before him as an outcast and a dead man, all on account of our sins [5, 53-54].

Despite this advance in Barth's thinking, however, the real difficulty of this conception emerges at precisely this juncture of the argument. In Barth's perspective, Christ as both God and man is the true prototype upon whom and in view of whom the world was created. In him, "human nature in its original and prototypical form is not hidden from us but made visible" (6, 60). But Christ is not simply man, he is God. And so the idea of what it means to be human as such cannot be derived or deduced from the Incarnation of Christ but can only be *presupposed* in it. Because God has become one of us, there must already be the possibility for humanity at the start, not just theoretically but in a true sense, to be capable of God, a capability that does not adversely affect Christ's prototypicality:

A being to which humanity were alien would be a being of a different nature from the human being Jesus. If we defined man as such a being, we would have to conclude either that the man Jesus was the only true human being as God has created him or that Jesus was really not a human being after all but a being of a completely different order. If there is a similarity between him and us despite all the dissimilarities, then

there must be something in us that at a minimum corresponds to his being- / or-others: even our human mode of being is at its roots a free being *with* others [6, 330].

This brings us up against the central problem in Barth's theology in its most recent form: the concept of *presupposition*. In Barth's theology, when God establishes the world in his actual and original act of positing [*Setzung*], he must presuppose something else [*voraus-setzt*] in that very act. The following passage illustrates this difficulty particularly well:

Where the saving work of the human person Jesus on behalf of other humans becomes possible and real, there is where we must look for some sort of intermediate order between him and this other order of being. This order as such cannot be based on the commonality between them; it must already be *presumed* as the possibility and realization of that commonality. We must inquire after such a basic form of humanness in other persons and in mankind as a whole, which can be the presupposition that makes it possible for the man Christ to be a man-for-others [6, 226].

The greater transcendent mystery of man's ultimate destiny presupposes "another mystery, one that is to some extent an immanent one, that is, one that is inherent to his creaturely mode of existence" (6, 319). On the one hand, in Jesus Christ, who is Truth, we see "the truth of the human nature that God created, the truth of our being in time" (6, 625). On the other hand, we cannot equate our truth with his. Rather we come to realize what *our* truth really is, how sharply different it is from his. In him and through him we can distinguish what truly belongs to our truth (for example, death as the determination of our finitude) and what did not originally belong to our truth (namely, sin and whatever in death is not part of nature but is a punishment for that sin; 6, 765). In the light of Christ, we come to see that "certain conditions of our nature only belong to it *de facto* and not necessarily" (6, 766).

The methodological problem of introducing this presupposition now becomes clear: to understand what is being presupposed we must view it in "the light" (6, 54) of God's positing act; on the other hand, however, we must be on our guard against identifying the two. "Christology cannot be anthropology" (6, 82). In other words, "we cannot go from a direct knowledge of the essence of man in general to the essence of the nature of the human being Jesus." But it is

possible on the basis of Christology to posit certain “minimal requirements that would have to be present, no matter what the circumstances, in any theologically useful concept of man” (6, 82). These would serve as both a negative and a positive norm (6, 270-90, for a discussion of *norma negativa*; 6, 290-344, for a discussion of *norma positiva*), because “when we pursue our inquiries from that illuminating region, we can always glimpse what the essence of man is” (6, 54).

When Barth asserts that “the decision about who and what man really is must be determined in the light of Christ” (6, 58), he is *not* saying that Christ is the only true human being. Or when he says that “the ontological determination of man is grounded in the fact that in the midst of all other human beings there is but one who is Jesus” (6, 158), this does not mean that Barth thinks that “determination” and “grounding” are interchangeable terms.

There are two alternatives here, both of which are impossible and must be rejected. On the one side, we cannot deduce the nature of humanity from the humanity of Christ or, more generally, the natural order from the order of salvation. On the other side, we cannot completely sever the two orders, as if we could define the ultimate essence and meaning of nature without considering the Incarnation. Between this Hobson’s choice, Barth has proposed a solution: a *theological* doctrine of creation and anthropology.

This program does not so much assert the impossibility of these alternatives a priori as it is saying that the natural order has its own proper, though relative, autonomy within the order of grace. These two orders must be separately thematized and distinguished from each other so that later they can be correlated. Indeed, they will be seen in their essential correlation only through this separate thematization.

So the relationship of human nature to God is in no way identical with the relation of Jesus to the Father. But ultimately the former cannot be explained without the latter (6, 83f.). Human history is not itself the same as “primal history” or the history of the Incarnation, but it is founded in these (6, 192-93). The unifying concept of “presupposition” contains a duality of orders within itself; and it is this very duality that makes it first possible for this concept to be unifying.

2. Creation and Covenant

This duality can be nicely expressed in the pregnant formula: creation (that is, the order of nature) is the external ground of the Covenant (5, 103-258); and the Covenant (that is, the order of the Incarnation and redemption) is the internal ground of creation (5, 258-377). Here again we see how the two orders, while clearly interrelated, are still made distinct and clearly marked off from each other, as we see in this assemblage of passages:

Revelation is not creation or a continuation of creation by other means. On the contrary, it is an inconceivably new work of God, far exceeding creation [1, 431].

Grace is really an entirely new way in which God has turned to the world. Through grace, God establishes an order that was not there before, one to which man has no claim: no claim to its power or benefits. Man has not even the power to accept it. All he can do is merely realize and recognize that it is in fact unique [3, 80].

How could grace encounter man if it simply coincided with nature, if nature as such were grace? Grace is in fact *mystery*. It is the meaning of nature *hidden* from us. When grace is revealed, nature does not cease to be. How could it, since God does not cease to be its Creator? But now there is something more than nature within nature. Now nature itself becomes the showplace of grace. Now we see grace in all its mastery and freedom over nature [3, 572].

Through this new reality, creation acquires a new depth of perspective: everything is inserted into this new order, but this new order everywhere suffuses the realm of nature as well.

It is not part of the essence and concept of creation that it *must* have this perspective. But in the work of reconciliation and revelation, it becomes evident that it *does* in fact have this perspective. God does not change into someone else, as it were, as if God did something in addition to his first act [of creation]. . . . He has responded to the Fall not only with an act of restoration (*restitutio ad integrum*) but with a revelation of a perfection that was already hidden in the original integrity of creation as such. . . . Looking back with the benefit of hindsight, we can now legitimately ask: What would that first act of creation be without the second act of reconciliation [3, 573 -74]?

What concerns us in this text is the insight that what creation does in fact happen to have is not what it *must* have. Nature and grace belong to that complex of concepts that dogmatics must separate (3, 356). When we speak of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we are not referring to the participation in God's Spirit that constitutes man as

spirit. “We have no choice but to speak about another, general, prior presence of the Holy Spirit in creation, one that is presupposed by revelation and appropriate to the creaturely aspect of human existence” (1, 495).⁴ Even the special union of grace confirms the distinction and does not abolish it (1, 415):

Even the Incarnation ratifies the creature as a distinct reality from God. The very event of the Incarnation indicates that, while making God and the creature one, it also reveals that God and the creature are in themselves two and distinct. Even the creature has its own reality in relation to God [3, 579].

Thus, between nature and grace is an “analogous” relation, which however is not “continuity”,⁵ although the *de facto* unity of the supernatural goal allows us to say that “there is something in the analogy that presses on toward continuity”.⁶

Grace is a *special* work that does not simply coincide with the work of creation. Nor can it be regarded as the continuation and crowning achievement of creation (although it is that! For how otherwise is God the Creator in fact to carry on and conclude his work, making it living and effective?). Grace is in fact that moment when God outdoes even himself [3, 569-70].

Of course, this work is free, unwarranted, a bestowal that is rooted in grace and not at all in nature and yet really happens *to* nature (2, 41):

What the Holy Spirit brings forth proceeds entirely from another being presupposed as already existing. . . . Birth from the Spirit is precisely a *new* birth, a rebirth. That is, the person reborn to God in the Spirit is already there when this happens to him [1, 509]. . . . From man’s point of view, it comes from outside [1, 179]. . . . But it presupposes creation as God’s existential foundation for the human person so that it might renew and perfect this human existence [3, 699].

Revelation, then, is something that is “really new” (1, 433), a “special work” (3, 569), “more than nature” (3, 572), “more than creation, more than the sustaining and governing of that creation” (3, 747). It does not just draw out prior potential but exceeds all expectation (3, 307). The created world, even as created, is the domain of the Logos; but the fact that the Logos became flesh goes far beyond this (3, 357):

The panorama of creation is not just the story of the genesis of the world and of man. It is also—and by virtue of being the story of our origins—the promise of revelation and reconciliation; it is a sign that the world has been declared “good”, that is, has become the showplace for revelation. Thus the world *already* clearly indicates in all its aspects that God’s revelation will be something unique in this world, that it will come as free grace and that that grace will be called Jesus Christ [3, 131].

In fact, when it comes to distinguishing the order of creation from that of revelation, one will have to go far indeed, so far that one can say with Barth:

According to the biblical view, the Covenant and its history are in no way the purpose of creation as such. Rather, the Covenant is the content of the divine work of reconciliation, which is something distinct from creation. . . . [But we can also say that] creation *points toward* this other work. This other work *begins* in and with the work of creation. . . . But this does not permit us to conclude that the work of creation is the cause of this other work, or that the other work is the purpose of creation [5, 50].

In other words, both works reflect each other in their respective orders and act as “countertypes” (6, 77) to each other. But, despite this relationship whereby grace supports and perfects nature, we would do well to maintain the distinction between them, even where we make the second order the prototype of the first (5, 82).

One example will serve among many possible ones: the account of creation indicates that plants are to be man’s food, while meat is permitted and commanded as the “sacrificial meal” in the time of the covenant of grace. But this new statute, which in its teleology points to Christ, does not suspend the order of nature: “It presupposes an original order that *highlights* this divine disposition as something extraordinary. It is a rule that certainly breaks through this disposition, but it is also confirmed by it” (5, 237).

Furthermore, the order that is pre-supposed is oriented toward the succeeding order, and so all its movements are continually aligned to the subsequent order: “The history of the covenant of grace follows upon creation but not *from* it.” Coming first, as it does, creation serves as a “model or a matrix for the second order and thus in its basic contours already manifests the form of the second” (5, 46). “Creation gives rise to history” (5, 63), as Cocceius and his disciples saw so well. The concept of history is already immanent in creation:

Creation is no timeless truth, although time begins with it, and time and creation are coterminous. . . . According to the Bible, there are no timeless truths. All truths are specific actions of God in which he discloses himself. True, these deeds are in and of themselves eternal and so encompass the whole of time, but at the same time they also have a concrete, temporal character [5, 64]. . . . That is why the definitive commentary on the biblical accounts of creation is the rest of the Old Testament [5, 69].

What these accounts tell us is that a space has been erected for the playing out of history, and thus creation has its scope in this history. Creation is already an event produced by the Word of God saying “Let there be. . .!” The blessing of God has already gone forth to the creature. “New as it is and new as it will strike its hearers, revelation cannot be a complete novelty” (5, 132). It is the same Word but in a new form and with a new intensity.

The nature of creation is its orientation to grace. “Creatureliness means simply: to be a promise of, a longing for, what God in his grace has in store for man” (5, 261). Hence, there are places in the work of creation where the already implicit history of the Covenant springs into full view (5, 212), such as the Sabbath or the second account of creation. This is a particularly relevant example, because here creation and history intersect. They form two perspectives that are not merely juxtaposed, with the danger of leading to contradiction, but are so interrelated that the story of salvation bathes in the light of the account of creation (7, 46). Thereby all forms of dualism are excluded (7, 291).

This interrelationship shows that formally all of creation is one vast symbol for grace. In this way Karl Barth gives an unexpected and previously unsuspected (though entirely logical) justification for Alexandrian theology, which habitually thought in such comprehensive and symbolic terms.⁷ But this is an authentic symbolism, arising from within the realities of Scripture. By no means can we maintain that such symbolism is an adventitious import imposed on the Bible from without. *Everything* in the Bible, and above all its great moments of articulation, are images and signs and expressions for the great salvific events that take place between God and the human race. Creation is itself “already a unique sign of the Covenant, a true sacrament” (5, 262-63). It is a sign and testament for the event that is to follow (5, 264).

So the covenant relationship of God and man is most clearly illustrated in the intraworldly relations of heaven and earth. And the event-character of the Word and of the coming judgment is prefigured in the event of separating chaos from the world of forms, which establishes the foundations for creation. And above all, God has prepared the human race for communion with him; in fact he makes it possible in the first place, in the sign of man and woman (5, 213, 345f.). And so too with the individual elements: light, water, air; also the rhythm between day and night. In the lights of creation we glimpse something of the reality of that Light that God himself is and that shines upon the world in Christ (5,133).

In looking at the things of the world and at the account of their creation, we find the real meaning of any authentic theological view of the world. "We should not be too hasty in concluding that this is all really only a mere metaphor", for example, between God's fashioning of the constellations and his work in the Old Covenant. Because, for the Old Testament, the act of recognizing God's work always entails a rootedness in things and in Being (5, 183).

The same applies to the world of animals: it too is a mirror wherein historical man sees something decisive about the meaning of his existence (5, 199). "For once, the strictest Platonism can become a virtually unavoidable and, at least in this context, a quite adequate means of expressing this insight" (5, 226). This is "no allegory" (5, 365) but a true and necessary theological interpretation of what it means to be a creature.

Thus we see in all this that the concept of nature is unavoidable in theology, especially as a *formal* term for specifying the "pre-" when we speak of "presupposition". Nature is "sign and preparation, the outfitting and building of a temple whose blueprint and construction are entirely determined by its purpose for giving worship to God, which purpose it is meant to serve" (5, 107). Our being created as earthly creatures is "the promise, the warranty, indeed the presupposition, for our citizenship in heaven" (5, 228). Adam is the "first-born and archetype" of the Second Adam, the archetype of grace. "So Adam was, together with Eve, already the ancestor of the one to be born as the Last of all, the earthly type of the heavenly

man, the sinner, the ancestor of the one who would justify him” (5, 229).

But, in these formal dimensions in the concept of nature, there is also a *material* element. The content of creation is included as well: the whole of creation is as such polarized toward only one end of the magnet: toward grace. Creation cannot stand indifferent to grace but is positively oriented to it, because it is a parable whose final meaning is unlocked when it receives the truth of God’s gracious revelation (5, 331).

3. God’s Partner

When God created the world, he outfitted man for grace by making him capable of becoming “God’s partner”, or, strictly speaking, “covenant-capable” (5, 206f., 331, and elsewhere; 6, 267). But man only becomes capable of entering into a covenant relationship when he already knows from his own experience what it means to be responsible and to enter into an I-Thou relationship.

The analogy between God and man is simply the mutual existence in an I-Thou relation. In the first place, this mutuality is constitutive for God [in the eternal mutuality of the three Persons]. Secondly, this relationship is also constitutive for the human being [primarily in the mutuality of man and woman]. To dismiss this relationality is to deprive God of what makes God God and the human being of what makes him human [5, 207].⁸

In both cases, we have distance for the sake of nearness, autonomy for the sake of exchange and love, irreducible otherness for the sake of genuine union. This polarity of two human beings, primarily in the sexual relationship and secondarily in every form of human communication, is the authentic, basic and indestructible *imago Dei* in creation (5, 216-33; 260-61). Everything that the human being is—as subject, as body and soul, as temporal and finite—he is in function of this polarity of mutuality.

But before we turn to a more exact depiction of human nature in all its detail, we must specify more exactly our point of departure: theology. Because the issue is human nature in a theological perspective, our view of this nature will be drawn strictly from revelation, that is, from the person of Jesus Christ. Barth’s inquiry

centers on what man is by nature in the light of revelation; this is a light that not only shines from without but (as the real ground of creation!) establishes from within the very creatureliness of human nature. Thus we should expect to find a relative opposition between two legitimate points of view: creation and reconciliation, with the former as the external ground and the latter as the internal ground of human nature. It is extremely important to keep this in mind if we want to interpret correctly what Barth is trying to do. This is especially true for theologians who are used to thinking from other starting points, for example, that of Scholastic philosophy.

Thus we must simultaneously see and assert two things: man has his own created nature, his own proper analogy to God, which stems from grace—insofar as creation is itself grounded in Christ. But human nature is also pointed *toward* grace—insofar as creation is not in itself the Incarnation but its presupposition. Here is how Barth puts it:

From the outset, man must be understood as a being who stands in some kind of relation to God. . . . This will be a different relation to God from the one that obtains in the human being Jesus. But in its own way it is no less radical or basic for all that. We must not see man as a closed circle of created realities or as a creature open solely to some or all of the cosmos that is so distinct from God. We must see man as fundamentally open and related to God. And we must interpret this relationship to God as a necessary and constant constituent of his very essence [5, 83-84].

We might easily be tempted to translate these statements into the language of philosophy by saying that transcendence is an a priori constituent of human nature in terms not only of the world and its environment but expressly of God too. But we must be careful here, for we really are thinking from the *de facto* revelation in Jesus Christ, the very basis of creation. Thus we can talk about an a priori constituent of human nature (in the theological sense of a “presupposition”) only on the basis of this *de facto* revelation.

This, however, has tremendous implications for Barth’s earlier position. Man is not in any way now an immanent being closed off and without hope in the world whose dialectical encounter with an utterly alien grace shatters his whole being. He now becomes explicable only in terms of transcendence. In other words, he is “true man” (6,158f.) only insofar as the God-man is human and his

brother. In other words, man's humanness depends on his being already related to God: "To be human means most fundamentally to be with God" (6,161). "Godlessness is consequently not one of man's possibilities. It is, more exactly, the ontological impossibility of human being, an attack upon the very fabric of his creatureliness" (6,162).

And since this is true of man the creature (because Christ is man), it is also true in some mysterious way of all creatures, since man is in biological, physical and ontological solidarity with all creatures. But among all creatures, it is the human being who has been singled out, fundamentally and ontologically, to be the object of God's personal election (in solidarity with the Son of God) and to live out his life as a hearer of the Word (once more, in union with the Son of God; 6,170).

These two determinants affect the very essence of man "in his uniqueness and autonomy as a creature distinct from God". That is why "he cannot flee from God into himself to remain unaffected. As a human being, he is already affected, already involved in an encounter with God" (6,169). If Christ really is the Chosen One of God in whom God is well pleased, then every human being too, as a human being, has "been chosen in God's gracious election, determined from the outset to belong to the Body of which Christ is the Head" (6, 174).

That means that the Word of God is not addressed to us, as it were, as an afterthought, coming from the outside. Rather we are summoned to become partners and comrades of the Incarnate One in our very existence (6, 176L). "Man's being is a history" (6, 188); that is, it is more than merely a *condition*. For what Christ alone is, so too are we. "The light of Christ does not shine on us from without only, but from within, as part of our essence. This light is truly part of what we *are*." The human condition is another way of describing human nature, which of course becomes visible in the being of man. "And the likeness between Jesus and us does not emerge when the human condition is set aside but is opened up to a higher reality in the *de facto* historicity of the Incarnation of God" (6,192).

Only now can we say what the immanence of being human means: integral totality of body and soul, finitude in time and solidarity with all other humans. To be all of this, man is first and

foremost a thinking subject who is responsible for his own actions through self-reflection (4, 733). But this does not make him independent of the effect that the challenge of God's Word and command has on his free subjectivity (4, 734): because he is a reflecting being, he is also free by nature (6, 509), as we clearly see in the way the soul relates to the body: making use of it, disposing of it, transcending it. But man does not have this natural freedom and spirituality without being related to the freedom of the divine Word and Spirit: man is spirit precisely because he has been borne, affected and inspired by God's Spirit (6, 414-39). His immanent freedom and spirituality, which is constantly, continually and entirely appropriate to him, rests on a "transcendental determination," which is "an action and a work of the free God who encounters him" (6, 418).

Grace is based on nature, as history is based on the human condition. "In this sense, however, it is not *natural* for man to be from God. . . . God is not obligated to act. It is his gift and grace. This is most evident in the fact of death: man lives and dies in the event of God's life" (4, 419). In this way Barth has come to reject as insufficient all the classical philosophical ways of defining man from the immanence of his nature (6, 256f.). They certainly describe real aspects, possibilities and realities of human being, but they do not ever really define *man*, just dimensions of his being.

At this point, we must inevitably ask: Has Barth really remained true here to his initial program of not deducing the nature of man as a natural, created reality from the order of redemption? Certainly, in the precarious integration of these two orders, we must make allowances for nuances and changes from major to minor key. Indeed, once Barth finishes his fully developed doctrine of creation in volume 5 of the *Church Dogmatics*, we must always keep this back-and-forth correlation in mind. Nonetheless, any step beyond this, any attempt to *deduce* nature from grace systematically, would be a step backward, a relapse to the monism of *The Epistle to the Romans*. We must never forget Barth's own admonition in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics*:

This is no two-way street: we may rest assured that we are on the right path when we try to recognize who the Creator is in his revelation. But if we are not content with this

and try to go farther and deduce and ground creation *as such* from revelation, then we are indulging in unwarranted speculation. . . . If we ascribe the Church or revelation to creation or to God's creative will, then we forget or ignore that the Church or revelation can only be real as a response to man's sin. Otherwise, we must assume that man's sin is an essential part of God's creation. But that would be to forget the free and gratuitous goodness of God or to make it a necessary component of a dialectical process [1, 469].

We have every right to say that nature is the wherewithal of grace and that this is what makes it what it is. We may see in grace the culmination of meaning for all natural conditions. But there is another side of the coin as well: we must not forget those properties of nature that make it a genuine wherewithal of grace.

If Barth gave nature short shrift by neglecting this second aspect in favor of the first, if we continually get the impression that the material aspect of nature has been lost in favor of the formal and has been absorbed as an immanent moment of grace, we do not have far to search for the reason for this emphasis. Of course, we should make due allowance for a certain echo effect, a kind of atavism, from the earlier stages of his thinking. But the real reason is otherwise: Barth holds to a noticeably *Augustinian concept of freedom*. In this view, freedom is primarily a life lived in the intimacy of God's freedom. This freedom, in other words, cannot be defined negatively, as merely a neutral stance toward God, as if freedom were merely presented with "menu" of options from which the *liherum arbitrium* would make its selection. On the contrary, when freedom is authentic, it is a form of living within that mysterious realm where self-determination and obedience, independence and discipleship, mutually act upon and clarify each other. And this domain is that of the Trinity, which grace has opened up for us.

This concept of freedom leaves behind every philosophical notion, challenging their pretensions to being definitive, and is the ultimate foundation of Barth's anthropology. And so, to salvage the loftiest and most authentic freedom, he will scarcely note immanent freedom and its prerequisites. To make clear that immanent freedom is a secondary, derived phenomenon, he will put all the emphasis on the primary issue: our participation in the internal freedom of God.

At this point Barth reaches the very summit of his reflections on what it means for God to relate to man: there is a real mutuality of

influence. When man really hearkens to God, then “God is revealed as the one who is so free, so much master of all he creates, that he can allow himself to be influenced by man’s faith in him” (3, 575).

And yet the question keeps nagging: If we look back from this highest form of freedom to the immanent conditions presupposed in creation, what does a purely natural freedom mean? Is it to be limited to purely intraworldly decisions? Or is it to be regarded, as it should be, as a “formal”, presupposed element within the transcendent relations as well? If we do not allow for this, how can we talk about a genuine creaturely freedom in our relation to God?

In volume 3 of the *Church Dogmatics*, where he gives his doctrine on God, Barth calls the believer’s influence on God “the novel and distinctive element in the order of grace” (3, 576). Paul’s words about “reigning with God” (2 Tim 2:12) point to a truth that for Barth applies to the friends, not the servants, of God: “It is *not in their creaturely freedom* and thus not because of some competition with God’s omnipotence” that believers exert this influence on God in prayer. Rather, they influence God “in the freedom of the friendship that God has given to them, a friendship that is not passive but active to the highest degree” (3, 575).

This position works in tandem with the same volume’s vigorous polemic against Molinism, which allows the creature *as creature* to intrude into the sphere of God’s eternal truth. Molinism ascribes to the creature, from the outset and by virtue of its creaturely status alone, an influence on the divine will and thus on predestination itself. Molinism justifies this position by holding that God, through the *scientia media*, knows all the future decisions of the creature (indeed, all possible futures) without thereby determining those decisions; and this foreknowledge is the means for God to incorporate those decisions into his own. Hence the effect of creature on God prior to the order of grace.

In rejecting this position, Barth first of all praises the Thomists, who in this instance have better preserved the true sovereignty of God’s absolute freedom. He even admits “with the contrition of a penitent. . . that the evangelical doctrine of grace has been better defended on this point by Catholic theology than by orthodox

Protestantism [which has succumbed to Molinism!], not to mention all the theologians who came later” (3, 651-52).

His only reservation against the position of the Thomists here is the question of whether they quite agree with their own principles. Of course, he means here the doctrine of the analogy of being, according to which, prior to all theology, God and the creature have already been fitted into a philosophical ontology, under a neutral concept of being. If this is the real determinant, can we not say that it is the Jesuits who have been more consistent? And is it not all too typical of Catholicism that the dispute between the Jesuits and the Dominicans has come to an end, not with a resolution of the issue, but only with a truce? Thomism is after all the official theology and philosophy of the whole Church, Jesuits included. Should we not suspect that this constant oscillation toward both sides is not only the “shrewdness of a clever Church Magisterium but also the clear footprint indicating the hidden presence of analogy of being” (3, 652-61)?

Be that as it may, what most interests Barth in this question is that God’s absolute being and his absolute truth not become intermingled with the sphere of relative, created being and its truth. He does not want any creaturely freedom in and of itself to gain a foothold in the realm of eternal truth. Molinism is the “denial of the sovereignty of God, the constriction of his omnipotence and an attack on his divinity” (3, 651). Creation as such, that is, as nature, does possess its own relative freedom within its own proper sphere, both before and after the Fall. But influence on God is something, as Barth saw it, that we can only consider inside the order of grace.

Barth is concerned here, as so often, with deflecting the constant threat of philosophy’s encroachments into the field of theology. If he rallied behind Thomism, it was only on two specific points: (1) that there is an authentic creaturely freedom, but that (2) it remains subordinate to the all-determining sovereign freedom of God. But he immediately renounced these statements when they purported to be philosophical, for then they threatened to trap theology in a narrow pen. Why? Because then they became anticipatory determinations about things that only the revelation of grace can establish and determine.

This is not simply an issue of methodology or epistemology but touches on being itself. Man's freedom, rationality and spirituality must be understood from their basis of creation-in-Christ. We can only know what created spirit *really* is from the fact of its being created in Christ. We can only know what *true* freedom really is when it encounters the event of revelation.

So Barth's starting point is entirely different from that of Thomism. Nevertheless, this distinction between the two orders of creation and redemption does not entirely settle the issue: creation is not an intrinsic, essential component of the Incarnation but its "external ground". But the uniqueness of the Incarnation must not in any way abolish the truth of the created order. That is why Barth had to return to the issue once more: in the seventh volume of the *Church Dogmatics*,⁹ where he treats the doctrine of providence, he is forced to clarify how the essence of created freedom relates to God.

It goes without saying that even here, where the issue is that of the relation between Creator and creature as such (7, 7), we are still operating entirely within theological perspectives. "The doctrine of providence is not some antechamber or common meeting ground" where the Christian faith finds itself on the same level with various philosophical or ideological systems describing the world and God (7, 30). Just as faith forms the distinctive and unique foundations of this theological insight, so too its object is a unique event, a "category unto itself", which must not be confused with some general, neutral commonality of being between God and the world.

Nonetheless, Barth is not simply talking here about God's special presence in Christ, Church and Covenant but about "God's universal presence and dominion in all the events that happen in our world" (7, 21). This does not imply, however, that he has abandoned his christological starting point (7, 35). God's universal presence in world history is grounded in his special salvific plan for the world, a plan that is hidden in world history but revealed openly in the Church. Salvation history is inextricably interwoven with that of general history (7, 43). And history as a whole participates in salvation history proper (7, 45). Faith is the capacity for seeing God at work reconciling the world to himself, and its light then casts illuminating rays on the shadowy meaning of history as a whole (7, 225f). We

come to understand general history aright only when we look on it as the companion, the orbit, the preparation for and working out of salvation history (7, 47).

Once more the question crops up—when we are discussing the wider sphere of history—what role the subject has, what the activity and freedom of the creature are to be, and how we are to understand what it means to “cooperate with God’s providence” (7, 52). But at this point we run into something that seems to contradict completely what has already been said. But the issue is inevitable, because it is clearly connected with the requirements of Protestant doctrine. And paradoxically enough, it provides us with those elements that had been missing in Barth’s discussion of God in volume 3.

We now learn that the proper place for the true activity and cooperation of the creature is the realm of nature or creation, while the realm of grace is reserved for God’s activity alone (7, 52). While there is a real “mediation” in the order of nature, this is ruled out in the order of grace (7, 74-75). The creature can truly collaborate with God in maintaining, propagating and shaping creation in the order of nature. In the order of grace, however, the creature “cannot cooperate or mediate but can only be a witness and sign, a liturgical assistant, as it were, to a work that God alone carries out.” Not that there is no connection between the two: by truly operating in nature, the creature brings its work into a relationship with the work of grace, which God alone accomplishes. It does so by being the “servant”, “instrument”, “material”, “showplace”, indeed, “the very mirror and image” of God (7, 53-57).

However this might work out in practice, it is certain that creation, as a nature, truly operates, and thus cooperates, with God. The concept of *concursus* [mutual influence] is unavoidable (7,107f.). It rightly found a place in Lutheran and Reformed theology, which took over from Catholic theology the notion of *causa* and made it their own:

This concept of “cause” does not stem from the Bible. However, that does not mean that its introduction into the thesaurus of theology’s vocabulary was an error. It can be of real service to theology in its task of unfolding and applying the message of the Bible for today. . . . Those who disagree with this view would first have to prove (which in fact cannot be done) that the use of this or a similar concept is avoidable when we

talk about God's activity and that of the creature in their relationship to each other [7, 112]. . . . [So we must concede that] the concept of *concursum* is logically consistent and quite useful, even in our own time. Because of the introduction of this concept, we have won clarifications of knotty issues that perhaps would never have been won without this use of *concursum* (both in terms of the Bible and of Aristotle!) [7, 113].

The conditions that Barth has set down for the right use of this concept would also be acceptable to Catholic theologians, indeed, they would regard this usage as obvious, something they would take for granted. These conditions are:

1. Causality must not be understood as operating mechanically.
2. There must be no talk of "things" (for Barth, "a mortal danger for all theology!").
3. There must be no weaving of an overarching concept of *causa* under which God and creature would be subsumed.
4. There must be no backsliding to philosophy. We must steadfastly hew to the theological crux: the interpretation of Scripture.
5. Thus the whole matter must be developed from within the first article of the creed, *Credo in unum Deum* (which necessarily entails the second and third articles): God the Creator, Sustainer and Companion of his creature so operates as *prima causa* that "he integrates the operations of secondary causes in the course of working out his own will, which is his gracious will to save. God, then, is the one who correlates the effects of secondary causality with the effects that come from what he specifically wills" (7, 119).

This doctrine of mutual, collaborative activity [*Zusammenwirken*] is unfolded along the lines of Thomism, that is, in terms of God's *prae-cursus*, *con-cursus* and *suc-cursus* [God's accompaniment of, or influence on, secondary events before, during and after they happen]. But he develops this teaching strictly from the lofty heights of the biblical God, who in the unfathomable freedom of his love lovingly bestows freedom on us as well. This perspective obviates the need for Barth to enter into a debate about a pressing issue in Thomism (at least according to the assertions of its opponents): How is creaturely freedom even possible when we grant such sovereign freedom to God?

Barth refuses to speculate on this issue because for him the possibility and reality of created freedom are the most obvious and certain of facts, and so he proceeds from there. In fact, once he

abandoned the monism of his earlier years and around 1930 changed his mind and came to a positive definition of creaturehood, he never doubted created freedom in the slightest. Thus it did not bother him in the least that, in trying to explain how the two freedoms, absolute and relative, can coexist, “we have no idea or concept for describing it” (7,153).

We can of course exclude all the numerous false conceptions: God is not, for example, the stronger (or strongest!) force to which the action of the creature must submit, being the weaker of the two. Nor is God’s activity “actual” while that of the creature is merely “potential” (on the analogy of a motor being active, while gears are only potential, that is, active *in* the motor and not otherwise). Nor is God’s activity the first in a series that then but catalyzes or provokes the activity of the creature (the way a locomotive causes the movement of the whole train because it is first in line and linked to all the other cars). Nor does God infuse or suffuse the creature with his divine power as if it were some passive vessel waiting to be filled, for that would not affect or alter the very essence of the creature. Nor, finally, is God’s activity some broad, undifferentiated potential to which creatures later bestow differentiation through their collaboration (7, 153-57).

To move in the right direction, to avoid those snags and conundrums that are the bane of all true theology, we must try to see and hear God’s activity as it emerges in God’s gracious covenant culminating in Jesus Christ. If we do this, then the answer we get back is quite simple: “God acts by speaking his Word to all creatures, and this Word has the power, the wisdom and the overflowing goodness of his Holy Spirit” (7,161). We cut through the Gordian knot simply by asking: “Is the heart, meaning and goal of all events in creation to be understood in terms of God’s general activity in, with and upon his creatures?”

Yes. God is secretly at work everywhere, while visibly so where he reveals the meaning and goal of history. But finally, we can answer Yes, because God is triune love and life (6, 260f.), which means God can bestow genuine mutuality and authentic freedom. It is only the obsessive abstraction of philosophical speculation that gives theology an anxiety complex here (7, 166), with its insinuations that

God's infinite freedom is some kind of threat to our finite freedom and not rather much more the only possible way that freedom can be rooted and assured. Or if this worry crops up inside theology without any innuendos coming from philosophy, then this can only be the expression of fear and lack of faith and not a sign of love and faith. When God's Word summons, it summons us *to* responsibility; when we receive the Spirit, we receive our very selfhood. To be sure, this freedom demands obedience, it even entails a "bondage", but it is a bondage of love, which is precisely what real freedom is (7, 170).

Thus once more, in undertaking to explain created freedom within the framework of general providence, Barth is forced to return to interpreting it in terms of the special freedom we are given in the particular domain of grace. Over against this authentic freedom, there really can be no other. The light of revelation not only illumines the structure of freedom as it operates in the obscure realm of nature; this light is also the actual object we discover in nature. In the domain of the Covenant, we come to see what has been hidden in the domain of creation. There is no other freedom but this *holy* freedom that comes from God and is offered to us in Jesus Christ.

Thus Barth's views in volume 7 hearken back to his anthropology in volume 6. But there is a catch here, for Barth must bring with him a strange dowry, the concept of secondary causality in the realm of creation. Alert readers will notice a discrepancy here: if it is true that the creature in its creatureliness and autonomy is a secondary cause and, on the other hand, if it is also true that freedom must be interpreted in terms of the economy of grace, then only one conclusion is possible. Contrary to Protestant doctrine, we are forced to conclude that the causality of the creature achieves its true character and its fullest maturity in the order of grace.

Therefore, the full implications of the notion of secondary causality are not to be sought in the natural sphere of the creature's own activity, its own propagation and creation, however authentic this causality might be in and of itself. Rather, we must look for the full implications of created freedom in that ineffably tender mystery of "the influencing of God" that Barth had already introduced as early as volume 3. In fact, the discussion of providence in volume 7 concludes with a doxology to *this* possibility (the basis for the

introduction by *Catholic* theology of every notion of *cooperatio*). And what is that possibility? The possibility of reigning with God in grace, faith, obedience, prayer and, above all, in petitionary prayer:

There really is such a thing as the possibility of following Christ. There really is a faith in him (and thus in God himself), which means there is also an opportunity for obeying him. And when we follow and obey him, we are praying; and, in praying, we are praying *with* him through his own intercessory prayer to the Father. This opens up the possibility of participating not only in his prophetic and priestly but in his royal office as well.

In Christ, God has crossed over to our side of the battle lines and descended to our lowliness. But in Christ we have also crossed over to God's side and have been raised up to ascend to the heavenly throne where all decisions about God's dominion over creation are made. . . . To deny this or even to call it into question would be just as fatal as if we were to deny or call into question the full humanity and creatureliness of the Christ-event.

The Christian has not moved over to God's side in himself but in Christ, and in Christ, as a member of the Body of Christ and thus as a member of his community, he speaks with and works with, having a say and cooperating in all the decisions that are made. . . . This concurrence is indeed very personal, but that does not mean one is coadjutor as a private person but, as it were, as a person who *holds office* at God's side.

[Finally], wherever the Christian believes, hearkens and prays, we find not only the exercise of the creature's freedom but the very finger and hand of God. The Christian too holds the scepter of the Lord God who rules over all. Even more, whenever a Christian believes and prays, there God's heart is beating. We are brought up to God's throne, placed in the very midst of the mystery and meaning of the whole of world history. Subjectively, it might be that all we can see is the figure of someone whose prayer is feeble and hopeless, someone whose empty hands are outstretched to God. But this subjective image conceals and actualizes the most objective reality of all: the Lordship of the King of Israel, the King of the Kingdom of grace, who "holds the whole world in his hands" and who directs all things to the good: *per Jesus Christum, Dominum nostrum* [7, 325-26].

Perhaps in our investigations we have not kept sufficiently in mind the hermeneutical rule first proposed by J.-L. Leuba, who suggests that Barth should not be interpreted systematically but "prophetically". If Leuba is right, then Barth has presupposed the truths of which he speaks rather than tried to thematize them, let alone prove them. If true, then what we have in Barth is more a description of how things operate when they are seen in the light of the Word of God than of what they are in their essence.^{[10](#)}

This might help to explain the snag in Barth's thought we notice from time to time: if Barth is really a "prophetic" theologian,

discussing things in the light of God's word and not in terms of essence, then even here the essence of created freedom and the essence of created spirit would be less thematized or described than taken for granted. No doubt that is our explanation, but we should also note that Barth's real purpose is to point to how created spirit and creaturely freedom attain their highest realization: in the actual encounter with God's Spirit. So overriding is this concern of Barth's that he almost exclusively defines created spirit in terms of this encounter: "A human being is human precisely by his *having* a spirit. . . . We cannot simply say without further ado: man *is* spirit" (6, 425).

For the moment we must leave this problem of how God and creature interrelate, though the matter is still unclear. So far we have seen that Barth affirms this mutual relationship and praises it for its innate goodness. But he has not exactly clarified what the issue is in its essence. Barth admits that the fact of the Incarnation and the order of grace presuppose the order of creation, which is indeed distinct from the former. But again and again Barth tends to reduce the order of creation to the order of grace.

4. Faith and Reason

Epistemologically, the question of the relation between nature and grace or between the order of creation and the order of salvation becomes the problem of faith and reason. This issue is particularly important because within its scope we must take up the disputed question about the validity of a natural knowledge of God, which itself touches on the probative value of the analogy of being. So we must be especially careful to listen sharply to what Barth has in fact said and what he in fact means. There are far too many absurdities that have been imputed to him already in this regard to add any more to the list.

Fortunately, since the great shift in his thought from dialectics to analogy (and it is only this latter period that will interest us here), Barth has expressed himself in such detail and so fully that this time there can really be little doubt or lack of clarity about his opinions. The first work to document this change in his thinking was his book

on Anselm's proofs for the existence of God, which he himself has called the real manifesto of his departure from his first period.¹¹ But it comes most fully into view in the *Church Dogmatics*, especially in volume 1 (the teaching on faith), volume 3 (the doctrine on the knowledge of God), volume 5 (on the knowledge we gain of the Creator based on creation), volume 6 (on man's capacity for knowledge) and volume 7 (on the knowledge we gain of God from the course of history). But we must also mention here two other important sources: his defense against the attack of Emil Brunner and his article on the sovereignty of God vis-à-vis the decision for faith.¹²

Human beings possess their reality as partners of God from the fact that they are brethren of Jesus Christ; they live in the same realm as he did. Correspondingly, their knowledge of God has its reality in the act of faith, wherein they come to know God as God has revealed himself to them: as the true and living God, the Father of Jesus Christ, Creator, Reconciler and Sanctifier. We can therefore say that the essence of faith is to serve as the organ of absolute truth, of *veritas increata*. And, conversely, the organ for absolute truth is none other than faith.

Why should that be so? Because, first of all, the absolute can only be recognized by the absolute. To put it more concretely, we can only come to know God through his own self-revelation, which has its foundation and summit in Jesus Christ. He is the Word of God who sustains the whole of creation, who is absolute because he is God and who is accessible to us because he is a human being.

Secondly, it is also true because man is not God. He cannot start out from some innate, abstract form or idea of the absolute and thereby come to know the living God. Nor does he become identical with the Word of God when he encounters it, sharing its outlook as soon as he begins to think theologically, as the Idealists are always saying. Rather, man can only come to know God by a total decision *to accept the Word*, a decision that is itself a gift from the Word and yet a real decision on his part; and this we call faith.

Just as for Barth every reflection on man that does not operate apart from his grounding in the Word can only be abstract, and indeed (if it presumes to be the last word) false, so too in the case of

our knowledge of God and man: it is false if it claims to be the last word or fails to take into account the encounter between creature and God and the obedience this encounter calls for. The entire necessity of nature rests on the freedom of creation in the Word; the same is true of the world's rationality, authentic rationality. And, in the same way, the entire necessity of thought (which is authentic rationality) rests on the free revelation of the Word. This Word is Logos and has already comprehended and grounded all logic.

So in Barth's sense, we can speak of an a priori of faith, that is, that it is prior to all knowledge of authentic truth, provided that we attribute nothing to nature considered in the abstract. To expand on this for a moment, Barth puts faith at the very locus where Fichte put the ego (prior to discursive thought), where Schleiermacher posited the root-experience of the "feeling for God" (prior to all reflection). But this comparison could mislead: this is not an a priori of reason or a constituent of the spirit. Rather, it is something that has *been* constituted by the true and concrete Word of God. Only here can we really say that reason is really reason and knowledge is really knowledge:

We are speaking here about God's self-disclosure corresponding to the reality of the Creator. Thus we are *not* talking about a further reach of our consciousness. This is something our consciousness runs up *against*, and *then* and only then does it gain well-grounded knowledge. This is a knowledge we gain only when we attend to this encounter from outside our minds, in a true act of *re-cognition*. Just as the reality of the Creator differs from all other realities (for he and he alone exists through and of himself), so too does his self-disclosure differ from the self-disclosure of all other beings and created spirits in that he and he alone is able to reveal his Being, his act of existing, authentically, effectively and in truth. And just as everything that exists outside the Creator owes its existing to him and to him alone, so too all knowledge about existence that takes place outside of him can only occur because he has not hidden his infallible knowledge of his own existence as the ground of all other existences. This self-disclosure by the Creator, which confronts the creature with such otherness, . . . makes it possible for created things to know about existence and reality outside of God. This knowledge begins as knowledge of God's existence, and then from there knowledge climbs down from this, its first and truest object, to come to knowledge about the existence of the knower and of the world surrounding that knower. . . . *Because* God has said "I am!", we can and must say back to him not only "Yes, you are!" but also the rest of the declension, "I myself am!" and "this about me is also what is with me!" The ontological order holds its own in the noetic order. Which means that God stands surety for his own as well as the creature's act of being, which—however different from God's—is yet forever bound with it too [5, 399-400].

Clearly it would be absurd to suspect Barth's position of being a type of skepticism, for it always stems from the most certain certainty of the Word of God in faith. It is just as absurd to speak of irrationalism here, for it derives from the openness of the Logos, who possesses every *ratio* in himself. And finally, it would be just as absurd to accuse it of noetic ontologism in the manner of the Idealists, since it speaks, not about some vision of God buried in every process of knowledge, but about our *recognition* in the encounter of faith.

That might seem to leave fideism with an open field. But we cannot dismiss Barth's position as being fideistic either, at least not as the term was used in the nineteenth century and had a role to play in the Declarations of Vatican I, although there are certain unmistakable similarities. The principles of the Abbe L. E. M. Bautain¹³ were based on Kant, and he was greatly influenced by Kant's doctrine that pure reason, left to its own devices, undoes itself; and so he came to deny the possibility of reason ever reaching God on its own. Barth certainly picks up on this melody and reechoes it in his polemics, but actually he is not working from the same foundation. Bautain spoke as a philosopher of a nature left to its own devices and natural powers operating outside the direction given to them by grace (whether or not those powers really existed or were a just hypothetical thought experiment). Barth speaks as a theologian about real human beings for whom that assumption has no meaning and in fact is an assumption that cannot even be entertained hypothetically. Please take note: we are not trying to *defend* Barth here or to decide whether his standpoint will withstand attack. For the moment, all we want to do is to understand him and to contrast him with positions that are similar but not identical.

What then is faith? We can begin by defining what faith is not. It is neither "some magical faculty enabling man to do something that exceeds his natural capacities" (nature is being understood here in its concrete, Augustinian sense), nor is it "an action that man brings forth in the course of using his natural talents. Faith comes from the Word of God. As a true *event*, it is an historical determination of human existence, indeed an event of salvation history." Yet this does not mean that faith impinges on human nature as some alien force coming from the outside. Instead, faith awakens "man to an action

that is *proper* to him. This action not only lies within the scope of his created nature, it actually corresponds to the highest natural determination of his creatureliness” (understood once more in the concrete, Augustinian sense). The model for how the act of faith relates to human nature is the Incarnation: “The Incarnation of the Son of God is the great prototype for the *genesis* of faith. It effects the completely undeserved liberation of human nature, but in doing so it also restores nature’s more exalted creaturely orientation” (7, 280).

The immediate implication of this is that we must reject two extreme and one-sided definitions of faith:

On the right, we must reject the view that faith is a blind *submission* to a law imposed on our understanding and will from without. On the left, we must reject the view that faith is simply an internal *conviction* about the legitimacy and importance of a certain objective content, a conviction that wells up from within the human mind, which then freely adopts it.

Contrary to this second opinion of liberal theology, faith does indeed impose a bond and an obligation. Faith strips a human being of his own will that he might receive into his heart his Lord and be judged by him. Faith is an entirely new and alien light that shines down upon human life from without. But, contrary to the first opinion of those who overstress the heteronomy of faith, this light does not shine wholly from without but also illumines the mind from within. Faith does not blind, it opens our eyes. Faith does not destroy the intellect or demand its sacrifice, it frees the mind by locking it onto its true goal, namely, itself. Faith does not suppress the will but sets it in motion.

The model for this is the Incarnation of the Son of God, which is also the prototype for the *nature* of faith. In the life and activity of Jesus Christ we see simultaneously the fullest obedience and the fullest sovereignty. The reality of faith stands *above* such oppositions. It includes them within itself. Faith is entirely God’s work and wholly man’s work too. It completely binds us but totally sets us free. Awakened by the Word of God, it lives and grows within this totality [7, 280-81].

One could hardly accuse Barth’s concept of faith of being one-sided (to leave aside for the moment the relation of that faith to reason). Faith is supernatural and positive, but it is no less suited to nature, for it claims nature’s own faculties, the understanding and will. It does not well up from within nature but it is adapted to our nature, perfecting it according to the intent of the Creator.

On the one hand, faith lives wholly from the Word of revelation. To that extent, it is part of the working out of God’s decree to save. It is “an echo and a reflection of the Yes that God spoke in raising Jesus Christ”. Thus it is our way of participating in God’s own activity and in

its ceaseless movement. It is our way of actually following Christ and not simply hearing and looking on as a spectator of God's action; faith draws us into the drama of God's activity in the world (5, 442-45).

But, on the other side, faith is a subpoena summoning the whole person, a writ claiming man's entire nature and existence, body and soul:

Though grounded in God's Word and living entirely from that Word, faith is undoubtedly our own action as well. How otherwise could the sovereign action of the Word of God come to fulfillment if not by the Holy Spirit reaching into the very depths of our being, if this action did not also rouse and summon us to our *own* action and decision? Just because it is entirely gratuitous does not alter the fact that it demands our own decision, an act of our own conscience, understanding and will. Without our response, it could not be God's work and God's gift *to us*.¹⁴

As a genuine deed performed by man, faith is to its very roots a decision for God, but it is not a blind, irrational decision utterly unmoored from faith's own cognitive aspect.¹⁵ For faith is most basically an encounter with the Word of God, and as such it is "certain knowledge admitting of no doubt" (5, 400-401).

In fact, Barth has so stressed this moment of rationality in faith that his Protestant critics, especially Lutherans, have often accused him of rationalism, claiming he has betrayed the trusting, "fiducial" side of faith. He admits that faith requires a moment of daring trust (1, 246f.; 7, 281), but he sees such bold trust primarily in the obedience that the event of revelation requires. For Barth, faith is an act of venturing trust because it is the act whereby the created spirit completely surrenders itself; it is the decision of the mind to live in and from God's truth, the act of adoration that is of the very essence of faith.

And this act is continually and from the outset saturated in the light of the Logos: "The Christian faith sees and knows to what it clings." Its "boast" is "no mere strut; it is not a kind of idealistic posturing, a resigned sigh of serene acceptance of the inscrutable or a battered submission to the raw fact of unresolvable antinomies" (5, 435). True, faith is "not a form of direct sight", but it *is* a form of "seeing through" whereby it peers through the earthly to God, who both hides and reveals himself in the world he has made:

There is a transparency, an inner meaning and teleology, a perfection embedded in the depths of creaturely imperfection. Not of itself but insofar as God has destined it in his Son to share in his own nature and image [5, 438]. . . . In the Gospels, faith and knowledge are not neatly separated from each other but are called the common way by which we come to a decision for Jesus. The reason for this rests on the fact that Jesus' own participation in the divine and his own human nature are not counterbalancing realities. It is his very participation in the divine that grounds his human being [6, 76]. . . . To hear God's Word means to know God [6, 210].

Before we proceed any farther, we should stress once more the Barthian law that a fundamental parallelism courses through the order of being and the order of knowledge. As we have already quoted, Barth holds that "the ontic order preserves within itself the noetic order as well" (5, 400). That man is not a figment of the imagination but a reality "depends ontically and noetically on the fact that he cannot exist without God" (6, 415). Just as man has no other foundation for his knowledge but his recognition in faith of the living God in Jesus Christ, so too in the ontic order: there is no other "ground of being" than Jesus, the real ground of creation (6, 157).

According to Barth, human nature is rooted in and comes from that original grace, without which it could not be understood. So too, reason is rooted in and derives from that disclosure by God in Jesus Christ. And if it is viewed in abstraction from its origin there, it will be completely misunderstood too. Catholic theology, however, has constantly tried to assume that reason can be understood (and exist!) even without faith, but it makes this assumption for the sake of the purity of the concept of grace! Barth rejects this assumption as an absurdity and a sacrilege for the following reasons:

1. It is absurd because it probes hypothetical and nonexistent possibilities while passing over real beings.
2. It is sacrilegious because it impiously tries to prove that something that has meaning only within the context of grace is actually meaningful apart from grace and on its own terms.

This, however, does not imply that Barth has fallen under the spell of Baianism, since he would not dream of claiming that grace is an integral part of human nature (sec 3, 61). Nonetheless, he would say that nature, with all its exigencies, does rely on and is rooted in

something beyond its own capacities, freedoms and exigencies: a freedom and “exigency” of grace.

We have introduced this nuance to clear up a potential misunderstanding, so that we can now follow the rest of Barth’s logic: every act of understanding the truth comes from God’s own utterly free disclosure of what is most intimately God’s own: his Word. “Essentially, neither the Creator nor the creature is hidden from us at all, only evil is” (6, 61). “The encounter of Being is an openness of one being to another” (6, 300). That is why Barth holds that hiddenness and untruth can only arise where this *essential* and *proper* openness and accessibility are denied, condemned or rejected, where the creature seeks to obtain truth and certainty on its own apart from the revelation of God’s absolute truth.

That is why Barth so often railed against any and every attempt to ground the truth *merely* from philosophy, that is, against any attempt that had explicitly mapped itself off from theology. But Barth was *not* thereby denying the presence of created truth (*veritas creata*) in the world—that is, in both things and in knowledge of them. Not only did he not deny this, he expressly presupposed—to use Augustinian and Thomistic terminology—that this *Veritas creata et mutabilis* is grounded in the disclosure to the world of *Veritas increata et immutabilis*.

In making this concession, however, Barth also does deny, and passionately, two things: (1) that *Veritas creata* can be equated as such with divine truth; and (2) that *Veritas increata* can be ours in any other way than in the personal self-revelation of God and our corresponding acceptance of that revelation in faith. Or put in another way: Barth never denied that God had revealed himself even in nature (for to do otherwise would be to forget or overlook the whole witness of Scripture). He only denied that this revelation of God in nature is, ontically as well as noetically, a “natural” revelation, that is, one inhering in nature herself as one of her qualities. For Barth, this revelation in nature is rather “super-natural”, because it comes directly from God. God is never an a priori of nature, already embedded in it ontically as well as noetically.

We would do well to look at the theses Barth has here rejected as they were first formulated by Fichte, Schelling and Schleiermacher.

Then we can see exactly what it was Barth was actually fulminating against and why he then rediscovered these same theses in the Catholic form of the doctrine of the analogy of being. The first clear expression of his final position comes in his analysis of Anselm's *Proslogion* (1931). We are not concerned here with whether Barth has done historical justice to Anselm's argument. His interpretation concerns us here solely as an expression of his own doctrine.

The clincher of the analysis is the argument that the *notion* of God itself, even after we have methodologically bracketed a positive confession of faith to bring out the conceptual requirements of this concept, forces us to admit the real existence of God. Moreover, we recognize this existence, not as some generic term, but as "being-there" [*Dasein*] specifically applies to God:

Anselm's presupposition is of course a term [*Wort*], but this is no mere word but the Word of God. . . . This is no isolated word given to us to be understood outside of any context whatever; it is the Word of God, meaning it must be understood in the context of that Word's full revelation, to which the revelation of its own existence also belongs. In uttering the name of God, Anselm is of course not trying to *derive* his existence from it, as Gaunilo imputed, but to make us see the impossibility of his nonexistence. He has thus made it possible for us to see that belief in the existence of God is rational.¹⁶

Anselm's starting point is *fides quaerens intellectum*, but that really means that it is *faith* that is seeking understanding. Whenever a believer speaks the name of God, or whenever an unbeliever comes into contact with a believer and thereby comes into contact with this name of God proclaimed (and that includes everyone),¹⁷ that person has already come from the event of encountering God. "The *event* of the recognition of that name entails raising the *problem* of the existence of God."¹⁸ In other words, the "prior decision" that already determines the nature of the problem makes it different from any other: we cannot utter the word "God" in this context and then conclude that God does not really exist.

Whatever is thought is thought from this event. This shows that, rooted in this event, the very thought of the concept of God ("greater than which cannot be conceived" as the name and pointer for the intended and incomprehensible content) would be a contradiction unless we assented to the existence of such a content. And this

existence is not merely a *de facto* existence (which means it might also *not* exist in the factual order) but divine and absolute.¹⁹

The proof for the existence of God cannot be more than a negative statement: a God existing solely in the understanding is a proven impossibility. "Coming as it does from revelation, the positive assertion of God's existence cannot be derived [from the negative]."²⁰ Only by proceeding from the highest reaches of God's self-disclosure in the event of his revelation can we fill in the content of the contradiction of the nonexistence of God. Only in conjunction with the revelation of absolute truth can all the relative truths of creation be known and recognized. As all things depend in their being on the being of God, so their truth and knowability depend on his truth. "Everything that exists outside of him does so only inside the parentheses, as it were, of his existence. And his existence is unique, for in thinking of it, we know it to be inconceivable not to exist."²¹

Only because there are absolute truth and absolute being are there relative truth and relative being; the latter are completely "real and true being" and real and true truth but analogous being and analogous truth.

But can this analogous being, this analogous truth, suffice in order to ascend to absolute being and truth? Abstractly considered and in and of themselves, no, they do not suffice. They do so only on the condition that absolute being and absolute truth reveal themselves in these analogous forms and that this revelation be accepted in the form proper to it: in faith. Thus man *can* recognize God in the parable of the world. "Moving up from the relative goods, the *summum bonum* can be disclosed. Revelation is of course the revelation of God in his world, in the world that is so constituted that God's essence *can* be revealed in it *in speculo, per similitudinem, per analogiam* (should God so decide *de facto* so to reveal himself), even if in fact he has revealed himself this way to no one."²² But the realization of this possibility only takes place where there is faith: in the Church.

This brings us to the last problematic of Barth's book on Anselm; and Barth adopts a position here that he will then maintain unchanged from that point on. The issue is this: If there really is a

parallel between the ontic and noetic order, if man's knowledge and being must be grounded and understood on the basis of the revelation of the Word, then how is it possible for man *not* to have faith? Would not the refusal to believe be equivalent to a denial of reason and nature?

Let us first take up the case that so puzzled Anselm and Barth: the conundrum of the "possibility of denying the existence of God".²³ How can the fool say in his heart that there is no God, when he cannot really think such a thought?²⁴ How can he get away with such a contradiction? Barth no longer answers the question as he did in the dialectical period, asserting that creaturely existence born in sin is itself a contradiction to itself. He now dissolves the contradiction by asserting that "the affirmation and denial of God's existence do not take place—and this is the key to solving the riddle—on the same level."²⁵

On the one level, where God's Word and its disclosure really encounter the fool, the fool cannot meaningfully deny God's existence. But on the level where he begins to abstract from that event and considers the concepts as if they were immanent moments of thought, he can deny God's existence. It is this abstraction that is the big lie. In this case, the old adage of philosophy is unconditionally true: *abstractio mentitur* (abstraction lies):

The truth of thought or speech stands or falls with the connection of referential language to a being distinct from that language. Subjective thought determined by the *vox significans rem* (the signifier) can only be true as an integrating moment in the objective thought of the *res significata* (the signified). But abstracted from thought referring to what really exists out there, the subjective side of the *vox significans* must be labeled as false thinking.²⁶

In other words, there is a possibility for thought to know the truth (*cogitare posse*), but it fails to alight on its goal because it has not reached the intentionality of that potential (*cogitare esse quod est*).²⁷

What, then, are we to say about the fool? What is the nature of his unbelief? The answer now follows inevitably: The unbelief of the fool can consist in nothing other than the contradiction that the fool does not *will* to accept and believe his faith as true. He chooses not to

believe what he already believes. This shall have important consequences for Barth's doctrine on predestination, whose roots and power of synthesis lie here in this insight about faith. But this takes us beyond the focus of the present chapter, so we will only mention this connection and continue with an exposition of Barth's Anselm book, leaving the issue of predestination for later.

In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth comes to discuss God's omnipotence and fidelity [*Beständigkeit*] in terms of *possibilia*, which are defined by the law of noncontradiction. Despite superficial appearances to the contrary, this strategy has nothing to do with voluntarism and nominalism. The noncontradictory nature of finite being and truth is not rooted primarily in created being but in the absolute Being and truth of God. This is its real and sure source of legitimacy (3, 600-605). Relative being can only provide relative assurance (which means no assurance at all!); and only absolute being can provide absolute assurance. The concepts of created *possibilia* "do not have their dignity, truth and validity in themselves (and that goes even for such statements as 'two times two equals four'). Such truths are not 'absolute', in the sense of being independent of God's freedom and will in a determinate system of human metaphysics, logic or mathematics, but are rooted in the freedom, will and decision of God, the Creator of all" (6, 602). Of course, we take for granted that God's freedom should not be defined as something irrational, in contrast with his rationality and fidelity. God's freedom and will operate only according to the essence of his Godhead.

Whenever we disengage our trust in the relative truth and consistency of creation from an absolute trust (of faith, but which as we say is in no sense irrational) in the truth of God, this will inexorably lead us to contradiction. The history of philosophy has shown this all too clearly. "Not only is the law of noncontradiction not absolutely tenable, it will sooner or later turn on itself and eventually undermine all certainty and make impossible any assured step taken within the creaturely realm" (6, 604). It is only in the light of revelation that we can venture to say that God cannot realize a contradiction (such as two times two equals five) and that the impossibility of contradiction comes from nowhere else but absolute truth itself.

Barth's extensive treatment of Descartes' *Meditations* comes to much the same conclusion (5, 401-15). Barth's book on Anselm had already taken issue with Descartes,²⁸ which made him quite adept for the battle to come. Descartes first inquires after the certainty we can possess about the reality of worldly being, which he first subjects to radical doubt. The Second Meditation plucks out from the ocean of doubt the *res cogitans*, the thinking self. But is self-evidence sufficient, is self-proof conclusive? To show that it is, Descartes resorts to the concept of God in the Third Meditation.

But, in discussing this concept, he imports the general regulative norm for concepts that true thoughts are "clear and distinct" ones. But then, asks Descartes, why cannot a malevolent and deceiving spirit lead the mind astray and give out the appearance of truth? This is when the proof for the existence of God is brought into service, which resembles Anselm's except for one crucial feature: Descartes presupposes the revelation, not of divine, but of finite and contingent existence. The clearest, truest and most distinct of all the ideas in the mind proves to be *Descartes'* idea. And it is this idea that God has stamped as a seal on the finite spirit as the signature of his work of creation.

But God by definition does not deceive. The Fifth Meditation takes up the question of the outside world from its ideal side. From its analysis, Descartes has determined that the mathematical ideas are completely transparent and clear. And so once more he goes through a proof for God based on them, and now in the classical "ontological" form: just as certain relations always and necessarily inhere in a concept (such as three sides to a triangle), so it belongs to the nature of God always and necessarily to exist. In Descartes' terms,

even if it is not necessary that I think the thought of God (any more than I have to think the thought of a triangle), it is still necessary that as long as I do think of a first and highest being and draw this idea, as it were, out of the treasury of my spirit, it is necessary to ascribe to this concept, inherently if not always *de facto*, all perfections.²⁹

But if I think this most certain of all certainties, then I notice as well that "the certainty of all other things depends on it, so much so that

one can never know anything perfectly without this certainty”,³⁰ not even the total undeceivability of mathematical ideas.

So I see clearly that the certainty and truth of all knowledge depend on the knowledge of God alone. So much is this the case that before I know God, I can perfectly know nothing about any other thing. But by knowing God, I can know perfectly and with certainty countless things about God himself and all other things of the pure understanding, as well as things of bodily nature, which form the object of pure mathematics.³¹

And so the Sixth Meditation proceeds to develop from various sides the probable and converging proofs for the reality of the outside world. But now, says Barth, if one asks at this point what Descartes has actually, clearly and distinctly known, one runs into a predicament: “Actually, only mathematical truths can be known directly.” But these truths are in themselves only elements of truth in the context of cosmic appearance. Descartes has not directly come to know his own existence, since this too belongs to the world of deception without an adequate grounding in the idea of God.

And what about God’s existence? But all he has proven is the existence of a perfect being, necessarily *thought* by me but which as such cannot have the power of guaranteeing the rule of truth in my thought. Is, then, the existence of the ego in the Third, and that of mathematical ideas in the Fifth, Meditation not dependent on the existence of God that has been proved in this way? Is not this very blatant circular reasoning simply the circle of the finite, subjective *cogitatio*? Yes, but for Barth this circle is in itself neither false nor anything to be ashamed of:

Man would have to be God himself to be able to speak of God in any other way but in a circle. Even the Christian will only be able to prove the existence of God to himself and to others in faith and in the form of a summons to others to believe in God. We can therefore see no error in the fact that Descartes’ starting point is, by his own admission, the *idea* of God: the human intellectual image of the most perfect being of all. Even the Christian draws on the idea of God conceived in faith and uttered in a profession of faith. The circle and the idea are essential, without which the Christian faith could not prove God. But they are not automatic machines put into our hands for cranking out automatic conclusions [5, 411].

We cannot, for example, draw out from the treasury of our minds God’s existence and then make use of this for other purposes, for

example, to prove the reality of the outside world. If the proof is successful, that can only be because it is God's own self-proof that shatters the circles of our finitude. Moreover, any valid proof depends on the "concept of obedience" that God imparts and that lifts the proof into the plane of awe, where proof yields to worship. "This is the only presupposition by which Anselm of Canterbury proved the existence of God in the eleventh century" (5, 412).

Certainly, Descartes speaks seriously of God. His vocabulary too is peppered with words like *intueri*, *admirari*, *adorare*. He even speaks of *fide credere* at the conclusion of the Third Meditation. But "Descartes' Catholic faith operates differently from Anselm's, somewhere below his philosophy, so that he finally lets his theology humbly take its place as the capstone of his philosophy" (5, 413).

Once more we come up against the problem of the relation of philosophy and theology, their closeness and interchangeability as well as their distance from one another (as we saw already in the essay on "Fate and Idea in Theology"). In the final analysis, neither can *prove* anything, they can only indicate. Both must proceed, that is, from an original pristine openness-absolute truth itself—and explicitly accept it as the first presupposition of all other true acts of being and truth. We can indeed "ascend" to the absolute from this world here below, but only insofar as we presuppose the priority of the absolute over the relative. Descent is prior to ascent; revelation precedes our perception of what has been revealed.

This is the only course that philosophy can take if it ultimately wants to get back to that ground of things that is the source of its reflections. In this respect, philosophy for Barth is quite possible as a tendency, a method, an inchoative movement, but this movement is not conclusive in and of itself. For only God can have the last word, which is the province of a theology open to listening and obeying that last word. Theology holds the position "toward which the true philosopher will necessarily point (his pointer is the culminating pinnacle of his own work, when he has reached the end of his legitimate reflections; this termination then points to the place occupied by theology). And he will perform this function of pointing even if as a philosopher he does not draw on theology for his own work."³²

Barth does not dispute that philosophy can legitimately pose the question of God as well as of the authentic created nature of the world and the problem of becoming that this entails. This question “at the very least lies at that unsettling periphery and borderline of its picture of the world (whether it agrees with this or not). At the very least, this question raises the whole problem of origins and of why knowledge and being are so interrelated” (5, 391). But meanwhile the theologian knows that this disquieting question not only can only be answered by revelation but that it has been provoked and posed *by* that same revelation.

And so it is quite conceivable that philosophy could pose its questions from the very place where God’s answer resounds, above all, when it speaks as a Christian philosophy of God’s openness. Without knowing it, philosophy has then “taken out a loan from theology” (6, 415-16), has unconsciously become a theology. Given his concept of faith, Barth has no choice but to leave a wide berth for this possibility.

It used to be that “natural theology” as well as any theology “that wanted to be purely philosophical” would appeal to Romans 1:19 as its proof text. But Barth, in a grand gesture, reclaims it for theology (3,131f.). Then, however, he once more leaves it free, to some extent, to be a (theological!) light for philosophy too:

Now what man can know of God is made plain [*phaneron*: literally, “brought to light”] to him because God has thrown light on it [*ephanerosen*]. Now God’s invisible being, namely, his eternal power and divinity, is to be seen from the creation of the world *if* contemplated in God’s works [*nooumena kathoratai*: Rom 1:19f.]. This light is, and remains, light, even if, in the warped eyes of man, it turns into a deceptive light a thousand times over, even if this light is the occasion for distortion, even if a “natural theology” has tried to appeal to it, misunderstanding completely the joyous but also sober truth of God [7, 58-59].

The Thomistic proofs for God’s existence seek to show something about what lies beyond the world by moving from the world. If this effort is to succeed, however, we must invoke more than an attempt of the world to transcend itself: “God must transcend the limits of the world and its own self-understanding and thereby prove himself” (7, 202). That this breakthrough has indeed *de facto* occurred is the testimony of the whole Bible. This witness justifies all those attempts

to prove God's existence as one component, a kind of preliminary stage, in the larger task of theological explication.

We only begin to see how seriously Barth took this possibility of a "preliminary stage" when he came to write the sixth volume of the *Church Dogmatics*, where he considers the various forms of philosophical anthropology and rejoices in his reconciliation with Emil Brunner. Anthropology describes the "phenomena of the human". But these phenomena do not all persist in the sphere of relativity in the same way. Some of these draw closer to the truth than others, and as they do so they become more and more useful for theology.

What is so striking in this treatment is that Barth will use the unheard-of little word "already" in his descriptions of various views in anthropology. In other words, he came to see some merit in such different versions as materialism, naturalism, Fichte's ethics, Jaspers' existentialism and finally in human religiosity itself, admitting a certain legitimacy to Brunner's "theology of the point of contact" (6, 86-157). For example, Fichte's ethics "already" sees man "as the subject of his own life". Existentialism sees man as "already" open to something outside himself, which is as such "the absolute, the unfathomable, the unapproachable, which we can only perceive in the limitations of human existence as it borders on real transcendence" (6, 239). And finally, theistic anthropology, relying on existentialism but transcending it, can see man with God as his origin and goal:

We confess without hesitation that such a theistic anthropology can describe to a great extent what really constitutes man's potential: the possibility, disposition and capacity for being God's partner. The object of a theistic anthropology is this capacity [6, 240].

When anthropology is aware of this and does not try to push past its legitimate field to describe how this potential is realized, then it is following an "authentic and serious opportunity", say Barth:

[This method] is possible; it is basically justified and necessary. God's Word and revelation are not the source from which this science draws its knowledge of man, even in its final form. This science is in all its branches a general science of man teaching and learning about himself. . . . This does not mean it has necessarily been left in the dark. . . . And theological anthropology will seek to be open to such a general science of man. It can draw from the knowledge of the real person,

presupposing it in order to understand and appreciate the whole complex of those capacities as the very essence of man's true capacity. Theology presupposes that man as he actually exists is know-able and known in light of the Word of God's revelation. It will then see philosophical anthropology in a more humble light, shorn of its metaphysical trappings, but it will then have a more exact and stronger, a more perfect vision of its status [6, 241].

Philosophy in this context is to theology as the abstract is to the concrete and possibility is to reality. But so long as it is really the abstraction of *this* concretion, the possibility of *this* reality, it is legitimate and has its own truth. Thus what was previously equated with the big lie in the Anselm book (abstraction) now takes on the opposite coloration: *abstractio non mentitur*, provided of course that this abstraction does not consider itself to be the *ultimate* concretion.

In this sense there can be such a thing as a "pre-understanding". And in this sense Emil Brunner was right. Did not the Church Fathers already look on the *spoliatio Aegyptiorum* (namely, the commandeering of philosophy by theology) as a legitimate expropriation? If so, then the incursion of theology into the regions of philosophy should then advance as boldly as the Israelites' invasion of Canaan:

Theology, after all, is not invading a foreign country that does not belong to it but is making inroads into the land of its fathers. Thus, for example, in fashioning an ethic, theology will take the revelation and work of grace so seriously and will operate so much within God's *de facto* decision to redeem that it will be able to see man only as objectively and entirely oriented toward God and bound by God's commands, no matter what his own personal attitude toward those commands might be [4, 579-80].

In short, then, Barth admits that "man can get to know God in the world, that the things of the world can become the *similia Dei*".³³ There is a real possibility of knowing God (*Deum cognoscere posse*) that is both prior and subsequent to any *de facto* impossibility of a natural knowledge of God.

Thus, despite all the anathemas Barth has thundered against "natural theology", we should not be surprised when we find him stressing with ever greater emphasis this possibility of knowing God, this *Deum cognoscere posse* in Barth's theological anthropology of volume 6 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Theological anthropology is the doctrine of man as he really is, as he really stands before the real

God of Jesus Christ. As such, it is to be distinguished from the previously mentioned theistic anthropology, which is the highest level of man's *self*-determination before the (secret) a priori of the Word of God.

Theological anthropology looks at the essence and knowing faculties of man from the perspective of the revealed Word of God in Scripture. Even though the tension mentioned earlier between the order of creation and the order of redemption is real, Barth wanted us to beware of getting caught up in the habitual Neo-Scholastic categories of "nature" and "super-nature" or of getting worked up over the problem of defining what human nature "in itself" can know of God and the world inside the order of creation. In a theological anthropology as Barth understands it, this question cannot even be meaningfully posed. Adam stands before the real God just as much as Abraham or the apostles did. Thus we can point to that disposition of human nature that *can* in fact grasp and thereby also conceptualize the Word of God only *inside* the one, true encounter with God.

It is clear that we are hearing the very opposite of what Barth had hurled against Brunner in his polemical tract *Nein!* Notice the difference now:

Man is capable of perceiving the God who draws near to him in an act of self-revelation. . . . When God deals with man, God appeals to this capacity. God presumes that in man, as the subject of his own decisions, God can appeal to that capacity. Without this capacity, the summons would be without an object and the encounter would be impossible. If God has created man to abide in his Word and thus to become a partner in his covenant, then we must assume God has created a being who can *sense* [*vernehmen*] him [6, 478].

Inner realization of the truth [*Vernehmen*] is the central act of the spirit. It is "the undivided act in which perception [*Wahrnehmung*] makes thought possible and thought makes perception [*Wahrnehmung*] possible" (6, 479).³⁴ Kantian dualism thus comes *later* than the *Urakt* that grounds the spirit and makes it a perceiving mind. That man is a spirit "means that he can perceive—first and above all God but, because he can perceive God, everything else as well" (6, 479).

Building on these insights, Barth can then describe in powerful and trenchant terms the indivisibility of body and soul in spirit-being. He well realizes that there is a simultaneous movement of the “embodying” of the spirit and the “spiritualization” of the body in a bodily and spiritual totality of perception and reason, even in the knowledge of the Word of God. But the more essential point is the enunciation of the highest principle of all:

Whether we are talking more about his perception or his ratiocination, perceiving man is essentially a being who can and does sense God. It is of course true that the other that he perceives is not identical with God, but behind that otherness he also perceives God as *the* Other. When the Bible speaks of man’s sensory capacities, it knows of nothing more crucial and necessary than to perceive *this* Other. To perceive this and that, to register one’s own self-consciousness, to sense the ordinary hustle and bustle with our fellow humans, the relation of nature and history and inner and outer in the surrounding world, is indeed important and necessary. But it is *only* necessary because God encounters us there, as a rule not immediately but mediately, through his works, deeds and effects. Behind and through all our acts of sensation, our perception has only *one* object: *the* Other who shines through the otherness of things [6, 482].

We can put it this way: man is created and equipped as a creature of nature to encounter and find God in all things. And thus he is *able* to do so. This is the *nature* of the real human being as he actually exists. And the “general” knowledge of things is given to him that he might see through them to the “special” knowledge that comes only from a direct encounter with God. When man abstracts from this *particular* knowledge, which is the only real kind there is, and moves about in the realm of the “general” (that is, the world) without relating the general to God’s particular, then he falls prey to the vanity of which the Bible speaks (6, 483).

Vanity means to want to withdraw from sensing God in order to live off one’s own reasonable nature. But that does not mean man has the power to change that nature. Nature herself condemns and judges him. It remains oriented toward God, though man might not want to admit this and would rather act as if it were not so. But it is so and will remain so. Thus the abnormal and deliberately abused perceptive faculty that abstractly turns to other objects can only be said to be *misdirected* and turned around and not innately evil:

Therefore, the Bible of the Old and New Testaments does not know of any perceptive faculty in man that is abnormally alienated from its first and last object but at the same time operates normally with respect to all the other objects of its field. The Bible knows of no reality that is not God's creation. Therefore it can know of no activity of reason, no science, no philosophy and the like that is both unmoored from the perception of God and yet in itself good, useful, valuable and praiseworthy. . . . I know of no passage where the Bible admits that this abstraction is good. Rather, it assails this autarchy of a general human perception gone amok and unmoored from God as its origin and object. The Bible protests against any move to banish a true perception of God into some religious corner [6, 483]. . . . If we want to see what the natural capacity for perceiving is like, we should look to the prophet and the apostle [6, 485].

Perception of God is primarily a matter of sensing what lies outside the mind, for the creature is not God but in need of God, who can be admitted only in perception, strictly speaking [*Wahrnehmung*]. But it is also a perception from within, because it involves finding the real God through God, and this is a matter of thinking (ratiocination). This doubleness of reason simply corresponds, in the viewpoint of theology, with the essence of being a creature before God (6, 484).

The situation is analogous for the two moments in man's act of making a decision: desire and will. God also presupposes these two moments as well, when he summons man. This act of making a decision is indissolubly connected with the perception of God, indeed is part of the same original act (6, 489). From the unity which is both origin and goal, even the side of the will can decompose, thereby making evident the "conditions for the possibility" of that unity. In this way, desire and will are distinguished, along with the presence of what must be described as freedom of choice (6, 501), "as the distance from one's own perceptions and desires", corresponding to the phenomenon of reflection on this side of understanding (6, 450). Once more we must stress that these two moments are secondary and must be understood as directed to that original and primary decision for God. And once more, to reject that first decision will only lead to the bloodless abstraction of a so-called *liberum arbitrium*. This really was the great discovery of the serpent in the garden: a would-be neutral ground for man between God and the devil, one indifferent to the act of obedience. This abstraction of a neutral free will (conceived as the faculty of choosing between two arbitrary alternatives) is, as an abstraction, the sign of sin and disobedience.

Now we can see why Barth, apparently in the same breath, can deny to man any “natural” capacity for knowing God and yet grant it to him so totally. Barth denies it where man tries to achieve this knowledge without relying on the Word of God, where he tries to draw out of himself the concept of God, all the while he is stuck in the world of finitude and relativity, and disobediently so. But he grants it where man’s potential knows that it has been created for the sake of revelation. For in this case, potential comes alive in accepting revelation. The meaning of revelation also encompasses the meaning of human potential.

So both statements are true simultaneously: *abstractio mentitur*, *abstractio non mentitur*. Theological anthropology can and may abstract as long as it comes from the concrete and returns to it. Theistic and all other forms of anthropology can and may abstract provided they understand their own provisionality vis-à-vis theology, or at least do not reject theology’s final judgments about the results of their investigations.

One final question must be mooted here. What is the relationship between this “perception” that grounds theological anthropology as the science of man as he actually is and faith? The anthropology of volume 6 does not touch on this point. But the answer is obvious: We can hardly do otherwise than equate them. For faith is the obedient perception and clear affirmation of God’s word, at least insofar as faith is described accurately and undialectically within the order of creation.

So we come once more to the conclusion that all of nature ultimately rests on the event of revelation, and faith is the corresponding factor of this event in the creature. And if the totality of sin cannot change or destroy the original and constant structure of nature, then all forms of unbelief can also be nothing but a despairing cry of *non serviam*, whereby the soul does not *want* faith to be true. But faith coincides with true perception, and that means with the *Urakt*, the primal act, of reason itself.

5. Sin

After all that has just been said, we need not linger long over the problem of sin. We can readily see why Barth could earlier portray sin as pure contradiction, indeed as the contradiction embedded in the very source point of nature. But we can also see how, after deeper reflection on the indestructibility of the constants of nature, Barth moved beyond this position and characterized sin as the “impossible possibility”.

When Barth wrote *The Epistle to the Romans*, he simply equated the contradiction of sin and the distance it causes with the distance of the creature from God. For the act of creation, the act of immediate union of God and man, the act of revelation and faith were all described in the categories of identity. But this meant that distance, sin, contradiction could ultimately only be pure nothingness. To avoid this conclusion, Barth asserted that the contradiction of sin had been superseded and encompassed by the reality of redemption. This solution saturated every line of *The Epistle to the Romans*:

There is no Fall from God in Adam and no judgment of death that does not have its origin at the point where man, already reconciled to God in Christ, has been promised life. . . . Dialectics is the movement of the second moment against the first, the turning or reorientation of the first to the second, the victory of the second over the first.³⁵

It is a sign of the constancy of Barth’s thought that this priority of the second moment, namely, Christ, over the first moment, Adam, became a motive for abandoning dialectics in the old sense and assuming the constancy of created nature—but in Christ. But in the initial period Barth was much more concerned with the miracle of the change, so much so that the identity of the subject in the sinner and in the justified person seemed to be reduced to a bare mathematical point, a mere pin-point hinge for so momentous a change:

The bolt of lightning that will set our existence on fire will not hesitate to leave unconsumed even our being, knowing, thinking, will and doing; perhaps it will melt them down to purify them, perhaps charring them, perhaps entirely consuming them—and yet not entirely! *non omnis moriar!*³⁶

This strange juxtaposition of “not entirely” right after Barth has said “entirely” is the perduring identity of the subject undergoing this

death and rebirth. This identity does not consist in an isolated, neutral zone, either on this side of or beyond sin and grace, but is *what* survives dying and rising. It is true that the sinner is not free of sin in any of the components of his life. His rebellion against God is not some aspect of his being but a minus sign affixed to the bracket of his whole existence, negatively determining it in the eyes of God (“to be lost does not mean to be lost a little but to be lost entirely”).³⁷ It is also true that the person who has been redeemed is a “new” subject in the sense that John 3:3-8 speaks about being born again and I Corinthians 15:35-53 about the total transformation of the resurrection, where the seed really does die so that something entirely new might rise. Nonetheless, this does not mean that two different persons stand over against one another. “It is not as if there were two worlds jostling each other, just as the ‘old man’ and the ‘new man’ that Ephesians talks about are not two separate human beings.”³⁸

While this seems something of a concession in the earlier period, Barth lays great emphasis on the perduring identity in the period of the *Church Dogmatics*. There are two reasons for this. First, when Barth thought about those properties that make a creature truly creaturely, he saw that the creature had to be freed from the constricting confines of dialectics. Thereby he came to see the basic goodness of creation as a reality distinct from God. But, second, this insight can no longer be detached from its christological foundation. It is an inherent good for something to stand over against God because it is a mirror-image of the way the persons of the Trinity relate to each other (6, 260f.).

But this goodness has its guarantee as well as its acme in the twofold unity of Christ, who seals, grounds and perfects the eternal covenant of relatedness between God and the human race. To detach this relatedness from its highest realization would lead to a catastrophe. For how could man fetch himself out of his sin, his contradiction to God, his total orphaned and forlorn desperation? But because the Son of God is the guarantee and foundation of creation, that means that the worst that can happen in the world, the irruption of chaos, has already been overtaken and conquered. In Christ there is no contradiction but only obedient acceptance of the will of God.

And peace *now* reigns between man and God in Christ, however much man may contradict this fact.

There is still a contradiction to God in man, but now it is bracketed in the truth of the Redeemer. One could echo *The Epistle to the Romans* and say that the contradiction is at its most rebellious where it is closest to being dissolved: in the Church, among the redeemed. But it is nonetheless an “impossible possibility”: impossible in Christ, who has broken the contradiction; but a possibility in man, who, although he is a brother of Christ, has said No to this fact. When the sinner opposes God’s summons with his own contradiction, he thereby contradicts himself and his own nature.

Just because the sinner cannot annul his nature, however, does not mean that sin is only partial, that he cannot radically affect the goodness of his nature. Rather, when he contradicts God (and thereby his own nature), he forces his nature to utter a No against God and abuses the potentiality of that nature, turning it into an *act* against God. He gathers all the good powers of his nature into a single pointed blade and hurls this spear against God, defiantly rejecting faith and refusing obedience. Thus it is quite understandable that his central organ, the *ratio fidei*, as a whole has been completely warped (and not just “darkened”, for example).

Considered in the abstract, there is much of man’s natural “capacity” for knowing and willing that remains uncorrupted. In fact, this must be so if the negation of sin is to be possible at all. Yet, however much this may be true, the core of this negation—the not wanting to perceive the word of revelation—makes man nothing less than a total sinner. In this negation, the sinner cannot recognize God, even though this nonrecognition is provoked by an encounter with God and really stems from being blinded by the divine light that lies at the base of his own guilty, cringing darkness.

If we follow up on this distinction between the ontic [*seinshaft*] bond between God and creation, “which cannot be broken by sin” because it is God’s relation to his creature,³⁹ and the actual relationship as determined by one’s actions, which can be and indeed is perverted because of the creature’s abuse of that relationship, then we shall come back to Barth’s earlier distinction between ontic and noetic *ratio*, which he first adumbrated in his

Anselm book.⁴⁰ Both *rationes*, the ontic as well as the noetic *ratio* of the creature, have their roots in the uncreated *ratio veritatis*, which is identical with the *ratio summae naturae*: the divine Word consubstantial with the Father.⁴¹

This is the measure of the truth, ontic as well as noetic, of the creature. And the creature is what it is by virtue of its participation in this standard. But now, so Barth continues (following Anselm), the noetic *ratio*, as “the primary faculty for the formation of concepts and judgments in relation to experience”,⁴² “first of all”⁴³ has its measure in the ontic *ratio*, that is, in the object:

In the right use [of the noetic *ratio*] as determined by the object, we can judge whether we can talk of a *Veritas rationis nostrae*. But even the truth of the existence and essence of the object does not rest in itself but in the divine Word. . . through which it has been created and which has given it its similarity to the Word itself in the act of creation, when that Word was spoken by God himself. The determination of the use of the human *ratio* to a correct use (which proceeds first from the object itself) is therefore only the conduit, as it were, in the middle of which the truth, God himself, pronounces judgment.⁴⁴

Throughout the rest of the analysis in this section, we should note how Barth continually subordinates the noetic *ratio* to the ontic:

As far as what concerns the ontic *ratio*, we conclude from these remarks that its participation in the truth is fundamentally no other than that of the noetic *ratio*, but higher. But this participation must be bestowed on each *ratio* based on the truth itself. . . . But whereas such a bestowal on the side of the noetic *ratio* is really a matter of how the subjective decision falls, with the ontic *ratio* it is different: truth is bestowed on the ontic *ratio* by virtue of the creation of the object, whose *ratio* it is.⁴⁵

That means that noetic *ratio* (that is, human knowledge as it actually occurs) is *subordinate* to the ontic *ratio* (that is, to the truth content of created things). Furthermore, this means that the noetic *ratio* is not given, as is the ontic one, a continual pervasive presence of the truth once and for all (although it can never possess the truth “except in the event of knowing”).⁴⁶

The relevance of this seemingly abstract teaching for our present question is clear: it could be that the ontic *ratio* of things (for which truth is something inherent) has not been affected by sin, while the discovery of the truth (which occurs only on the noetic side) has

been damaged. In other words, man could be blinded by sin, as it were, and no longer recognize God's revelations of the eternal *ratio* in the ontic *ratio* of creation. This approach is extremely appealing, and it is quite tempting to interpret Romans 1:18f. in this way.

There are discrepancies in this interpretation, however, that perhaps suggest deeper flaws in the whole doctrine of sin and its consequences. To begin with, it is insufficient to situate the subjective, active "decision-character" of our knowledge of intrawordly objects on the same plane with God's own active and personal decision to reveal himself in creation. For creatures possess a genuine, if creaturely and relative, truth content that somehow can be recognized as such, even if they cannot be explicitly known in God nor God in them. Such knowability is guaranteed by the continuing veracity of created things.

In the *temporal and intrawordly* process of acquiring knowledge, the act-character of knowing has, at least in principle, the same dignity as the objective character of the things being known. But the point of Barth's distinction here, whereby he tends to fuse the act-character of worldly knowing with that of revelation (and thus of faith), is all too clear. Barth's subordination of the noetic to the ontic *ratio* might seem surprising coming from him. But it hides a tendency to disallow an "imaginative" quality to the noetic that he concedes to the ontic. Noetic *ratio* seems to be violently reduced here to mere hearing.⁴⁷ Consequently, Barth concedes to the knowing faculty "an a priori capacity for forming concepts and judgments"⁴⁸ "according to the rules of a logic built on the law of noncontradiction".⁴⁹ But these principles of thought are not some game of pure formal logic unrelated to life. On the contrary, they are so transcendently bonded with the laws of the object that only by using them can we think and know correctly.

What must be borne in mind is that the structure of knowing has its own ontic dignity. And there is no reason why it should not also be a ("continuous") image of the *Ur-Subjekt* God, just as the ontic *ratio* is an image of the *Ur-Objekt* God. This structure of knowing, however, has not been annulled as such by sin. Logic is as true as it was before, but now it serves the sinner to help him build statements against God instead of for him. Put in another way, the act of

knowing of course has an event-aspect; but it is grounded in the *nature* of knowing, which as such remains intact, no matter how “corrupt” the act of knowing might prove to be.

This brings us to the point where we can see something that has been obscured time and again in theological anthropology. The spontaneity of human knowing belongs to its very nature, which has not been destroyed even by sin. This spontaneity means that the question of the natural a priori structure of cognition, so often discussed and debated by Catholic philosophy, cannot simply be passed by. In giving equal billing to the will, to the act of decision in the very core of reason’s reality, Barth clearly shows that he is unwilling to deny this spontaneity. But he lapses into a deep silence when it comes to the issue of the a priori structure of the agent intellect, the *intellectus agens*. For here is the Danger Zone where the concept of Being as such and the *analogia entis* lie.

A strange passage in the *Church Dogmatics* might throw some light on this obscure point. In the doctrine of our knowledge of God, Barth proposes this principle: Only through God can God be known. Barth claims that this principle is necessary to theology, not because of some critical or agnostic theory in epistemology, but because of revelation itself.

If we are required to say by the Word of God that it is God’s good pleasure to be so known by man that human knowing possesses as such its own self-subsistent importance next to and alongside God’s own work and that therefore a true knowing of God only takes place in a two-sided mutuality, then it must be possible for this to happen. That is, we have to say after the fact that no epistemology can claim this to be a contradiction. But we are not proceeding from an epistemology here. We may circumscribe the human capacity for knowledge in whatever way seems appropriate: more narrowly at one point, more broadly at another. But the statement that God can only be known through God (this is the God who has revealed himself in his Word!) is neither derived from nor grounded in this or that understanding of the human capacity for knowledge [3, 47].

Theology, then, derives, not from an epistemological theory, but from the Word of God that illumines human nature. And the covenant relation between God and man, the partnership between the two, is in a true sense “two-sided”, with interplay on both sides, a theme that Barth continued to develop in volumes 5, 6 and 7 of the *Church Dogmatics*. Whether the human side of this relation, with its

spontaneous acts of knowing, is accorded the verdict “important in its own right” probably depends on the emphasis it is given. In any case, the difficulties that arise when trying to describe how an absolute and a relative subject can stand over against one another are not resolved by refusing to accord the human side its own legitimacy and spontaneity.

To look at the paradox right in the eye, we may say that the “receptivity” of reason reigns in the highest act of faith and lies completely beyond and above the natural tension between spontaneity and receptivity, as Barth well knew.⁵⁰ If this is true, we cannot dispute the moment of spontaneity that is present in both the act of accepting faith and in the act of rejecting it. But then, if this is true, we cannot reject the problem of the analogy of being, for it now appears as a law embedded in the inner noetic-ontic nature of the creature. This is a law that is not annulled inside the act of faith but whose abstractness is filled with something concrete. On the other hand, inside the act of unbelief, this abstractness remains unfilled and is perverted to use against God.

According to Barth’s own presupposition, a “neutral” use of this law is not possible. Such a neutral use would itself be a decision against the true concreteness in faith. It would be a sign that man wants to cling to his “structure of knowing” as his final crutch instead of guiding and subordinating it to its true purpose: the right perceiving of the living Word. Such a refusal of concrete obedience could of course, as Barth said, be used as a tool against God. Indeed, it would have to become such a source of power: *the* invention of the Antichrist, as Barth so famously put it. This happens when man is offered a good means: he perverts it to evil ends.

Barth might well be able to concede this, it would seem, without having to abandon his basic outlook on the relation of nature and event or on the potentiality of the creature versus the actuality of the Word and faith. So this means that our next task will involve a definitive interpretation of the analogy of being. Does it still have a function, as these distinctions seem to imply?

6. Analogia Entis

We can now conclude the expository section of Part II of this book with a brief glance at the reasons that prompted Barth to reject so vigorously what he called the analogy of being. Based on what has already been said, the reasons will not come as much of a surprise, but this background will also help contextualize his reasoning and to some extent make it understandable.

We will summarize his objections to the analogy of being under four headings. They are all mutually reinforcing, although the first two are more decisive, while the last two are pressed into service more as a way of articulating his own doctrine.

1. The concept of being does not suffice for expressing the decisive element in the relation between God and creature. In fact, it obscures it by making the commonality in the concept of being something that one more or less finds lying about, a fact that seems all too obvious, whereas it is the least obvious reality of all: pure miracle, absolute event and astonishing vitality [*Aktuosität*]. The concept of being inverts this, making the summit of the pyramid the base. This basis is supposed to be what both subjects have in common; but the real basis is what is most unique about both subjects, where there is no similarity. The one subject is self-positing, that is, exists *a se*. The second is other-positing and exists *ab alio*. This is the indissoluble contrariety.^{[51](#)}

2. The concept of being, no matter how analogously we may conceive it, remains precisely that: a concept. That is, it is *one* ordering schema under which God and creature are subsumed in common. This demonstrates not only the impious traducing of the reverence due to God by the creature (who subsumes its Creator under one of its own conceptual possibilities), but it also represents an unheard of anticipation of God's own self-disclosure. Only God has the right and power to express what he is and how his most perfect being is to be named.^{[52](#)}

3. The concept of being, like all the other concepts derived from a finite and relative being, can itself only be finite and relative. The operation of "negating" the finite and limited, putting a negative sign

in front of the concept of the finite, which the thinker claims gives a referential claim, in fact leads nowhere. It gives us a sham absolute. It is actually only the attempt to absolutize the formula for finite being and thus to project the creature into the divine.⁵³

4. In the hands of a sinner, the concept of being becomes the most dangerous instrument for disobedience, because with it the sinner purports to produce something from within himself that can only come as a gift from God. In this respect, it is the most direct expression of disobedience. It secularizes, falsifies and superficializes our real status before God by abusing the grace of that relationship.⁵⁴

The *analogia entis* must be replaced by the *analogia fidei*, for only the latter can uproot all these dangers and abuses. The analogy of faith expresses the fact (1) that all knowledge of God rests on a prior revelation by God from above, should this in fact occur; (2) that man gains knowledge from this revelation only by freely surrendering his own truth in worship in the act of faith (in this act of faith there is indeed a real analogy and a real gain in knowledge, but only as creaturely potentiality is drawn into the divine actualization in the event of revelation); and finally analogy of faith says (3) that God's self-revelation must be grasped at the point where it is most unambiguously expressed: at its center, Jesus Christ. For it is in Christ that God's revealed presence in history and creation can become an event for the believer.

But once we admit this centrality, many new implications open up for a faith seeking understanding, including a rapprochement with the analogy of being, and even the possibility of incorporating the analogy of being into the analogy of faith. First of all, we should recall the concept of "presupposition", which is indispensable in Barth's thought. For if revelation is centered in Jesus Christ, there must be by definition a periphery to this center. Thus, as we say, the order of the Incarnation presupposes the order of creation, which is not identical with it. And, because the order of creation is oriented to the order of the Incarnation, it is structured in view of the Incarnation:

it contains images, analogies, as it were, dispositions, which in a true sense are the presuppositions for the Incarnation.

For example, interhuman relationships—between man and woman or between friends—are a true presupposition for the fact that Jesus can become our brother. It is *because* man is a social being who lives by intersubjective relationships that he is capable in the first place of entering into a covenant with God, as God has intended (6, 266-67). And *this* natural order is for its part only possible on the basis of God's own interpersonal nature, his triune nature, of which the human being is a true image (6, 262).

Certainly one can call this an analogy of relation [*analogia relationis*], as Barth admits (5, 206, 219). But this way of talking is all too Scholastic and expresses nothing but a relation of being. Similarly, one could speak of an *analogia proportionis* (6, 262-64), a classical concept in the doctrine of the analogy of being. For all these terms of proportionality are meant to establish for the Scholastics the similarity in being between God and creature. Finally, one can speak of an *analogia operationis* (7, 116), but even here the operation in question is but a form of being, the very form, in fact, in which it comes to its fulfillment.

The highest analogy that Barth will describe (without directly calling it that) is the *analogia adorationis et orationis*: God's gracious inclusion of the creature into God's own dominion, where God gives to his children power over his own will and heart. This is an ineffable analogy to how the Divine Persons are mutually determined by one another in the unity of their one nature.

Barth had no difficulty in recognizing and approving the analogy of being in this form, that is, within the context of an overarching analogy of faith (3, 89-90). He saw that the concept of being could not be avoided in theology's doctrine of God, even though it may be dangerous when used as a neutral instrument: "We should not give way to a resentment against the concept of being as such" (3, 291-92).

And, in many passages of the *Church Dogmatics*, we have already seen how Barth describes the God-creature relation in the classical terms of the analogy of being. As in the first volume, where he says: "Despite all the dissimilarities, the human potential for seizing the

promise in faith is not without a similarity to God's own potential for fulfilling this promise" (1, 256). The second volume recognizes "that between the love with which God loves us and the love by which we are commanded to love him, there exists a similarity. Despite the majestic superordination of the first over the second, there is nonetheless an ordination that justifies us in calling both loves love" (2, 435). The third volume says: "In order for it really to be *we* who know God, it is necessary that we depict [bezeichnen] God with our images, concepts and words and not simply as something utterly foreign and other" (3, 252). The fifth volume speaks of created being in this way: "It is not nothing but indeed something. But it is something that hovers on the edge of nothingness. . . . It is determined for God just as certainly as it is real only through God" (5, 430-31).

The sixth volume goes even farther, culminating in a conclusive formulation (which goes so far that it protests in vain against having given expression to the analogy of being) (6, 391): "If human being is a being in correspondence to its determination to be God's covenant comrade, then the statement is unavoidable that human being corresponds to God himself: to the being of the Creator" (6, 390). And finally in the book on Anselm, he puts it with Scholastic simplicity:

What God's existence has in common with all other beings is of course only objective reality. But the objective reality of all beings outside himself is a reality that can be conceived as not present or there [*als nicht-vorhanden*]. . . . Inasmuch as the existence of all beings outside of God are conditioned by his being-there, they exist, as it were, in the bracket of his being-there (which we cannot conceive as not being there!), and that is the only way we can conceive of their being there. . . . There are existing beings [*Wesen*]. God too is an existing being [*Wesen*]. But only God the Creator is an existing being [*Wesen*] whose existence [*Dasein*] we cannot imagine away or think not to be. In God's bracket, there is a true and genuine existence of other beings too. . . . But they possess only imperfectly (and always will) what God has perfectly (by nature and not by gradual achievement): existence [*Dasein*].⁵⁵

This is the analogy of being when it is conceived inside the analogy of faith. We shall not investigate here the ultimate implications of the all-encompassing bracket. We only point out that within this bracket a space has been vouchsafed: the space between the order of creation and the order of the Incarnation. Therefore it will not do

simply to give the priority between the two to the second order. This does not imply that there is a “reciprocal priority” between the two. No, they are interrelated as one interlocking order, inasmuch as creation is the *outer* ground of the Covenant and the Covenant is the *inner* ground of creation. Just because the Covenant is the ground and goal of creation does not mean it is creation’s form and content. If the images inherent in creation are to be lifted up and used as images that really tell us something about the history of the Incarnation, then we cannot say that in the potentiality they are without value as images. And this in no way prejudices how we decide the way these images are to be recognized as *similia* of God.

We can sharpen Barth’s concept of analogy still more by examining what he has to say about obediential potentiality [*potentia oboedientialis*]. When Barth was publicly putting distance between himself and Brunner, he had to reject this concept because in Brunner this concept was in fact a possibility for being related to God’s grace that inhered in human nature as such, both ontically and noetically, even if Brunner conceded that it was only a negative possibility. But it was meant to serve as an opportunity, a “point of contact” onto which grace could alight.⁵⁶

But Barth’s attitude gradually changed: the more strongly his thought was affected by its christological starting point, the more jejune and superfluous became his polemic against *potentia oboedientialis*. Now Barth saw the whole of nature and the order of creation from the beginning as nothing but the potential for receiving the act of revelation. In other words, nature is the presupposition for grace, which means that the question about possibility or *potentia* has already been overtaken by reality.

The essence of creation, then, is defined by its capacity for perceiving and accepting the Word of God and for being the stage for the event of the Incarnation of the Son. And Barth finessed the problem of “nature in itself”. For he did not describe nature’s disponability to God’s revelation as an inherent property, power, potentiality, as a point of contact that it possessed. Rather, nature’s disponability was described as a “presupposition” decreed by and derived from the Word of God itself. In this way, Barth outflanked the danger that lies in the use of this concept.

Creation's capacity to join in a covenant with God, its orientation to its already established goal, its instrumental availability is in no way its natural property but is an adaptation devised by God to make it suitable for God's plans (6, 267-68). There is nothing in the creature that is inherently suitable to be the point of contact. Rather, the whole creature, with its light and shadows, has become the fitting occasion for that unheard of surpassing of nature that took place in the Passion, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ (5, 422-46). And this is why creation in the final analysis was called "very good" (7, 49).

Based on these presuppositions, Barth had no difficulty in recognizing that the creature is clay in the hands of the Creator and that it *can* heed the Word of God in all things, even though this obedience corresponds to no innate natural faculty in the creature. Thus in his interpretation of Genesis 1:11 ("Let them produce vegetation according to their various kinds"), Barth has this to say:

We need not appeal to an immanent faculty. Rather we should say that we are dealing here with the prototype of what the Bible understands by the creature's capacity for obedience (the *potentia oboedientialis*). For the Bible, a real potential leads to a real stance of obedience, which is but the corresponding response to the gift of hearing [5, 171].

But one should not confuse this with a potentiality in nature: Man has been determined as the being fitted to be God's partner in the Covenant. But that is no human property. It does not belong to us by virtue of our being God's creatures. We are not created as God's partners but *to be* God's partners. For that to happen is the affair of God's free grace [6, 285-86].

In nature everything can be two-sided. But *de facto*, with grace, everything is one-sided, determined by God, and so there is no need for a "point of contact" (6, 387). God has so created the world as to be *amenable* to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

For other hands than God's, creation would not prove to be amenable to become what it was determined to be. It needs the master who created the instrument to play it aright. Only thus can its goodness, indeed its perfection, become *real* and *apparent*. This forestalls all the laments and complaints of the creature against its alleged imperfections. But how the instrument is being used is not the affair of the instrument [7, 49].

Barth's complete acceptance of the *potentia oboedientialis* once more gives further support to the concept of the analogy of being, of course in the way Barth means it: only as a function of what he has called the analogy of faith. Faith is an act given to us by God, but one that marshals the whole creaturely dimension of our being. In faith, the creature in obedience does what it cannot do on its own but that God gives it the ability to do: to transcend itself and thereby come to the meaning intended for it from the moment of creation. "To that extent, we can grant the legitimacy of Thomas Aquinas' phrase, which has been so dangerously applied in the past: *gratia non tollit [non destruit] sed [praesupponit et] perficit naturam*" (3, 463).

INTERPRETATION

Chapter 5

ZEAL FOR HIS FATHER'S HOUSE

This book has four parts. The first sets the stage and makes a few introductory or anticipatory remarks. This, the second, discusses not just Barth's theology but the architecture that gives it its unique structure. Part III shall attempt to do the same for contemporary Catholic theology, while we reserve Part IV for concluding remarks about the result of this confrontation.

So far Part II has been devoted to a thorough exposition of what Barth has said: not his whole theology, of course, but a few key questions that show in what direction the whole work is headed. We are now breaking off this exposition and moving into the second phase of Part II. We do not intend to give a full-scale critique of Barth's thought but to throw some interpretive light on our exposition. If up to now we have tried to understand the content of Barth's thought, we will henceforth try to interpret the whole in its *form*, and thus in its deeper intentionality.

Interpretation always includes within it a rendering of judgment, but this should be done for the sake of better understanding and not merely to criticize for its own sake. A critique does have its proper place and will follow in due course (in this work, in the last half of the book, Parts III and IV). But it will only be legitimate if we are as sure as we humanly can be that we have understood the ultimate intention of the author.

When Barth pulled on the bell-rope of *The Epistle to the Romans* and its ominous bell resounded so authentically that it awakened the whole theological world, surely the peal of this bell carried such force that it would continue to echo in everything that Barth would later write. The ultimate purpose of so prophetic a thinker and preacher could never really change. And if we were to give that passion a name, we could not do other than to call it Barth's consuming zeal for God.

In *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth took up the Kierkegaardian term "infinite qualitative difference". Eventually he had to leave the

term behind, but the zeal to which it refers remained the same. The terminology would change from time to time, but not the zeal, the passionate refusal to deviate even a hair's breadth from the center where revelation stands, that "narrow way that leads to salvation", where we also find all the personages of the Bible: the martyr, the prophet, the apostle, the true believer.

Barth has never forgotten for a moment that creaturely being has no other meaning but to give glory to God alone: *sola Dei gloria!* All his efforts were harnessed to see this glory, to worship it, to love it above all else, to show how it alone is worthy of our love. Rarely has Christendom heard God's love sung with such infinite, melodious beauty as in this life work.

God has stooped down to the world and become man without sundering his divinity. The Christian can imitate his example by being fully inserted in the world without sundering his connection from his own center, which is his faith. Incarnation entails a union of divinity and humanity, but this "and" does not imply a compromise between the two. The same can be true of the Christian: in the world *and* faithful, but without compromise.

If we are not to misunderstand Barth's purpose, we must see it as an expression of the final purpose of the martyrs and saints. How else can we explain this steadfastness of theme, the tireless variations he weaves around this theme, the certainty in ecstasy, this magnetic power for ordering all things to their center, this relentless submission of everything that has meaning and value to the throne of God, to whom belong all worship and love?

It is hardly surprising that this zeal for God first took the form in the young Barth of a relativizing of everything that was not divine. It is even less surprising when we recall the context of Barth's efforts: he was out to topple the false gods that pious and upright people, even members of the Church, had built for themselves. He certainly brought down the temple, but, as we say, the collapse was so powerful that our young Samson was himself almost buried under the falling debris.

Even in the later writings, however, there is an almost Old Testament pathos that pervades all his work. Here is a Jeremiah, consumed with the fire of zeal, surrounded by misunderstanding and

more and more constricted in his effect. Here is Job, suffering the dialectical shifts from judgment to love and back again. Here is the sardonic Preacher of Ecclesiastes, the skeptic for God's sake, weighing all earthly values in his scales of judgment and finding them wanting.

While he eventually dropped the term, "the infinite qualitative difference" permeated all his work. Every line of Barth proclaims that what has been created is not God but is creaturely and therefore relative. Even creaturely truth and goodness and beauty are relative: they come from God and return to him. In themselves they have no consistency, no power, no meaning, no existence.

Yet the truth of the creature is no less true because of its limitations and its open-ended reliance on other relative truths. Barth did grow more mellow in his later years and could cast a joyful glance at the things of creation. But that was because his later work was a reflection of God's outlook, whose eye looks on the things he has made. Barth wanted to see things as they are meant to be for God. And that is the grace of judgment. For God judges his creation by binding it more to his truth than to its own, making it in eternity what it could never be in time.¹

God has become man, not to be backed into a corner but to establish his dominion over all creatures by suffering, dying and rising within the very world he has made. What worldly wisdom can compete with such sovereignty? What human folly can frustrate such a plan of sovereign love? On the contrary, is it not precisely the folly of the world, its sin, unbelief to the point of killing God's Son: Have not these become the very means whereby God proves his love? Schelling and Berdyaev are wrong when they depict created freedom as equipoised to God's, as a kind of demonic obstacle to his own loving will.

Nothing is more certain for Barth than human freedom and human sin (which do not annul freedom). But both rest within the threshold of the finite, and God is greater than these limits, for he is God. And he has proved his superiority over our limits by plunging into the seeming tragedy and evil of creaturely finitude and overcoming it. Why should God not be free enough in his infinite freedom to leave room for a genuine freedom within the matrix of his creation? Those

who truly believe in God already know that we need not torment ourselves over how these two freedoms interact and cooperate.

The relative comes from the absolute, born in its love. The cooperative work among the creatures of this world is accompanied and dominated by God's activity, yet it is its own relative activity. The matrix of the world is not closed in on itself. It is open to God not just by virtue of its creation and grounding in God; rather, in its whole history at each moment, it is open to God's action, which does not annul or rend the fabric of that history but gives it its true form (7, 138). Even if there were an element of determinism in the world, this would not close the world off from God (7, 141). Precisely because God is God, unimaginably superior to any creature, the creature can rest assured that it has been saved and protected in this nonrelative truth that towers over all contradictions and opposites.

If it seemed in *The Epistle to the Romans* that the fire of God's absolute reality was threatening to consume the creature to the very core of its being, the *Church Dogmatics* shifted perspective and saw God's all-consuming presence more as the fire of absolute love. Barth was rather sparing in his use of the word "love", the better to bring out the deeds of this omnipotent love. As we say, creation and Christianity are for Barth triumphant realities. Not in labor and pain does God struggle with his enemies. Instead, Christ has put an end to hostility on the Cross (Eph 2:16) and sits at the right hand of God "to wait until his enemies are made his footstool" (Heb 10:12-13).

On all sides, the creature is encircled in this ring of fire, the fire of God's victorious love. Barth hews strictly to the biblical message when he comes to discuss what lies ahead for man. Ahead lies God. Through death, the creature passes over to God. The limits of finitude are good because they establish the space God has given us according to the limits he has determined. The created spirit does not have to look forward to a natural immortality but to God. A life in God. A resurrection of the flesh in God (6, 770).

Except as an estuary opening out into God, death would only be a descent into the shadowy nothingness of Sheol. And death will indeed involve judgment: a judgment on the perversion of man in time, on his sin of not having believed in God. But this judgment will

also show that God is just, eternally just, and that he was right with his plan of love.

This love is the ultimate necessity [*Notwendigkeit*] that transforms all distress [*Notwendet*] and indeed for the sake of this transformation [*Wendung*] permits all distress. God's love is more exigent than any necessity in the world, for it is stronger than all the powers of the world:

We have no choice but to accept and make vivid in us the message of the revelation of God's dealings with us as that has come down to us. We are compelled to take this course, not because of the compulsion of a force hitting us from the outside, but by the love of God addressed to us. We can maneuver around force, but we cannot get around love. When we encounter the truth of our existence in God's self-revelation, we learn that we have been sought out by him, found, loved, redeemed and called to faith [5, 444-45].

When God acts, his action is by definition more powerful in comparison to the actions of the creature. . . . But the exaltedness of God's action consists in being the work of his *eternal love*. It would be a poor description of God's power if we were to see it only as of much greater potency than what a creature might possess, or if we were to posit God's power as one vast sea of which the creature shares an allotment. God's power is superior because God is eternal love. God loves *first*. If the creature is to return that love, it must first be loved. God loves because that is his *essence*: as Father, Son and Spirit, he is love pure and simple, and he loves his creatures from the overflowing of this essential love. But the creature can only accept that love and try to respond, however inadequately. God loves *eternally*. As the Creator, he also loves in time. But the creature can only love God in the best of cases in the time allotted [7, 121-22].

Love is either free or it is not love. God gives of himself, therefore, by accompanying his creature. But he is neither his own prisoner nor that of his creature. He acts always according to his own good pleasure. His freedom is displayed in the very fact that his love has overflowed into creating the world and in sustaining and accompanying it [7, 123].

Now love always involves a choice. It is always directed toward a particular object, and hence it is exclusive in that sense. And that is why love always has about it a zealous, wrathful and judging aspect. "God says Yes, but in saying this he is uttering a No to what has not been addressed with his Yes" (7, 405). That God is jealous and wrathful is but the expression of his grace:

God could indeed be a pleasant, easy-going, self-contented God. But he has taken upon himself the burden and care of his confrontation with the chaos and nothingness of sin. He would rather be wretched *with* his creature than be the serene God *of* a wretched creature [7, 412-13].

He chooses to enter the fray to fight for his own cause rather than to be a passive spectator. His love fights its own battles and, in so doing, it passes judgment in wrath and condemnation on everything that love has not chosen. But what creature, having been created in love, would not be the object of God's electing love? God hates nothing he has created. And he will allow nothing he loves to be torn away from him.

The predominance of love. Wrath and judgment as forms of love. We listen attentively: If this is the core of Karl Barth's message (and it is), what has happened to his theology? Is it really a theology? Or perhaps, is it the only authentic theology? Or are Barth's many critics right who smell the scent of the old dismissed philosophy, metaphysics and gnosis? We have soared high. Perhaps too high? Are there limits that a *theologia viatorum* must respect? Has Barth overrun them?

What Barth is ultimately driving at here can only be divined by looking at his doctrine of predestination. Is this doctrine possible? Is it biblically based? Is it perhaps the true reading of the word of revelation? An interpretation that lay buried for millennia and only now, like lava from the bowels of the earth, is surging up into the light of day? This doctrine, as Barth interprets it, certainly stands out. In Barth's own words, his version,

when we look back on the history of the doctrine of predestination, throws such an *uncanny* light on the issue that one must wonder whether we have really got things right, whether we have not taken something for our reflections that does not belong to us [4, 160].

Barth felt that he was almost blinded by his discovery. And he knew that he had to face a certain loneliness, given the history of the tradition, if he were to stand up for his doctrine. But he also said, "It is actually rather strange that what should be the most obvious and universal doctrine of all must be defended under the appearance of being a novelty" (4, 168). "However foolhardy and presumptuous this might sound, I cannot deviate even an inch from this teaching" (7, 419).

So now we must look at this doctrine, for it promises to give us the key to Barth's entire theology.

Chapter 6

PRAEDESTINATIO GEMINA

Even as early as *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth had turned sharply against Calvin in his exposition of predestination. Calvin seemed to him to be in danger of being counted among those who “rant on too much” (*qui nimis crasse delirant*).¹ Barth felt that the whole Augustinian and Reformed approach to this deep mystery was a “mythologizing” attempt to delimit God’s activity.² Their version of predestination focused too quickly, too drastically on the psychological unity of the individual, making predestination a kind of iron-clad “natural law” that decided the fate of salvation or damnation for the individual in eternity, bypassing God’s role in this decision.³

Barth’s own teaching on this point took shape early. Even the first, predialectical edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* contains it (in fact, fully developed). His first attempts at sketching a dogmatics continue to echo with this theme. And volume 4 of the *Church Dogmatics* is devoted exclusively to it. Without doubt, it is the most magnificent, unified and well-grounded section of the whole work. Written with greatest love, it is the heartbeat of his whole theology, a kind of dithyramb of nearly six hundred pages, which one must read on one’s own to catch its simultaneous audacity and careful sobriety. Certainly no dry summary can do it justice.

And here finally Barth’s central thesis finds its ultimate triumph: God’s mystery can only be understood from his self-revelation in Jesus Christ, and any relapse, like philosophy’s, into an “abstract” God would have only disastrous consequences. This is true everywhere, but in theology the effects are especially devastating. But seen in the perspective of revelation, the doctrine of election is the *summa evangelii* (4, 11; 4, 25). It is *the* key for understanding all of God’s revelation in creation, reconciliation and redemption.

Through this revelation we get a glimpse into the innermost mystery of God himself: his primal will (6,175) and decision (4, 53), which are the source and fountain of all the graces that come streaming out of God.

The doctrine of election is the warrant and witness that all God's way and works have their beginning in his grace. By virtue of this primal decision, God is in every way a gracious God. The doctrine of election tells us that we may be certain that God's self-determination is identical with his decision to turn to us. And this turn toward us is the best thing that could ever happen, for Jesus Christ himself is the reality and the revelation of this turn, which means that it is both eternal yet encompasses our temporal lives. It gives assurance that God's decision to save is both totally free and yet irrevocable, incapable of deceiving or lying. . . . And this holds true for all God's ways and works without exception. There is no created nature that does not have its being, essence and continued existence from grace or that can be known in any other way but through grace.

Sin and death, the devil and hell, God's permissive will and knowledge, his power to negate, do not form exceptions to this doctrine. For God's will and knowledge are gracious even where he works his will by negating and denying (or permitting). God's servants—and thus the servants of his grace—are also God's foes. . . . But God remains gracious even in his denial of grace [*Ungnade*]. And that denial cannot be recognized for what it is except through grace [4, 98-99]. . . . The doctrine of election testifies that God's grace is the origin of all his works and ways. It is therefore the "common denominator" that cannot be ignored throughout the rest of the operation, for it is the numeral that makes the rest of the addition add up [4,100].

The source and beginning of all election, behind and over which there is no earlier, no higher and next to which there is no other, election is Jesus Christ alone. In him, God chooses himself, but in the form of a creature. On him, the gracious Mediator and Redeemer, all creation is founded "from before the foundation of the world". He alone is the primal object of the Father's election. It is in him that the family of man is summoned to election. And the individual is summoned to his own personal and private relationship with God only as a part of this family. This primal election of Christ is the foundation for the whole epic of divine providence, so that the doctrine of providence must be unconditionally regarded as part of the more comprehensive doctrine of election, but not the reverse (4, 47f.).

The flaw in most of the previous doctrines of election was a failure to contextualize election as part of God's relationship to Christ. Previous theories misconstrued the christological basis that is so clearly witnessed to in the Bible. Instead, they regarded election as a purely individual happening between an abstract (and therefore terrifying) absolute God and the isolated creature viewed atomistically. But it is the Son of God who is the object of God's election from all eternity. He is the one who has been elected and

chosen to lead the as-yet uncreated world back to God. He will stand up for it and plead its case, take its guilt upon his shoulders, atoning for this guilt in place of all those who are to become sinners; and thus he will become in this sense the object of divine “reprobation” and rejection.

And the one who so offers himself to the Father is himself God and therefore the *subject* of election (4, 81). For he is the one who offered to take our place and be rejected in our stead, who offered to “become sin” for our sake. This is just as much an example of loving and gracious predestination as the will of the Father: “This one person, Jesus Christ, was with God in the beginning. And that is just what predestination means” (4, 157). In this beginning, everything is clarity, love and grace. In God there is no shadow of darkness. And because that is so, the gospel is entirely and wholly a message of glad tidings, of great joy. If there had been some shadow of twilight, a twinge of hesitation, doubt or reservation at the beginning, then the gospel too could only bring partial good news, partial grace and partial redemption (4, 13).

But what has happened is that theology and preaching have too often not realized this. For whenever our preaching or our theology insinuates a partial darkness, a twilight of ambiguity in that full light of God, whenever it imputes an undisclosed primal secret in God’s counsels that sets limits to our love, our faith, our hope, leaving them to shudder in the terrors of an impenetrable darkness, then our preaching has failed us and our theology has not attuned itself to authentic Christian realities:

The history of the doctrine of predestination is pervaded by the struggle to determine whether in the mystery of election we are dealing with light or darkness, whether the electing God and the people whom he has elected are known or unknown quantities. But even this determination is beyond our grasp so long as we do not venture to take the step of admitting that the same person, Jesus Christ, stands on *both* sides of the equation describing divine predestination. Time and again, one side or the other (the subject or the object of the concept) gets lost in that darkness; and, as a rule, both do. And so we must continually respond to that darkness with the final and decisive word about this issue: it is well past the time when we can still continue to play at this game. This is a deeply disedifying spectacle, where we merely toy around with what are, in the last analysis, mysteries. This game is inauthentic, enervating and in any case deeply unchristian [4, 158-59].

In God's eternal election, he knew from before the foundation of the world what the world and the creature could turn out to be, which means that the act of creation is itself a risk, a venture, a responsibility and thus an act of commitment by the Creator to his creation. And by deciding to speak his Word, to give his Son to us, God has first and foremost rendered a decision about himself: "God would no longer be alone with himself, for now this human being would be an integral part of his divine will" (4, 176). The danger that would confront the world would first be a danger for God himself. What God foresaw would now be the occasion for the work he would undertake and the pledge of the grace he would pour out.

It is only in Christ that we can speak of such a thing as "double predestination". In choosing Christ, "God has destined man for the first side of predestination: election, blessedness and life, while he has reserved for himself the flip side of predestination: rejection, condemnation and death" (4, 177). God is obliged in justice to reject sinners, and he must, as God, draw his sinless Son to himself as the first of the Elect. But God will do this in such a way that the Son of God will load all the sins on himself, "even to tasting reprobation, death and hell" (4, 179), while sinners—totally and without exception trapped in their disobedience—are to be set free for the sake of his Son, "so that he might have mercy on all" (Rom 11:32).

This is the wondrous exchange that happened at Golgotha, the barter by which God chooses the cross of a criminal for his throne, where the Son of God suffers what the Son of Man should suffer. A bargain for us, but irrevocable too, for it took place to fulfill God's eternal counsel. God can never go back on this trade-off. That is why Paul says that there is nothing—truly *nothing*—worthy of damnation in those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1) [4,182].

That is why no one who believes in Christ can believe at the same time in his own reprobation. We can only think of our rejection by God if we start to look into ourselves or on a God who had not surrendered his Son for the world. But once we come to know God's mercy and justice on the Cross, we no longer have any grounds or justification to fear that we have been rejected by God [4,183-84].

This binary reciprocity entailed by God's election in Jesus Christ, our brother, is the basic theme and leitmotif of the whole of salvation history, indeed is the very watermark of creation itself. In creation, there is already an act of "election", the choosing of cosmic order

and the correlative rejection and banishment of chaos. And this two-sidedness is carried on within the elected (and therefore good) creation by the division of light and darkness, day and night, earth and water. But these subsequent divisions take place *within* the first decision by which the world was elected to be. They are the token, the admonition, the representation, of the prior division that grounds creation itself: God's initial decision to choose cosmos and reject chaos.

This decision ultimately derives from Christ and his Cross. Here God's will shows itself to be not at all two-edged but totally good and merciful, one decision with one result. For the most extreme thing that God can do to reject and divide is the Cross itself. And the Christian is not permitted to go behind this event with more ultimate speculations. Only *one* person has been able to measure the full depths of what it means in truth to be abandoned by God: the one who knew who God really is and what the eternal life of love means. Only he has known suffering "without limits, without meaning and without future",⁴ to the point of descending into hell,⁵ the one who did everything for us and for all persons.

"No longer need we go down into hell, nor should we even *want* to, in order to ask ourselves there why God has abandoned us."⁶ For we do not know what sin truly is. We can only measure its consequences after the fact from seeing the one who has experienced it in all its horror. "In Christ let us bring what we are to God's light. We will have done enough if we can just do that."⁷ "What is our punishment? Precisely to know the unending torment that it has cost God to assume our place in the man Jesus Christ so that we need not suffer. Is there no other punishment? No, no other punishment."⁸

Outside the Cross there is no judgment. Every act of judgment has been handed over to the Son, who judges from the Cross. Those who cling to the Cross in faith have already put judgment behind them.⁹ Because God himself was once "history", over and done with in the grave, so too sin has been buried in this history and is itself past history:¹⁰ "He alone has suffered the eternal death we deserve" (3, 456).

If this holds true of creation, this double-sided reciprocity is all the more clearly seen in salvation history. To choose one person always means not choosing another. Yet, at the same time, this chosen one, Christ, has been chosen for the sake of those not chosen, and he vicariously bears their fate in his destiny. In this way those not chosen become in truth the elect, while the one elected is rejected for the sake of the others.

In this regard, Barth has given us an extremely careful and nuanced exegesis of Romans 9-11, in which the dialectic of Jacob and Esau is but the opening adumbration of the dialectic of Church and Synagogue, pagan and Jew. And this dialectic culminates in that absolute mutual representation of election and reprobation, Jesus Christ. By virtue of Christ's death, God elects the unchosen pagans so that the chosen people, the Jews, may come to their definitive election by passing through the experience of rejection. And in this way, in this exchange of roles, all experience rejection and all experience election: God has shut up all in unbelief that he may have mercy upon all (Rom 11:32). Both groups are bound together in solidarity in Jesus Christ, who is the head of both, the chosen and the rejected:

In bearing witness to the truth, [believers] bear witness to what God *will*s. Likewise, in bearing witness to a lie, [unbelievers] bear witness just as forcefully to what God does *not* will. Thus both serve to reveal God's will, which in its content is entirely light but which could not be revealed or recognized as revelation without it becoming both light *and* shadow. Just as believers are the chosen ones insofar as they serve to reveal God's will and as they bear witness to the elected Son, Jesus Christ, who is *the* Truth, by following and imitating him, so too are the godless ones living out the fate of the reprobate. For they are really representing, repeating and imitating the death of the rejected Christ in the witness to the lie. Because this one man is *the* chosen one and *the* rejected one, he is the Lord and head of the elect *and* the reprobate, to whom both bear witness. Both are, in their own ways, *his* vicarious representative, as he was originally *theirs* [4, 382].

The next quotation is a long one indeed, but at this juncture of our presentation, we should not shirk from citing it in full, for it leads to the very heart chamber of Barth's thought:

We can gather what it means to be elect of God only from the model of human being we get by contemplating the one Jesus Christ. *He* is the human being endowed with that special relation to God. *His* life is the authentic realization of authentic election. The address of, "I have called you by your name and you are mine", applies to him by

essence and actuality more than to any other. *He* is the only one who, in the midst of living with all the others and sharing their fate, is nonetheless placed in a special spot and called to follow a special path. Before he has done so with all the others and in contradistinction to them, God has only called *him* his Son and friend. *He* is the only elected one.

There are indeed others. . . who are also called. But this happens only in the community of the Holy Spirit, who has first and most truly called him—who alone is God. And those who are chosen have been chosen as *his* community: Israel and the Church, the people who share in his election and call and confirm and bear witness to his election in their faith. If one neglects to look first at his election, then one can only understand *all* the rest as rejected of God. Every single individual as such would be rejected were he not included in the election of Jesus Christ, and were Jesus Christ not also chosen to bear the weight of his rejection and atone for it. . . .

And if the individual does not represent the realization, attestation and confirmation of the election of Christ, then he must also remain excluded from union with the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ, and from the communion of the saints. He remains lost and without God. What remains for the individual then but to live a life of lies, the lie of being rejected?

To this extent, Jesus Christ is not only *one* of the elect of God but rather is *the* Elected One, next to whom and beside whom there is none other, but only the reprobate. And even in relation to all of them, the rejected of God, even for them he alone is *the* Elected One, *the* object of God's gracious choice, so that they all need not have to be rejected of God.

But the same holds true for the rejected as for what we said about those who are elect of God. We can understand what it means to be rejected of God only by contemplating the image of the one Christ. He is the man—precisely by virtue of his election—who has been banished from God's sight because of God's just judgment and sentence that handed him over to eternal death. His was a life that was lived out in truth as one who had to suffer God's annihilating hostility, and this was precisely the authentic fulfillment of his authentic election. That he took it upon himself to be rejected in this way is the special uniqueness of his place in history, where he has been situated in the midst of all the others. God has made *him*, his Son and friend in a way no one else could match, "into sin". He is *the* individual who has been rejected. If there are others who have also been so rejected, that is due only to their malicious, fatal and impotent distortion and contempt of the fact that he alone is really the Rejected One; it is due solely to their godforsakenness, which lets the justification which he alone has won for us linger on as injustice. And there are others who have also had to suffer in their way too: this is what the wrath of God in the form of suffering means for those who will have it no other way, having so wantonly and mendaciously called it down upon themselves. But even so, the curse that lies upon them can only be the *echo* of the curse which has fallen upon him in their place, and not on them directly. There are reprobate individuals (living the life of the reprobate). But they are by definition the very witnesses of the sin which has captured him; they are the testimony of the punishment which he has suffered.

If their witness, insofar as it seems to point to their own abandonment of God and to their own forlorn wanderings, can in the last analysis only be a lie (because really to stand in true godforsakenness and really to be lost cannot be their affair, for that is precisely the affair of Jesus Christ), then that means that they cannot help but bear witness, in their lie, to Jesus Christ. They must still point to him as the one who

actually and truly was *the* lost and abandoned sinner, whose shadow falls on them. Even in their complete godforsakenness they cannot repair the perversion which he came to set aside by surrendering himself. Nor can they even manage to re-ignite the fire of the divine wrath which he has taken upon himself and suffered in his total self-surrender.

All they can do, in their sin and in what they suffer as a consequence of their sin, is to be unwilling [*widerwilligen*] and yet at the same time *willful* [*mutwilligen*] participants in this rejection which Jesus Christ took upon himself and which he deflected from them by fulfilling the meaning of his election. . . . Precisely for the sake of the election of all who are reprobate, Jesus stands alone, over against them and different from them: precisely for *them* is he *the* reprobate one (creating room for them as the elect of God *by* being rejected!). And it is by doing so that he is *the* object of God's gracious election. And so Jesus Christ is the Lord and Head and object of the witness of both the "elect" *and* the "reprobate".

Of course, it makes all the difference in the world whether one is chosen or rejected; but both groups have their actual existence only in him. Only in Christ, who is originally both the Elected and the Rejected One, does the opposition between the two camps possess its necessity. Not only is the relativity of their contrast founded in him, so too is the fact that in their very opposition they are yet *brothers*, mutually entangled with one another in their lives and actions, and forming an ineffable and indissoluble unity. Just as the election of Jesus Christ precisely finds its scope in his vicarious reprobation and, conversely just as his vicarious rejection is precisely the confirmation of his election, so too do the elect and reprobate stand not only over against each other but also next to each other and live for each other. Because they are not Jesus Christ himself but can only bear witness *to* him, they also stand beside one another and live for each other, without prejudice to and notwithstanding their contrary characters. They are ordered to each other. The elect can no more be seen and understood without the reprobate than the reprobate can be seen and understood without the elect. It is impossible not to detect in either group the hand of the One who is Lord of both. And who that One is, what he is about, can be seen just as well in one camp and in the other—and this despite all the differences between them.

Those who are the elect of God are by definition those who must bear witness to the positive pole of God's will: his *telos*, his mercy. So too with the reprobate; in order to bear witness to the negative pole—that is to all that God the Almighty, the Holy and the Gracious does not will—they must take the divergent path and bear witness to God's judgment. But at all times it is the one will of the one God, whose witnesses both sides are. Both camps forever testify to the covenant that embraces them both. This is a covenant whose power is not grounded in the fidelity of the ones who are elect, nor is it a covenant whose power can be destroyed by the infidelity of the reprobate. This is a covenant whose fulfillment is indeed *proclaimed* by the accumulated blessings that have devolved on the elect, but only by anticipation. But this is also a covenant that cannot be *annulled* by the accumulated curse inflicted on the reprobate; on the contrary, the curse is made into an opportunity for a new promise.

This means, therefore, that we cannot understand the relationship between fidelity and infidelity, blessing and curse, life and death, here and there, as if the elect were only the bearers of the first elements of these pairs, while the reprobate were bearers only of the second; rather, the roles intersect. Thus we must say that even the elect are, in their own way, deserving of reproach, while the reprobate too, in their own way,

merit our praise. God's judgment does not cease to fall on the elect, any more than indications of his goodness and patience do not cease to rain down upon the reprobate. The further back one stands, the more similar do the elect and the reprobate begin to seem, however immense their dissimilarity might seem close up. Not only do they conspire together despite the differences in their functions, they can also exchange places with each other on behalf of the other.

So intensively are they ordered to each other, so much are they the condition of the other, that the *one* figure of Jesus Christ often becomes much more clearly visible in the mutually complementary contrast of the *two* forms of Elect and Reprobate than he does as *their* contrast. And precisely because the electing and calling God separates and divides between them, they will never be so divided that God himself—who is and will ever be, who sustains in being both camps and does so for the sake of both—would no longer be responsible for them. God would never let his grace and his election cease to flow. God has no regard for the outward appearance of a person. If he is with his elect ones, then that means precisely that they must wrestle with God as if with a foe, if they are to win over for themselves a share in his blessing and to remain in it. In any case, God's presence with his elect does not mean that he would act in a different way with the reprobate. If God hides his face from the reprobate, that does not mean he has ceased also to be their last true refuge. If he is their enemy, then this is his special way of being with them, even them. Wherever God exalts, it is to abase; and where he yet knocks down, that is not meant to cause someone to fall.

This is a difference established by God himself, even where—precisely where—its sharpness and trenchancy seem to be invincible. This difference is the confirmation of his covenant, which is the divine beginning of all things. It is the instrument of his work, in which he gives a shape and an identity to this covenant. It is the prophecy and the announcement of the difference between himself and all men, a difference which he has both established *and* overcome in his Word become flesh. It is the prophecy and announcement of the grace in which he condemns and simultaneously justifies every sinner in his sight. God loves by making these distinctions. This is the way he has loved his only begotten Son. And this is the way he has loved us in him. So if now no “individual” can be the actual object of God's love outside of this only begotten Son, this means that no individual can be spared the glowing and radiating embers of that love: the wrath of God [4, 387-91].

Barth never tired of describing the correlative pairs of reprobate and election through the figures of biblical history: from Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, Saul and David, to the two thieves on the cross and the great diptych of Judas and Paul. Running through all these contrasting “twins” of salvation history is a special interpretation of the Mosaic Law and of the relation between Church and Synagogue. And once more, we find a new contrast between Barth's highly biblical doctrine of election and the traditional view in the history of dogma: the place of the Church.

Between the election of Jesus Christ and the election of the individual, Barth inserted the election of the People of God, the

Church. For it is for the sake of the Church that Christ is the elect of God (and elected to be rejected). And it is only for the sake of the Church that the individual is chosen to become a member of the Church. The moment of community cannot be removed from the biblical doctrine of election without threatening to dislodge the rafters and destroy the whole edifice. Without the moment of solidarity, we cannot describe Christian election in all its depth and uniqueness. Vicarious representation is essential. A religion of only provisional, partial solidarity and of a purely individual fate having no bearing on the fate of the others would in any case not be the Christian religion.

This insertion of the Church as the middle term between the election of Christ and the election of the individual gives unmistakable solidity to the basic thesis of Barth's doctrine of election and makes it seem incontrovertible. It breaks open the narrowly individualistic coloring that the Church's claim to be the means of salvation now possesses and opens her to the world:

The identity of God's Chosen One consists in this: that in his election and mission, in the ministry he was called to fulfill, God integrates his reconciling work into the world, making it a real event. The closed circle of Christ's election and that of his Church is opened out to the world in the election and vocation of each individual. . . . Every act of election, every vocation is a trespassing of boundaries [4, 461].

Grace can only be understood as mission and apostolate, for the terms are synonymous (4, 477). For Barth, the Church is an *open* space, a dynamic concept from the outset. For all its visibility, the earthly Church is but the movement of the Kingdom of God into the world, in the sense of an eschatological totality (3, 542-43). Scripture continually speaks of "the many" for whom the particular event involving an individual is destined. And for as long as the Church is yet underway, "the many" must be understood as referring, not to a determinate, but to a dynamic and open number:

For what many? If we cannot simply say for all, but can speak only of an unlimited many, this is not because of any weakness or limitation of the real and revealed divine will in Jesus Christ. This will of God, as is continually and rightly said in harmony with 1 Tim 2:4, is directed to the salvation of all men in intention, and sufficient for the salvation of all men in power. It agrees with I Cor 5:19 that Jesus Christ is called the light of the world in Jn 8:12, 9:5, 11:9, 12:46; "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" in Jn 1:29; the Son in whose offering God "loved the world" in Jn 3:16, and who was sent "that the world through him might be saved" in Jn 3:17; "the

Saviour of the world” in Jn 4:42; “the bread of God which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world” in Jn 6:33 (cf. v. 51); “the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” in 1 Jn 2:2; and the light “which lighteth every man” in Jn 1:9. When we remember this, we cannot follow the classical doctrine and make the open number of those who are elect in Jesus Christ into a closed number to which all other men are opposed as if they were rejected. Such an assumption is shattered by the unity of the real and revealed will of God in Jesus Christ. It is shattered by the impossibility of reckoning with another divine rejection than the rejection whose subject was Jesus Christ, who bore it and triumphantly bore it away. It is shattered by the fact that Jesus Christ is the irreversible way from the depths to the heights, from death to life; and that as this way he is also the truth, the declaration of the heart of God, beside which there is no other and beside which we have no right to ask for any other. It is shattered by the fact that Jesus Christ will not reject any who come to him, according to Jn 6:37. And yet it is not legitimate to make the limitless many of the elect in Jesus Christ the totality of all men. For in Jesus Christ we have to do with the living and personal and therefore the free will of God in relation to the world and every man. In him we must not and may not take account of any freedom of God which is not that of his real and revealed love in Jesus Christ. But, again, we must not and may not take account of any love of God other than that which is a concern of the freedom realized and revealed in Jesus Christ, which, according to John’s Gospel, finds expression in the fact that only those who are given to the Son by the Father, and drawn to the Son by the Father, come to Jesus Christ and are received by him. This means, however, that the intention and power of God in relation to the whole world and all men are always his intention and power—an intention and power which we cannot control and the limits of which we cannot arbitrarily restrict or enlarge [4, 466-67].

For us what remains is the mission to go forth; our role is to go out to all nations. By responding to this mission, we partake of the threefold office of Christ. The apostolate is an “active participation in Jesus’ own mission. Those who are sent must do as Jesus did: they too are prophets, priests and kings, just as he is, for he has made them his own” (4, 478-79). And because their grace is entirely invested in their mission, they have neither time nor opportunity to worry about their own election, to close themselves off from the supposedly unelected or in any way to conceive of election statically.

There is no such thing as an “experience” of one’s own election (4, 40; 4, 367f). There is no subjective certainty of one’s own salvation. Even this part of Reformed doctrine must be submitted to a “thorough revision” (4, 373). There is no other way of attaining certainty but an objective reliance on the Redeemer in bearing witness on his behalf. And this witness is borne not just for the sake of oneself but for the others (4, 374).

Christian existence can never rest content with a static view of God's election and personal predestination. The meaning of God's election can only be comprehended inside the act of faith, which entails obedience. This obedience inserts itself in that very movement in which God's decision and judgment continue to take effect: in the irreversible transition from No to Yes, the annulment of the symmetry between left and right, the conquest of the powers of chaos by the power of light. There is no other assurance and peace except by plunging into this process even now still going on. To step outside this process is to fixate on God's judgment. It brings the same ruin as befell Lot's wife, who could not resist the temptation of turning around and seeing how God was carrying out his judgment:

It can only be a sign of false *gravitas* if one is led to suspend the finality of faith and to bracket once more God's definitive decision to save as it has been revealed to us. Faith does not permit us to stand, as it were, at the crossroads where the path of eternal bliss and eternal fire intersect and where we can see where each road ends. Such false symmetry is a sure sign of pagan eschatology [3, 441].

And what has been forbidden to our speculations about the personal fate of one individual has also been forbidden to us in the matter of the fate of the total number of individuals (4,143). Earlier theology has certainly gone off the rails here. What especially derailed it were the pernicious presuppositions that different schools of theology all had in common (whether they followed the supralapsarian or infralapsarian models). Earlier theology regularly assumed (1) that predestination referred to a stable system; (2) that it involved this delicate symmetry between eternal bliss and eternal fire; and (3) that it could be regarded as grounded on a prior *decretum absolutum*, even without Christ! Barth did not totally reject the insights of these two schools, for he found some useful elements among them (primarily in the supralapsarian perspective: 4,150), but only when they were purged of their rigid and erroneous presumptions (4,136f.).

This, so far, is Barth's doctrine in its basic outlines. But we have yet to ask the question: Is such a doctrine really tenable in Christian theology? Is the audacity and boldness with which Barth has annulled the "symmetry" of judgment an outgrowth of the courage of faith, or is it not really much more (and thus: so much the less!) the presumption of a gnosis, a theosophy; in short, a philosophy?

We have already heard Barth say that the thought of *apokatastasis* has been forbidden to us. It is forbidden because it makes of the event of God's free decisions a kind of "natural process that absorbs all opposition" (4, 150). For Barth, at best the idea "of a finite redemption of each and everyone" draws its power from man's natural optimism (4, 325), whereas the Christian witness can only be based on the "profession of Christian hope" (4, 333). It is not given to man to presume to anticipate the exact range of the circle of the redeemed (4, 462). The doctrine of *apokatastasis* breaks off the point and blunts the edge of the sword of judgment and dissolves the whole dialectic between election and reprobation (4, 528).

In his book on the Creed, Barth warns us of eschatological arrogance.¹¹ He avers that the "positive doctrine of the *apokatastasis* does not belong to the Creed because it would simply eviscerate it".¹² Internal to history, God's Word will always be a two-edged sword (1, 188). "As in many other cases, theology must here refrain from drawing logically consistent conclusions from its premises for the sake of its own subject matter."¹³

Nonetheless, despite these demurrals, Barth's doctrine of election does not leave much room open for possibility. There is something inevitable and necessary in his views. What is definitive in Barth's thought is grace and blessing, and all reprobation and judgment are merely provisional:

Even God's curse is but the reverse side of his blessing. His wrath and punishment afflicting man do not represent a retraction of his promise but a special form and ultimately its most glorious confirmation [5, 212-13].

God's saving power is the deed of his freedom, in which he reveals himself to man as the One who so wills and acts that no one will be lost [6, 80].

Thus man remains, even in the depths of the Fall and the judgment of death that befell him, the person created and redeemed in the grace of Christ. Thus he can never become a different being, one who has been utterly stripped of the promise of the Covenant of grace. Even in death and hell, he can appeal to this promise [6, 418].

Actually, given his premises, Barth really cannot discuss this issue in any other way. True, he gives lip service to our inability to survey the full implications of the activity of the Word of God. He speaks of a healthy "inconsistency" in dogmatics. But these are mere words,

because he has already immured the idea of an all-encompassing redemption in the very groundwork and foundation of his doctrine of creation. Man can only exist because he comes forth from the grace of Christ and goes back to it. His nature remains constant even in sin and is not definitively corrupted only because the grace of Christ preserves it from total wreckage. Indeed, in the last analysis, man can only sin at all because he does not *will* to admit he has been saved. He can only be unfaithful because he does not want to admit the truth of his faith (this is why Barth calls sin not just a possibility but an “impossible possibility”).

This was the cost Barth had to pay to realize his seamless systematization of the economy of salvation. But this is also what gives it its triumphal allure, its unprecedented consistency, its certainty of victory. And shouldn't this certainty of victory be the real Christian pathos? Should we really permit Christians to look away from Christ's Resurrection and, instead of looking forward toward eternal life, to squint backward all the time, as if the Cross had never happened? Why should it be so uniquely distinctive of Christians continually to be dwelling on the danger of the Fall and the power of evil in the world?

It is as if Christians' real liberation or redemption is only an affair for some way-off, ever-receding future. It takes no expertise to recognize what is obvious to all: this is how Christians in fact think time and again. Over and over again, the anxious, legalistic, tragic, irresolute and cribbed and utterly melancholic thoughts: they keep cropping up because they are unavoidable. . . . We do not need to describe in detail here how much the Christian community has failed in every century to think in *this* matter according to the dictates of the Christian faith. And so the Church has also failed in every century to speak to the world of the liberation at hand: having failed to live in that freedom, she could hardly call others to the same liberation. For this reason, so-called “Christianity” has become repugnant to its own essence, both to itself and to the world—a strange and sad affair, indeed. . . . One does no credit to the import of the Christian life and proclamation if one draws back, if one declines to admit that audacity—to the point of foolhardiness—is its normal *modus operandi*, indeed is the only possible way the Christian life can be lived [7, 420-21].

And, when Barth says “the only possible way”, he means it quite literally. This is the very hinge of Barth's whole theology, and so we have now reached the point where we can judge the whole. For Barth's whole doctrine of God and world, of creation and redemption, of man and providence stands or falls according to the tenability of

this one point. So now all the reflections we have undertaken must focus on this one point. But as we thematize this one issue, we shall thereby be submitting the entire system to a critical reflection. In its extraordinary compactness, this system betrays characteristic traits of a quite definite *form of thought*, a structure that determines his whole world view. This framework is quite different from other Protestant forms of thought as it also is from the Catholic framework (or the Catholic framework insofar as there really is one).

This recourse to the issue of structure and form is in no way meant to be a kind of reductionistic “unmasking”. No theologian, indeed no thinker, can dispense with such forms. To thematize them does not mean calling into question the theological character of someone’s thought. Every theology develops in a particular period of history, in a particular culture, and so inevitably takes on the characteristics of a personality. To dispute this would only lead to a faceless, bleached neutrality.

Intending, therefore, to understand Barth’s theology more fully and to contrast it all the better against other thought forms, we shall raise this question of the perspective from which Barth has gained his vast panoramic view. Whoever wants to understand him will above all have to make the effort to stand on the same promontory. Only in this way can we even approach seeing what he has claimed to have seen.

Chapter 7

THE STRUCTURE AND FORM OF BARTHIAN THEOLOGY

Nothing is more important in ecumenical dialogue than the issue of form: What is the structure, the all-determining form, in which a theology is cast? In most instances when we encounter a variety of theological opinions we find that what matters is the *perspective* in which revelation is considered, the *logic* by which the truths of theology are arranged and ordered. Form determines how some truths are more stressed than others: it chooses and arranges concepts and words according to its own schema, which in turn radically affects those concepts and words. The same reality can be looked at from different angles, and each of those angles can be described in several linguistic forms.

Thus before attending to a particular theological object, one will have to use great care to bring to light the unity underlying inner intention and outer language. To presuppose that one's opponents must first adapt themselves to my language violates the rules of human communication. Language, whether inner or outer, is not itself the truth but at best an expression of the truth. Where it soon becomes evident that the partners in a conversation are speaking in two different languages, there the first and most important task will fall to the translator, the interpreter, the master of the art of transposition. Until the interpreter has finished translating the other's language, every speech act will prove to be in vain, every prospect for mutual understanding hopeless.

The longer the two languages—which well might have at one time flowed from a single source and have had their roots in a common soil—continue to develop alongside one another without ever coming into contact with each other, all the more surely will they grow apart until finally all possibility for mutual comprehension vanishes. Luther's prophetic and existential form of thinking was already far distant from the medieval structures of the Catholic theology of his

time. So different were the languages in which they expressed their theology that we must wonder whether they were even speaking of the same reality.

Languages are related to the truth in a way that resembles how the ineffable individual is related to the species. Every translator knows that in the transposition from one language to another, the “general” truth (the “gist”, as it were) can be transferred, but a certain unique particularity, an ineffable flourish and stamp will forever remain lost, never to be redeemed. The true translator must possess an inspired genius for the genius of language itself. For the essence of the task is to express the uniqueness of one language in the uniqueness of another. At the very point where someone else would throw up his hands in despair, the true translator will not resign himself to the impossibility of the task but will regard *everything* as translatable.

This does not of course mean a characterless translation, a faceless text written in a kind of conceptual Esperanto. What must really be brought over into the other language are the most unique and personal features of the original. It is true, of course, that when we set up two different languages over against each other, we will notice that one lacks a word that the other has; one will have a particular genius for a certain concept, an intuition, a striking image, that in the other can only be expressed through paraphrase. But such paraphrase presupposes a feel for the whole organism of both languages, where word need not correspond to word but overall balance corresponds to overall balance.

Joseph Marechal, Erich Przywara, Bernhard Welte and other writers have proven to be extraordinarily gifted as translators in the field of philosophy. And one can only hope that this same art and skill will also someday become a more expected part of the equipment of the theologian too. Dialogue with Karl Barth by Catholic theology must not shirk from this preparatory work concerning thought forms and the respective treasuries of the two different ways of speaking. For only when we are truly certain of what the other person means and how he conceives this meaning, only when we have mastered this “foreign tongue”, can we legitimately expect something fruitful from the conversation.

Barth has frequently stressed this necessity and unavoidability for thinking within a thought form: that is, within a conscious or unconscious philosophy, a world view, an overall schema of thought.¹ Even the one who rejects such a notion cannot get by without such a schema, whatever form it might take. And as we would expect, Barth himself has a certain pathos, a certain accentuation, a certain unique way of putting things, that betrays his interest, his preferences, his way of thinking.

And what is Barth's unique schema, the cast that gives his theology its striking identity? It is the pathos of "reality" (5, 395f.), of "actuality" (6, 40f.), of "realization".² For example, theological anthropology must deal "not only with the phenomenon of man but also with man himself as he concretely exists, not only with his possibilities but with his reality as well" (6,27). This is the only place where we can find out "who and what the real human being is" (6, 58). And where is this reality to be found? It is only where the greatest intensity, the highest concreteness, the fullest unfolding of the possible is attained: in what the medievals called the *concretissimum*. One can call this the "event", or historicity, or actuality or, if we want, simply: act. Being exists for the sake of act and must be interpreted from the perspective of action. "Whatever else his nature might be, man is ordered to this historicity and can only be interpreted as a historical being" (6, 179).

This already puts us in touch with the main difference between Barth and Aristotelian Scholasticism: Barth thought from the summit of highest reality and saw everything else as the preliminary stage leading to this *telos*, as potency to this realization or, to speak with Kant, as "conditions of the possibility for. . . ." And for Barth, the whole realm of nature and all its constituent parts belong to these "conditions of possibility".

Beginning his reflections from the act, from act as the unique particularity of meaning, Barth asks what has made this act possible. The Scholastics, too, do not essentially think any differently, at least at first, for they posit as the highest principle of their thought Aristotle's assertion that "act is prior to potentiality" (*proteron gar eisi ton dynameon hai energeiai*, *De anima II*, 415 a 18).³ But the Scholastics did not apply this principle to the relation of nature and

historical realization but pursued, at least methodologically, the opposite path: Scholasticism *begins* with “natures” and “essences” (which are known as such and stand in the center of philosophical research) and *then* moves on from there to determine their activities: *operari sequitur esse* [operations are a consequence of being].

If Barth is continually doing battle against this precept, daring even to counter it with what to the Scholastic mind would be an absurdity: *esse sequitur operari* (3, 90-91), we must be sure to understand his intention aright. Barth does not mean to dissolve nature into a pointillist series of discrete and discontinuous momentary events but to begin with the notion of “fullest realization” and make that the standard and measure of the meaning and interpretation of being. Only then will Barth go on from there and ask what the conditions of the possibility of that realization are (see, for example, 6, 266f.).

Of course, Barth would not dream of ignoring or abstracting from the unique and precious reality of the event by this inquiry. The very last thing Barth would want to do would be to explain away, trivialize or domesticate the very thing that makes the act an act: its event-character, its presence in the Now—which means its temporality, its power to compel from us a decision. We can pile up thousands of “conditions of possibility”, but that will not result in an event. But once an event does take place, we can admit that the event presupposes certain conditions for their realization.

Thus Barth likes to use the contrasting terms of “act” and “potency”, but in a sharply delimited sense. As a theologian, Barth holds that *the* actuality and reality—the *concretissimum*—are the event of revelation. Here is where man becomes what he is meant to be before God and *sub specie aeternitatis*, where he attains the reality for which he was created and exists in the first place and for which he even has a nature and an earthly history. Everything that impinges on the nature of man is thus potential for the realization of this act: the act of the encounter with the Word of revelation. *This* is reality. Here, where the *concretissimum* of the divine Word touches man and summons him, like the skeleton in Ezekiel’s valley of bones, to true being before God, true existence, true human being: *here* is reality.

Without ever abandoning or suspending this reality, one must plunge into all its depths and implications in order to know what it contains in all its fullness. But in no case is one to proceed from a “nature” in order *then* to delimit what is not nature: the “supernatural”. The procedure to be followed in every case is to move from the actuality of what man is before God, to move from the *telos* of his creatureliness (even if this lies far beyond, infinitely beyond, man’s “own” potentialities), in order to understand what kind of being man is.

Barth pours considerable scorn on the definition of man as a “rational animal”. For Barth, this is a classical definition of man “from below” (6, 88-90). Rather than locating the essence of human nature in the concept of the subject, it presumes that what is essential to human nature is its difference from the rest of nature. And then it goes on to presume to claim that man’s true determination has been expressed by such a definition of human nature!

But we thereby have defined only a “shadow man”. As if the real meaning of human being—which is after all easily determinable from revelation—could be nailed down and fastened to a self-enclosed concept of human nature! As if man’s nature is something indifferent to its final determination in God, as if it were something merely possible but not necessarily real!

But the act from which theology must proceed is not just any old act that one can choose more or less at random and that can be discussed in the same breath with other events. It is the revelation of the deed of God (1, 148f), which as deed expresses something essential about God’s being. This being is in every case absolute event, absolute act (3, 294). And, by virtue of revelation, man has been elevated into this sphere in order to attain to what makes him real in God’s sense.

God himself is this *concretissimum*. In the freedom of his love, in which he is Father, Son and Spirit, God is the most concrete reality of all, disclosing his concrete reality in the revelation of creation, reconciliation and redemption. That is why his Word is always the perfect fullness of the perfectly unique event. In one Word we find all words, and in all the words of God we find the one Word. And that Word is always the revelation of the whole God, and it thereby

entails a total claim upon the whole person. Every Word of God is “concrete fullness”, everything about its content-is definite and determined:

Contrary to what people too readily imagine, what is truly special, concrete and unique is not our particular moment in time. It is the Word of God, which as the *concretissimum* reigns over us at every moment [4, 738].

The entire uniqueness and singularity of God as Lord is reflected in the singularity and particularity of what God wills and offers [4, 754].

Everything general is contained in this particularity [6, 483].

And since God always speaks as the *concretissimum*, he never lets man’s existence leave this most concrete of realities. Just as God’s revelation is not one instance of a more general concept of revelation and religion overall, so is faith not a (highest) form of general belief in God. Israel is not “first and generally a people” (6, 492), the Church is not one community alongside-other religious and profane communities, the Christian is not one representation (even if perhaps the highest) of the religious dimension in human culture, and so forth.

We can never reach the particular or distinctive by starting out from the general. We can only asymptotically approach the particular, which means that we will always fail to touch directly the one thing necessary: to *proceed from the particular* and to understand and evaluate everything else (that is, the general) from there.

The Christian proceeds from the Word of God, his one sure foundation. All the essential elements of human nature depend on the freedom of grace (6, 434f.). Christians live from the fullness of grace and express that fullness in their lives. Their lives are not

an affair of arbitrary choice but the commission laid upon them by God. And so the carrying out of this mission has nothing to do with doing one’s duty or practicing the virtues [6, 259].

Christian obedience cannot therefore be on the lookout for thanks, merit or reward, because it proceeds from the noblest, indeed the only possible, reward that can fall to a person: the Christian’s real reward is the election and calling that are constitutive of being a Christian; it is the actual chance to share in the life of Jesus Christ and in the

efficacious gift of the Holy Spirit. . . . The great reward for a Christian is being a Christian, being allowed to respond to God by becoming a Christian [7, 295].

For Christians, petitionary prayer must consequently be rooted in this exalted calling. The very fact that they pray proves that they are permitted in their prayer to participate in the conversation between Father and Son in the intimacy of the Holy Spirit. In other words, they share in the fullness of all gifts for which they have been praying. Even more, Christians receive a real share in the attitude of the Son of God before the Father, who has received and possesses the fullness of God in the form of prayer (7, 305f.). Through the grace of revelation they have been initiated into the heart of the mystery of the God-man:

Just as Jesus Christ as the Son of God was himself the God who actively pours out his gifts to us, exalting us to his heights, so too is he, as the Son of Man, the human being standing before God in prayer. Jesus presents himself before God as the one who has nothing on his own and no claim to anything. Everything he has he has received, indeed received from God. He entrusts it all to God, entirely and totally. This is how he lives, this is how he loses his life, but so too this is how he saves and wins back all. Because he is only and entirely a pray-er (and outside of prayer is nothing at all), he has already been heard. . . . Because Jesus' life has become one single act of prayer, one incarnate plea to God, it is therefore God's own love and power that break through to complete victory in the existence of this man [7, 311-12].

Just as the *concretissimum* is the fullness from which human beings as they really exist derive their existence, so too is it the unity preceding all the multiplicity of words, truths and commandments (4, 795f.). It is the only source of man's real unity (4, 800f). The oneness of God, as it is imparted in revelation, grounds and precedes all created oneness and multiplicity and is their only source of fulfillment (7, 155f., 165f.). God's uniqueness cannot be grasped by invoking the abstract concept of "monotheism" (3, 504f). God stands above and beyond the antithesis between the world's notion of the problem of the One and the Many, just as God's authentic infinity stands above and beyond the antithesis in the world's notion of finite and infinite (3, 525-26). Furthermore, God's ubiquity makes itself known precisely in the specific limitation of a particular space and in the contours of a particular form in the world (3, 537-538).

We must never forget for a moment, if we are to grasp the true essence of human nature, that man has been allowed to live in this

mystery of God's own concreteness. It is only here that his temporal being and finitude find their true features. Seen from below, from the confines and immanence of the world, both of these can only be the expression of man's frailty and abandonment, his radical distance from God (6, 616f.). Seen from above, from the place where God lays hold of man's temporality and finitude and reincorporates them in the fountain of their origin, in the time and finitude of Jesus Christ, time becomes the medium of the manifestation of eternity.

Now the here-and-now becomes the very place where eternity (or better: God's eternal time) is made present and tangible. In the presence of the eternal Word in time, our time is judged yet saved, suspended yet grounded. In Jesus Christ, God has time for man and man has time for God. Because of this, all real time is established in God, and man's perdurance is assured (5, 72f.; 6, 524f.). Now time becomes a real participation in eternity, and discrete eventfulness becomes a real participation in God's perdurance, and finitude and death express and enable the creature's uninhibited surrender to God. Because of Christ, we can continually praise our finitude (5, 109, 147; 6, 671f.; 7, 96f., 264). And, because of Christ, we can discover behind the just sentence of death a death that is itself grounded in the goodness of finite creation (6, 722, 743, 764f.). To disguise this revelation of the medium of temporal finitude and historicity, to reduce it to a "general truth", would be to annul its true identity (4, 789). Knowledge of the general must be interpreted in the light of the particular: it confirms the precedence of the particular (4, 574). The general is valid because it is the framework and setting for the radiation of the particular. Taking it for itself and isolating it from the particular can only rob it of its function and make it appear to be a "deficiency" (6, 483). Indeed, as the standard of the particular, it becomes its bitterest enemy.

That is why Barth was so hostile to "neutrality" in every form, above all, the neutrality of the category of *species* when it is not considered in the light of the all-determining differences that occur within the type or species. Nothing was more repugnant to Barth than the neutrality of the abstract, in which man continually tries, whether covertly or openly, to exalt himself over God's own particularity. Only the particular has "contour, coloration, contrast"

and can convey this to the general (7, 498). “*Latet periculum in generalibus!*” (“Danger lurks in generalities!” 4, 51).

Whenever a person thinks he knows what life is all about because of an acquaintance with the general, then we know right away he lacks the ear for the message of the special and particular. Or, to phrase it with more nuance: whoever wants to start with the general must do so in the strictest obedience: by interpreting everything in view of the particular, expecting wisdom and direction from its concrete indications (5, 390-92). Authentic existence is always qualitatively determined, either positively or negatively. To treat it in the abstract and regard it as a neutral being is to fall into error at the outset.

Real existence is either nobility and value (that is, being something more than it is) or it is guilt and an empty longing for God (that is, being something less than it is). Therefore, the justification of human being can only follow from God and not from the self. Justification is entirely the work of the God who, as it were, “outbids” both aspects of the world in the death and Resurrection of his Son (5, 431) and thus justifies both:

Here is where those who rejoice find out they are right. But also those who lament and protest: they are not *right* exactly, but they find out how right they are, more than they could ever dream or imagine. But the lukewarm are not like this at all: the neutral ones are entirely *wrong*, who in their wisdom fail to do justice to the actual content the more they could like to incorporate it into their wisdom (that is, in their lukewarm neutrality) (5, 431).⁴

Nothing in the nature of Christ can be viewed “neutrally”. We cannot abstract from the fact that he is God and God’s Son without at the same time completely distorting his identity (6, 69). In Christ’s free will there is no trace of a neutrality between good and evil (6, 30), and in his mind there is no trace of an otiose general concept hovering between God and world. Nothing in his nature remains as a residue unaffected by his work (6, 71). For Barth, Jesus is “entirely and exclusively the history of God’s redemptive initiative embracing the whole human race. Every human being exists, therefore, because this history is now taking place” (6, 81).

If we understand every human being from this history, then we are seeing the human race the way God does. But if we do not seek to

adopt this perspective, we will only be trying to interpret man from within the differences that emerge in the world immanent to itself. But those differences are merely relative and cannot bear the weight of an absolute assessment. This will necessarily lead to an abstraction from these differences, to the conclusion that neutrality is the last word in wisdom. This will inevitably lead to a confusion between man as he really exists and the “field” on which real history takes place (6, 298). This field is only the possibility and potentiality for the inherent eventfulness [*aktuelles Sein*] in the Word of God (6, 475).

Man is the hearer of the Word, or he is nothing (4, 832). He is history, or he is nothing (6, 188, 297). He stands in the event of divine revelation, or he hovers over nothingness (6, 418f.). But once more, in saying this, we are not describing what belongs to human “nature” as such; we are simply pointing to that free and gracious gift of God that grounds and establishes the whole sphere of nature in the first place:

This is the basis of his being and existence. But in saying this we are not describing the natural conditions of man. Otherwise that would mean that what man receives from God is something like an element of his essential make-up. But even in this sense it is entirely “natural” for him to live from God. What we are trying to describe is a determination that transcends as such the human constitution. This is a work of the free God. It is an event. And because God is this living and active primordial ground of man, God is and continues to be man’s hope, even when God no longer chooses to maintain man’s being, even, that is, in death. God is not obliged to to this. It is his gift. It is grace [6, 418-19].

The eschatology of the Old Covenant makes this frighteningly clear (6, 433-35), and the New Covenant has in no way annulled, but has rather fulfilled, this eschatology. But if the ground of human nature and existence is this free grace, on which it rests, and never enters for a moment into its essential constitution, then the *telos* of this nature can only lie outside itself: in that history in which God deals with us and which he has oriented to his own ends: “Thus the ground of human being is also at the same time its goal. Man comes from God and goes to God, and thus he is meant *for* God” (6, 82).

Because Barth has seized hold of the nature of man at this most lofty and exalted of levels, he refuses to abandon or disregard anything pertaining to his nature and worldly possibilities. He is as

open to the world and takes as much joy in it as any theologian around. But in everything that pertains to that world—the riches offered by creation: science, art, technology—he never for a moment abstracts from the light that Christ radiates down upon these riches. This is the only method Barth can recognize. Any other option would have made him give up the work of theology.

Accordingly, he can most felicitously characterize his thought as “intensive universalism”.⁵ This is because his method is to bring everything to the point of highest intensity: where God and man intersect in Jesus Christ. In Christ, the moment of revelation and the moment of faith are fused together, and, in their interchange in him, we discover in the truest sense the infinite fulfillment of both in all their implications.

We could describe this thought as a kind of hourglass, where the two contiguous vessels (God and creature) meet only at the narrow passage through the center: where they both encounter each other in Jesus Christ. The purpose of the image is to show that there is no other point of contact between the two chambers of the glass. And just as the sand flows only from top to bottom, so too God’s revelation is one-sided, flowing from his gracious decision alone. But of course the sand flows down into the other chamber so that the sand there can really *increase*. In other words, there *is* a countermovement in the other chamber, but only because of the first movement, the initiative of the first chamber.

Everything, however, depends in the final analysis on the funnel at the center. This narrowest of passageways is verily the decisive one. It is the *actus*, the point of contact, the event, from which everything we call nature and condition derives its being.

Chapter 8

THE ROOTS OF BARTH'S THOUGHT

A further avenue into Barth's theology opens up when we examine how much Barth's thought forms are rooted in German Idealism. We have in mind particularly that strain of Idealism that began with Kant's transcendental form and was systematically developed for Protestant theology by Schleiermacher on the basis of the indispensable mediating efforts of Fichte's philosophy of identity.

Barth cannot be understood unless we see how his point of departure was determined by Schleiermacher, who gave him during the years of his theological formation the conceptual tools for his own thought. But even more than that, Schleiermacher gave Barth a powerful intuition into the unity, grandeur and totality of theology as a scientific discipline. Schleiermacher was for Barth what Plato was for the thinkers of the Renaissance, what Spinoza was for Herder and Goethe and what Schopenhauer was for Nietzsche: the originary stamp pressing down on the impressionable young thinker an ineradicable engraving on the mind, molding that mind with a form that the young thinker could never shake no matter how vigorous the disagreements might be in matters of content.

Of course that does not tell us the least bit about the theological value of Karl Barth's doctrine. Augustine was a Platonist, but then so was Giordano Bruno! We have so far said nothing about how Barth filled this empty shell, mixed his palette or painted his canvas. And so, when we rightly notice this influence, we are in no way joining—indeed we explicitly abjure—all those who, on the basis of this observation, accuse Barth of an open or hidden “philosophism” (such as all the critics of his earlier years like Gogarten and Rilliet have done) or “Modernism” (as does Cornelius van Til). We are merely referring to the conceptual material with which Barth thinks and works.

Even in the early years of dialectical theology, it became lightning clear that Schleiermacher would be the catalyst for a split within the

groups of dialectical theologians, as we can see in the literature between Barth and Emil

Brunner at that time.¹ Brunner's explicit purpose was to attack mysticism for the way it undermined biblical eschatology. But in the background it was clear that Brunner was motivated by the concerns of a religious personalism, which provided him with his most decisive categories. This religious personalism served as both the reason for his attack on the transcendental systematization of the great Idealists and the means for assaulting it. But that was just what attracted Barth to Schleiermacher:

Schleiermacher has succeeded, above all in his great work on the doctrine of faith but also in his shorter works and in his explicitly philosophical efforts as well, in giving to dogmatics, indeed to science in general, something that the great theologians before him (Augustine, Thomas, Melancthon, Zwingli and Calvin) have failed to manage despite their corresponding efforts, which are so neatly marked off with chapters, articles, loci, sections, and so forth. Only Schleiermacher managed to provide an *utterly amazing and thorough overview* of the scattered limbs (*dissecta membra*) of the historical Christian faith.²

Later on, to be sure, Barth would reject the possibility of a strict systematization in theology and would only recognize an open-ended method for a true reflection of the Christian reality (2, 970-71). But to reject systematization is not the same thing as to reject all context or to refuse to see concreteness in a wider matrix (ibid.). One is hardly being systematic in the pejorative sense because one has a great style, a unified vision, a personal flair that not only clearly sets out one's thoughts but does so in a way that makes them lovely and attractive. In this sense, we can certainly call Barth "systematic", for he shows not only a passion for the object of theology but consistently ("systematically") demonstrates a subdued ardor that is all the more powerful because it is so subdued, so consistent.

The reason Barth is so thoroughly systematic in this sense is his ambition to do correctly what Schleiermacher tried to do *for the first time* in the history of theology: to develop a comprehensive overview of theology. This project dominated the whole history of theology in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and since the history of theology could provide Barth with no other formal principle, he

borrowed the framework and thought form from Schleiermacher, but this time to fill it with another, genuinely evangelical content.

If this proved to be a promising undertaking, it was because the whole history of German Idealism, with Kant at the summit, stemmed from the Reformation and had been stamped with Luther's own habits of thought. That is why observers have so often pointed out that German Idealism is fundamentally a secularized theology. Why should it not then be possible to take over from Idealism the form, the style and the genius of a universal, overarching viewpoint, which the Reformers so sorely lacked? Why not fill this remarkable vessel with the original content of revelation?

Naturally, Barth did not simply stay with Schleiermacher but made use of the whole subsequent development of Protestant theology.³ Herrmann especially he took seriously, but he was influenced by all the trends of the time that tried to fashion an authentic, existential dialectic from the "pseudo-dialectics" of Idealism. As we saw in the last chapter, Barth's whole relationship to Idealism was based on his determination to establish the principle of actuality from the old systematic principles of Idealism. But that does not change the fact that the outline that Schleiermacher had drawn and Herrmann had maintained⁴ also determines the outlines of Karl Barth's theology.

Barth's study on Schleiermacher of 1926⁵ is extremely instructive, as we find densely compressed into a single place everything that he means to Barth; even more importantly, Barth acknowledges in this essay the formal theme, the issue of form and schema, as his real focus of interest in Schleiermacher, even when he must sharply reject the actual content of his theology. We will seldom go astray if we find the very points Barth fought over with Schleiermacher (for the first time!) later being projected onto Catholic teaching. Even when Barth is battling against Catholicism, he is basically struggling to purify Schleiermacher. In fact, his anti-Catholic polemic makes no sense outside of his confrontation with Schleiermacher.

Let us first describe the formal similarities and material differences between Schleiermacher's transcendentalism and Barth's actualism in the following five points:

1. Everything depends on one point of highest intensity: for Schleiermacher, that is the religious experience of “absolute dependence”, while, for Barth, it is the encounter with the Word of God. This is the initial point of departure and sets the respective theologies of each man in motion, much like the way the initial push on the pendulum sets a grandfather clock in motion.

2. The intensity of this highest point depends in both thinkers on the positing of a duality that is then overcome at the same time through a further intensification. For Schleiermacher, that duality consists of “insight [or intuition: *Anschauung*; trans.] and feeling”, that is, the duality of receptivity and spontaneity.⁶ What overcomes this duality into an ultimate identity is consciousness of God, primarily and exemplarily in Christ, but also through his example in devout feelings. Barth stresses the sharp difference between God’s revelation and man’s subjective faith, a duality that is overcome and ultimately united in the unifying power of the Holy Spirit.

3. This point of absolute intensity lies essentially beyond the knowledge of human reason, even though as such it grounds all reason. For both thinkers (in fact, for all the Idealists), this point is the moment of *actus*, that which justifies every subsequent condition of stasis. It is the nonobjective that posits every contrast and clarifies them. In Kant, this point carried the name of (nonintuitable) transcendental apperception; in Fichte, it was the original positing [*Ursetzung*] of the ego; for Schleiermacher, it was the most basic fact of all, religiously attuned feeling; for Herrmann, it was the personal decision of faith; and for Barth, it was faith itself, understood as the gracious act of God working in man. In any case, if our thought does not proceed from and return to this point that transcends all thought, then our thinking will be empty, vacuous and philistine. It might be correct according to the letter, but, according to the spirit, it will be utterly lost and vain, because it will be unaware of itself.

4. Because the reality that lies behind thinking and to which all thought aims is itself inherently beyond the grasp of thought, our thought must necessarily be dialectical. This dialectic is either static or dynamic. Static dialectic expresses the abyss separating our words and concepts from the unattainable unity beyond them, while dynamic dialectics refers to the way thought recognizes this situation and tries to begin a process by which thought asymptotically approaches this unattainable unity by progressively overcoming the dualities of existence.

5. This point from which all thinking is set in motion is also the point from which we explain being and the concrete objects of being. As the point of unity, it is also the point of totality in its comprehensive sense. For Schleiermacher, the whole world is to be derived from the point of subject-object unity (which is God). But this point is also the source of all piety and mysticism, and so from it too all of culture develops, being rooted in its soil. But, for Barth, this point of unity is the unity of God and man in Jesus Christ. Thus it is the point from which creation comes to be and from which all redemption is realized. And here too we have our point of entry into the meaning of culture and its works. For both men, however, the Church is an unconscious continuation of Christ's own work in the world, despite their different accents (for Schleiermacher, Christ's work continues through the impulses felt by believers, while, for Barth, it is more a matter of the objective mission a Christian receives).

Along with these important affinities, Barth also noted other similarities. Both, for example, hold that theology is but the handmaiden of Christian preaching, whose importance is therefore only relative.⁷ Both insist that dogmatics is normative only insofar as it adheres to the truth of Christian doctrine.⁸ And both also believe that dogmatics must develop from a medial principle, which, for Schleiermacher, was midway between Pietism and Rationalism, and, for Barth, was midway between Modernism and Catholicism.⁹ Schleiermacher's thoroughgoing irenicism even finds an important echo, unexpectedly enough, in Barth, who at first seems too

polemical and prophetic. Schleiermacher stressed the principle of “peace” as the aboriginal, all-reconciling harmony of all things at the origins of being. This basis for his irenicism has real parallels in Barth’s great panegyrics in the *Church Dogmatics* (for example, at the end of his doctrine on creation) and in his discussion on the Sabbath as the contemplative moment within the point of actuality, in which the whole unfolds in an especially powerful way (3,170; 5, 241f.; 6, 54f.).

Furthermore, both men insist on the necessity of dialectic as the only possible way of expressing a unity that will always elude the mind’s grasp.¹⁰ Both stress the impossibility for pure philosophy ever to reach the transcendent point that is the ground of the world,¹¹ though the question of this ground will continually crop up at the outer boundaries of philosophy.¹² And both recognize the importance of marriage for religion and see a reflection of this in the Song of Songs,¹³ with Barth’s treatment of the relation of man and woman directly corresponding to Schleiermacher’s own views.

Both look on the absolute point as the “fullness of concretion, as the summation and inner essence and power of the particular”,¹⁴ which in both thinkers gives to finitude a positive note. Barth’s thought is deeply influenced by this “higher realism”¹⁵ of Schleiermacher’s, and he stresses even more than the latter this sense for facticity,¹⁶ this preference for the factual and historical in the world. Schleiermacher’s ideal of the religious world as the “perfect republic”¹⁷ corresponds to Barth’s own attraction to the ideal of a perfect democracy. Behind such ideals we find operative, not Utopian fantasy, but that density of possibility that in Jesus Christ signifies the potential in history for “sinless development” that is “not unconnected with the idea of human nature”.¹⁸

All this converges on what for Barth grew to have more and more importance: the sense of creation and its perfection in the Second Adam, “both of which refer back to one undivided decision by God [to create and to redeem]”.¹⁹ This sentence is the summation and foundational principle of Barth’s whole doctrine of creation. And from it he derives his whole dynamic of the Church in the world: “No longer can there be any difference between the desert and

Jerusalem.”²⁰ As Barth says, “prayer is the highest instance of labor”, for it sends us into the world.

Finally, it was Schleiermacher who as a theologian “preached the prosperity of a well-ordered society in the form of a nation state but also countered this in his own time with a prophetic call for social equality and for a system of social security and state welfare (as a right and not just as an act of free generosity!) and for a shortening of the laborer’s work hours.”²¹ So besides the five major points listed above, we should also recall all the ways these two thinkers agreed in applied theology too.

No one should get the wrong impression, however, from these many affinities, for these various points of similarity really relate much more to their common schema of thought. Barth, however, fills this schema with a quite contrary content, one directly opposed to that of German Idealism. Above all, where Idealism posits identity as the point of origin (in Fichte, Schelling, Hegel or, most starkly, in Schleiermacher), Barth posits the encounter with the wholly Other, the gracious God meeting the sinful, self-centered human person. In Barth, there can never be any notion of a unity of feeling or even of experience. Unity comes only with the act of obedient faith, which is itself a gift of the encountering God. The misty, woolly Pietism of later Lutheranism must give way completely to the pathos of a John Calvin, with his deep reverence and sober reticence.

And precisely because the aboriginal encounter entails two pairs that are not only contrary but directly opposed to each other—grace and sin—so too must Barth put the emphasis on the *harshness* of the contrasts in the dialectical process. Not for Barth, the easy and soft transitions,²² the merely relative contrasts, the too-quick response of “Yet there is this to be said in our defense”,²³ all of which presupposes a deeper, uninterrupted continuity and mutual understanding of the poles!²⁴ Not for Barth, the easy way out of elliptical thinking²⁵ that lives from the pathos of a hidden identity! All this Barth replaces with the dialectic of scandal and event, an event that takes place only in absolute decision (God’s and man’s!), an event that rests on no other principle than itself.

The true is not the idea, the general, the transhistorical (as it was for Schleiermacher, despite his vaunted stress on the “aboriginal fact”), with history being only the unfolding of the Idea and its exemplification. On the contrary, the historical is the truth. Or, more exactly, the truth is that aboriginal history that was set by God in the revelation of his Word into the midst of history in the event of Christ. And the universal, the general and the natural must be explained in terms of this far more primary history.

Thus everything we experience is first bracketed with the sign of contrariety. Instead of the Enlightenment and Idealist habit of watering down the Christian message in its scandalous abruptness and absolute claim, Barth makes room for the original and pristine proclamation. Nonetheless, the Idealist form of thought still works powerfully even on this other content, so powerfully that we cannot help but ask: Is what Barth calls Schleiermacher’s “simply amazing and thorough overview” possible within theology, even as Barth has undertaken to provide it? Let us first speak of the *hesitations* that militate against seeking such an overview.

The absolute nodal point in Barth’s system is the intersection between Word and faith: the Word is the exponent of the God who creates out of nothing, and faith is the exponent of the total creatureliness of the human person (provided we understand that creatureliness as already exalted, redeemed and transformed by the Word and made a participant in God’s possibility). For without this incorporation into God’s own sphere, we cannot even conceive of the union of the two opposing poles into an identity. Theologically speaking, this point of identity is the Holy Spirit, “the subjective realization of revelation” (2, 222), in which, however, the recipients are so drawn into the act of revelation that “they not only have revelation in their existence but that is what they *are*” (2, 257). However much the perduring distance remains affirmed, we are never made aware of it except in this incorporation.

To this context belongs also everything that Barth has to say about spirit in his anthropology, where spirit is interpreted dynamically as “the movement of God to man” (6, 427), which then enables a countermovement from the human to God (6, 428). But “Spirit in its origins is identical with God”, insofar as God associates with man,

“determining him anew without increasing or lessening or changing his prior possibility” (6, 429). This is what finally distinguishes man from the other animals, this unique way God has touched him, bestowing upon him spirit and temporal meaning (6, 431).

Here we see how close Barth is in this regard to Schleiermacher, a nearness that does not easily admit of a clear Yes or No to him, especially since Barth grants to him that his program

of contemplating and describing the pious Christian consciousness could also be adopted and realized in a quite different manner, namely, as a theology of the subjective reality and possibility of revelation, which would not exclude but include its objective reality and possibility: as a theology from below, from the human perspective, but which would understand itself as a theology of the Holy Spirit [7, 370-71].

It is not difficult to pick up how intertwined and complicated is Barth's Yes and No to his great predecessor:

It is a considerable testimony both to the formal originality and to the material value of Schleiermacher's conception that, though its rejection is patently necessary, this cannot be accomplished without conceding its great merit and following up in some way the consequences of his stimulating insights. . . . If we look closely, and dismiss every false accusation, the remaining objects present themselves as a vast complex that curiously enough confronts us at the exact point where we cannot but first and foremost acknowledge and admire his positive achievement. In other words, he is extremely weak where he is so very strong; he is catastrophically wrong where he is most convincingly and instructively right [7, 373].

Such as? One of the main points where Schleiermacher was most definitely right centered on the interpretation of sin:

Nothingness, vanity—that is, sin, alienation from God—exists only in its relation to redemption. Sin and evil only exist because there is an awareness of redemption, which includes an awareness of an original perfection. And this awareness is measured by the *goal* that consciousness of redemption presents to the mind and from our initial *origins* (which cannot be completely obscured in us). It is *when* we become aware, by virtue of our relationship to God, of a future victory over our existential divisions (and at the same time of the original unity of our existence) that we become aware for the first time of those divisions and of how they merit punishment because of our guilt. It is by virtue of this connection that we fall under the sentence of negation. But this negation confronting us is therefore an annex, as it were, of the prior affirmation preceding everything else [7, 379].

Far from rejecting the core of this thought, Barth is praising it. But the schema in which this thought is conceived is that of asking about

what makes possible the differentiation and sundering from a protological and eschatological unity and identity. We have already seen this schema at work in *The Epistle to the Romans*. This leads us to ask whether Barth's whole announced (and for him indispensable) method of "presupposition" is not finally in the acute sense a purely idealistic method that can only be applied at all within this philosophy of identity, since the spirit, in order to understand itself as a unity, is always "presupposed" as a *divided* spirit (for example, as nature, and so forth).

Thus, according to Barth, man is a "spirit-soul", that is, a soul who is a free regent of the body, insofar as God has given him spirit (6,510). But once more: spirit is given to him *insofar* as he is "spirit-soul".

The *one* divine calling concerns the one human person, who as soul rules himself and as body must serve himself and, by accomplishing this life-act, corresponds to the divine call. This vocation calls man to be there for the person of the Creator as a created person, that is, to be able to be active [6, 512].

In other words, the divine Spirit (as the one calling) posits the human person, who is thus presupposed as someone who can be called. Indeed "human nature is itself the reflected anticipation of his created destiny that God wants to be with him" (6, 513). But that prior anticipation lies fundamentally in God and in God's will, from which every reflected copy is endowed with the power to exist.

This kind of argument becomes clearest in Barth's soteriology, where Christ's Passion and death require as a precondition the contingent sin of man, which is an "extraneous burden that does not originally belong to his life" (6, 765). But, on the other hand, sin is just as clearly to be understood as even possible at all only from the reconciliation effected in the death of Jesus. And so Barth concludes that the "election of the man Jesus Christ to suffer is the foundational act of God's gratuitous choice" (4,129). If we add to this the fact that Barth has a marked proclivity to Scholasticism (in the sense of a clear rationality), then his method of a self-positing and self-presupposing principle will not be able to avoid a close brush with Hegel.

Is the fusion of Proton and Eschaton, is this whole dynamization of reason, not finally the Spirit as Hegel understands Spirit? Does their identity become the actual agent of the whole intermediate process—which process, however, itself becomes again the co-presupposition of the principle within the bracket of the main presupposition? Can we not see this in the way reason is dynamized as pure event, in the high-spirited superiority of a victorious, all-conquering Yes? Barth's exposition of Hegel's philosophy in his history of Protestant theology²⁶ is written with such verve and conviction that one can hardly miss a kind of inner congeniality between the two thinkers.

One might immediately object: this Idealistic tendency might be crucial for the first period of his thought, but it has been essentially overcome with his basic recognition of creation as an inherently good form of being in its own right, recognized and treasured by God and never to be annulled. That might well be true. But one should not overlook the fact that the compatibility of God and creature even in the time of the *Church Dogmatics* ultimately rests on Christology. But precisely in Christ the two natures, divine and human, can only cohere in the identity of the one Divine Person. In other words, everything that in the created realm is called spirit and person cannot even be thought without this original identity.

Among all the creatures, this man [Jesus] is the one in whose identity with himself we must recognize at once the identity of God with himself. In all other creatures the presence of God is at least problematical, but here it is beyond discussion. It cannot be overlooked; it is a necessity of thought. It would be impossible to see and think about man, that is, the man Jesus, if we did not at once see and think about God also. In and through the being of man there immediately meets us at this point the being of God also. . . . This cannot be said of any other creature. In regard to the rest of creation, the vision of the Creator in the creature can only be indirect, and therefore the connection of the concept of the creature with that of the Creator can be made only in the form of subsequent reflection. Here in man, that is, in *this* man, the vision and concept of the Creator are both direct and immediate in the creature. In the case of this creature, there is no need to reflect about God. God is present and revealed as this creature is present and revealed. . . . [God's] presence and revelation in man, that is, in *this* man, is not just a fact [*Tatsache*] but a deed [*Tat*]. . . . He does not exist outside this act of sovereignty, but within it. He is there as God is there, as he is there as the Savior of each and every human being. The fact that he is a person, that he is the soul of a body, that he has time and so on, does not make him real. It merely indicates his possibilities as a human being. He becomes and is real as God is there in him. . . . Not two juxtaposed realities—a divine and then a human, or even less a

human and then a divine—constitute the essence of man, this man, but the one, divine reality, in which as such the human is posited, contained and included. Man, this man, is the coming Kingdom of God, nothing else besides. He is, by being in the Word of God [6, 79-80].

This is the dogmatic statement of the *anhypostasis* and the *enhypostasis* of Christ, which in Scholastic terminology is defined as the *actuatio creata per actum increatum*.²⁷ True, Barth protests that he does not want to understand this identity of Christ as a principle in such a way that he would deduce the nature of the rest of mankind from it. And yet, his leading principle is formulated to say: “The ontological determination of man is grounded in the fact that, in the midst of all other human beings, one is the man Jesus” (6, 158). Indeed man is man only because of this, where the “boundary of his condition” (that is, of his “nature”) (6, 209) has been transgressed. “And the image of the circular movement of coming from God and going back to God should not seduce us into overlooking the fact that both movements mean that the frontiers of the creature have been broken through and transgressed” (6, 222).

We cannot go farther in our analysis here without casting a glance from this latest form of Barth’s doctrine to its *earliest form* as it took shape even before the time when Barth was writing the first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* (1919). As a graduate student, Barth was first an avid pupil of Harnack’s but then found his real teacher in Wilhelm Herrmann, at Marburg, in 1908. That same year he became an editorial assistant on the staff of Martin Rade’s periodical *Christliche Welt*. In 1909, he became suffragan pastor in Geneva, serving there until he was named pastor of Safenwil in 1911 (staying until 1921).

The publications of this time (up until about 1916) show, of course, that he was in the mainstream of the then-prevailing liberal theology. But, remarkably enough, many of the outlines of his later writings are clearly discernable. This is especially true of the thought forms then being impressed on his mind, which he would later infuse with a different content. For the remainder of this chapter, we will briefly analyze the three most important essays of that time.

The first was called “Modern Theology and Work for the Kingdom of God”.²⁸ This provoked a reply from Achelis and P. Drews, prompting Barth to explain his point of view once more.²⁹ From the studies Barth had just concluded, two things stand out as particularly thought-provoking: religious individualism and historical relativism. Religious experience is strictly individual: “There is no universally valid *ordo salutis*, no universally valid source of revelation that one person could demonstrate to another.”³⁰ Indeed, precisely because religious experience is strictly personal but, as the strictly personal, is also the absolute standard, there is therefore in nature and human culture no absolute or fixed standard. “That is the content of the school bookbag that this pupil of ‘modern’ theology took with him his whole life from his systematic and historical studies. Two things stand abruptly juxtaposed: religion knows only individual values, and history knows only universally valid facts.”³¹

Faced with this situation, one can “flee into praxis”, and most follow this strategy. But Barth will have none of it. He wants rather to look the difficulty right in the eye: to speak to others as a theologian of the strictly individually experienced religion without making the results of this talk available to a normative, transhistorical concept of orthodoxy. “We apply historical relativism to our own theology as well, and, when we compare it to others, we see it as but one manifestation of the gospel alongside others.”³²

As we said, this provoked quite a debate, and in his answer Barth made his standpoint clearer. Religious individualism is the great discovery of Schleiermacher, he said, behind which we can never go without falling into all the obscurities of nineteenth-century theology, especially of Ritschl’s school. And here Barth quotes Schleiermacher: “Everywhere our thoughts and words are the changeable epiphenomena behind which lies the inner unchangeable reality that can itself never be conveyed as such.”³³ Of course, the individual does lay hold of life—the absolute norm—in his contact with history and the self-consciousness of Jesus (despite the relativity of the sources); but “only in ‘feeling’, in inner experience, do we encounter the normative, the objective, the eternal.”³⁴ In contrast to this inner experience, preaching and dogma

remain utterly inadequate, and certainly never source and norm. The whole of this first essay is dominated by the idea of the radicalism of the nontangibility, the nonobjectivity of religious reality.

Barth's second essay, first given as a lecture in Neuenburg in 1910 and called "The Christian Faith and History",³⁵ is an attempt to infuse all the rigor of the old Reformers into Schleiermacher's methodology without deviating even an inch from him. The postulate for this project runs:

While fully presupposing and recognizing historical relativism, we wish to establish a uniquely religious and theological methodology based on such relativism by virtue of which there can emerge an absolute relation to absolute history, by virtue of which faith and revelation can occur.³⁶

Faith is the experience of God, the immediate awareness of a life force lying beyond this world, to which the individual is raised and which gives to the individual a transindividual life. This personal dimension already has within it a social side, since it could neither arise nor continue to procreate without history.

Faith essentially belongs to the problematic of the individual, not of reason. And through the instance of faith, the abstract possibility of cultural awareness becomes actualized, transformed in concrete reality. But that means that cultural awareness is made historical because of faith. Faith and the historicity of culture are synonymous terms. What makes this so paradoxical is the fact that faith is in no way bound up with time's forms of appearance. There is no time in the experience of God. On the contrary, just as active and passive behavior, absolute dependence and absolute striving coincide in the experience of God, so too are past and future (origin and later perfection) present in the same moment.³⁷

The question is then in what sense the historical personality of Jesus is constitutive for the Christian faith. Barth divides the main answers to this question into two large camps: the first answer points to a historical datum as norm that transcends mere personality: the canon of Scripture, the rule of faith as its authentic interpreter, and the episcopal Magisterium: "Catholicism was established, and everything that later accrued was only the necessary consequence and unfolding of that institution of the second century."³⁸ The Reformation, of course, denied the last of these pillars, but it never really broke with the basic features of the Catholic principle:

The Reformation really removed only the third of the three moments of the Catholic understanding of authority, namely, the hierarchical teaching authority. The second, the rule of faith, the ecumenical confessions of the councils, they explicitly acknowledged. . . . But it was the first, the Old and New Testament canon, that the Reformers—and especially their successors—elevated into a formal authority that it had never before had, so much so that the opponents of the old-style Protestantism could not without reason say that the Reformers were replacing the living Pope with a paper pope. . . . And so biblicism lay like an albatross around the neck of the young Protestant theology, and we too are still suffering from its different versions even today.³⁹

What both classical Protestantism and Catholicism have in common in these principles is the unavoidable stress on rational assent over personal trust in the act of faith.⁴⁰ But with such a stress came also a continuation of the coercive culture of the Middle Ages: “Along with a paper pope we also got a Protestant Rome.”⁴¹

But times have changed, and scientific scholarship now lays its hands on the regions of time and space, with its inevitable relativizing of historical data. And think of modern philosophy! We can never undo Kant and his Copernican turn to the subject or abandon Kant’s successful midwifery “in rescuing the autonomy of consciousness from the crust of the coercive culture of the Middle Ages. . . . There is only *one* way of knowing and that is the knowledge of critical rationalism.”⁴²

The other large camp with its own way of answering this question is that of St. Paul. This answer lived on in the authentic message of the Reformation and found a new advocate in German Idealism, especially in Schleiermacher:

With one man, the Romantic starting point became the point of departure for a new theory of God and life, that is, for a new philosophy of religion. This was so fruitful and necessary because it recognized the problems in their qualitative distinctions without losing sight of the synthesis already present in classical poetry and especially in the life of Goethe. And who was that man? Schleiermacher.⁴³

“Problems in their qualitative distinctions.” What does Barth mean by this? He is referring to the difference between literary and philosophical Idealism, on the one hand, and the theology of religious experience, on the other. And once Barth learned this distinction from Schleiermacher, it remained decisive for his entire thought structure from then on out:

[Idealism] treats of the objective and abstract *possibility* of consciousness, the a priori basis of knowing and acting, while [the theology of religious experience] treats of the knowing and acting subject, the thinking and willing individual, the human being *of reality*, the person who actualizes the possibilities of reality, individually and transindividually, simultaneously certain of himself and of God in one act. Theology is related to cultural awareness as the actualizing, regulative principle. . . . Like Plato's parable, we are in the cave, our backs are turned to the fire, but in its light we see the light. . . . The peace of God is higher than all reason.⁴⁴

The distinction in the core of this primordial experience between "seeing" and "feeling" is now equated by Barth with the dualism of faith and justification. Seen from the human side, justification is understood in its forensic sense (as synthetic judgment), but, from God's point of view, it is an inner justification (analytic judgment). This means that ultimately justification is identical with faith. "The feeling that God brings about, his justification, his *deed* of election, all these arise *in* the [subjective] intuition and seeing of God's efficacious work; they arise *in* faith, in obedience to moral norms."⁴⁵

But this is now the decisive presupposition for Paul, Luther and Schleiermacher: the highest act, that which carries and supports all else, must not be *presupposed* in the concept of man. The concept of man is cultural consciousness worked out in logic, ethics and aesthetics. And such awareness can and must not know anything of such an intuition if it is to remain true to its own methods. Here, just as in the problem of the superiority of the individual over universal reason, we are not dealing with a transcendental, universal, law-based possibility of the event but with the actual, concrete, unique and real event itself, that is, with *history*.⁴⁶

It is precisely the individuality of this act that puts us on the right track. Even the object being intuited, wherein God's works are revealed, must be something individual: "mankind", "love", "the personal inner experience of pure surrender and pure community".⁴⁷ So runs the answer of the philosophy of religion.

The answer of Christian dogmatic theology runs parallel to this (or is it a fall from this answer?), for it describes our relationship to Christ as founded in the most interior experience of God. The Christ meant here is the "Christ outside of us", since "intuition" is precisely "intuition of something", and thus in this sense is forensic. But this is no "Christ in himself" but a Christ accessible only in faith, only a

“Christ in us”. With Schleiermacher, Barth defines objectivity as “the effective manifestation of Christ, effective in the sense of affecting the other in some definite way”.⁴⁸ Outside of this influencing—that is, outside of justifying faith—there is no objectivity in religion.

Objectivity in theology is the objectivizing, the projecting of this influence in thought and word; otherwise, there is no such thing as objectivity. And so we come full circle: “The Christ outside of us is the Christ in us. Efficacious history is faith at work.”⁴⁹

But to what extent is Christ the source and substance of the Christian faith? First of all, he himself is that source: “It is not his external life, his words or deeds” but his person that is the substance of our faith.⁵⁰ The externals can of course help to mediate his presence but they would never suffice alone to produce that inner historical “encounter” with God. Only his inner life, which has earned the name *justitia*, can be the source of eternal life. This however is mediated by the documents that relate the events of his public life. But we leap from the relativity of history into the absolute by a kind of Platonic “vision” of this life as it “shines through” the documents and by the simple fact that this life proves to be efficacious.

But what we look on as being objectively so efficacious is made subjectively effective in us through the Christ that God brings about in us. In transcendental Idealism, God does not stand apart from man, nor does Idealism admit a synergism of mutual influence: “Faith is itself the work of God, and thus faith is justification.”⁵¹ Faith is in its very essence the life of Christ in me: what Christ *is*, I am *becoming*.

For Barth, both synergism and biblicism represent “swamps”, whereas a true theology of God-consciousness lives on in the circles of the mystics and Pietists, though in amazing costumes. Only in this theology do we find all the proper equations of the dialectical pairs: *fiducia cordis* = *oboedientia spiritus*, Christ outside of us = Christ inside us, history = faith. And Schleiermacher came from this tradition. “He taught us,” says Barth, “or tried to teach us, to win back and truly make our own the true legacy of the Reformation by fully exploiting the resources of modern thought.”⁵²

Only one piece of the argument remains yet to be put in place. The intermediary between the historical Christ and us is the *living tradition* of those who have truly been awakened⁵³ to this new life and who live in constant contact with Christ in the stream of their whole lives.⁵⁴ That is why for Barth, contact with authors rather than texts has priority:

We should not associate the divinity of the Holy Spirit imparted to the Scriptures with the biblical texts but with their *authors*, for it is between them and us, not between their letters and us, that a real rapport and contact can take place and serve as the vehicle for the *apprehensio Christi in corde*.⁵⁵

Once we stress author over the letter, we can venture to discover the wider effects of the biblical witnesses in and outside the Church:

not only in Augustine, Luther and Schleiermacher, but also in Francis of Assisi and Friedrich von Bodelschwingh, who in their deeds were just as good a source of revelation for their fellow man as the above-named three writers. . . . And is not a part of what makes Goethe so powerfully effective a kind of loving obedience to Christ in self-renunciation, however far apart the Olympian of Weimar might at first glance seem to be from the Man of Gethsemane?⁵⁶

But the fact of the aboriginal religious phenomenon remains ultimately underivable. It is, in fact, “the beginning that can be explained by no other more primary reality”.⁵⁷

Finally, there is Barth’s lecture on “Faith in a Personal God”.⁵⁸ It too moves within the same Schleiermacherian categories and tries to use these to explain the problem of God’s personal nature and to criticize the relevant literature on the subject in the history of theology.

The concept of personhood hovers on the border between transcendental philosophy and psychology but continually eludes a full accounting in terms of either. Whereas transcendental philosophy (in logic, ethics and aesthetics) stresses the notion of infinity inherent in personhood, without the limitations and determinations of the historical ego, psychology can deal only with the historical self and leaves out all considerations of its transcendental background. But a thorough treatment of the phenomenon of personality can never succeed without constant reference to both perspectives:

Viewed transcendentally as the I of spirit, personality is undoubtedly infinite judgment and comprehension [*Setzen und Umfassen*], spiritual openness and endless potency. . . . We have already defined the being of spirit as action. This action contains in itself the tendency to aim toward an infinite ideal. This tendency is the essence of the spirit.⁵⁹

On the other hand, viewed empirically, the finitude of spirit's being is an empirically verifiable condition and thus inseparable from what we call personality.⁶⁰

Applying this to God, Barth moves cautiously. God is indeed Spirit first of all, infinitely so. But it is naive to think that we can divest the concept of personality of its finite connotations by a *diktat* of reason or strip it of its temporal identity by the mere invocation of an infinite ideal (for example, by speaking of an infinite "self-determination").

But this does not mean we can avoid the concept of personality as an expression of authentic religious experience. So all that remains to us is to hover between the *sic et non* of two unacceptable alternatives: between the forbidden frontier of pantheism, which would strip God of all personal attributes, and the forbidden boundary of deism, which would like to subsume God's personality within the finitude of the world. Between these two impossible alternatives we must content ourselves with the ambiguous center, with that *sic et non* that we are never allowed to cover over with a false apologetic synthesis.

Above all, we will want to avoid taking the human structure of the person in its dialectical hovering between finitude and infinity as our starting point for developing a concept of God. What is so fascinating about this argument is that we can already pick up in 1913, before Barth even began to write the first version of *The Epistle to the Romans*, the first adumbrations of a doctrine of the analogy of faith:

We cannot find an analogy to the real content of religious belief in God in the human personality. . . . No concept of God that arises from projecting human awareness onto the transcendent can ever reach the reality of God, let alone describe it exhaustively. Religion's thinking about God cannot be something projected from within ourselves; it can only be the reflection of a fact that has been created and projected *into us*. This fact is *life in God*, which is granted to us through our *connectedness to history*. This inner connection to history is religious experience. In it we possess God, and because of it we can speak of God.⁶¹

All of this, however, is still spoken on the basis of the liberalism of his training. But now Barth continues further, speaking here of religious

experience:

Just as we draw from experience the pictorial images of our notion of God in their various individual moments, so now we must find in religious experience also the ground of the peculiar antimony of these moments. This antinomy must be tangible in every religious experience. But we will confine our treatment here to that antinomy of divine life that is awakened by the gospel of Jesus, because here the inner contradiction has found its deepest, clearest and most perfect expression.⁶²

This is the antinomy that pervades the whole gospel: between the infinite importance of each individual soul and personality and the impersonality of the Kingdom of God, for which the individual has to sacrifice his life in total surrender. This dualism, which is the essence of the gospel and of the life of Jesus, is the kernel of all religion and the true starting point for conceiving the idea of God, in which both moments must be stressed and any attempt to find a formula for unity abandoned.

What can we say about these three essays we have been summarizing? In all of them we find in the content a typical liberal theology of the day, and yet all the essential formal outlines of Barth's later positive thought come through unmistakably. We can summarize our results in the following eight points:

1. The starting point for systematics is immediacy to God, where, however, the divine is completely nonobjective.
2. The focus is always on a "fact" and in this sense on historicity, in contrast to the a priori structures of philosophy.
3. This fact is seen as brought about by God, not generated by anthropological structures; it is something that man cannot reach, let alone understand.
4. This fact is what is real in relation to which everything human and "cultural" is mere potential. These potentials, of course, have meaning, but only because they come from and go back to this more basic fact without which reality they would remain meaningless and vacuous.
5. Barth tries to fill the Idealist vessel with the content of the Reformation, or better with St. Paul and the gospel.
6. In all these essays, Barth draws a sharply polemical line between his position and Catholicism, which is clearly taken to be the reference point for all that Barth opposes.

7. From all these considerations comes the first mention of the analogy of faith (or, more exactly, in this context, of the analogy of history) as opposed to the analogy of being.

8. And we notice here for the first time the motif of religious socialism as well as a comprehensive universalism bursting the confines of ecclesial narrowness, the same motif that we first met in *The Epistle to the Romans* and which eventually found its ultimate justification and defense in the *Church Dogmatics*.

The results of this examination of these essays and the original thought form they display seems to confirm and corroborate completely what we said earlier about the conceptual framework Barth developed between *The Epistle to the Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics*. Indeed, the way Barth consciously links Paul, Luther and Schleiermacher together, which is evident in the earliest essays and is consistently maintained, suggests that the difference between the earlier writings and the later ones are relatively minor. At first, the stress might lie more on Schleiermacher, who provides Barth with his conceptual schema, into which Paul and the Reformation are projected. Later it might lie more on Scripture, but read through the eyes of the Reformation and Schleiermacher. In any case, these shifts do not affect the substance of the affinities connecting all Barth's writings.

This does raise the important issue of philosophy's influence on theology, however. Critics of Thomas Aquinas have often accused him of being at heart an Aristotelian philosopher who would recast revelation in this mold, thereby constricting it. Nor have critics been slow to accuse Barth of the same thing: taking a fully formed picture of the world—this time, that of German Idealism—and making it the standard for shaping and containing the biblical message.

But this comparison with Thomas Aquinas should give us pause, especially at this most critical juncture of our investigation. Barth himself after all accused Thomas of philosophism, clearly, then, something he wanted to avoid. For at least one fact about Barth is indisputable: Barth has always wanted to be a theologian and nothing else. He has always been aware, increasingly so, of this objection raised against him. He has taken it into account, confronted it: in this respect he is anything but naive.

He knows, and he has repeated it often, that every theologian has no choice but to work with human concepts and thought forms. And if he uses those concepts in which he first learned to think theologically, then he does so in clear awareness of the consequences and because he can find no better. He has made use of them, not as a philosophy *per se*, but as a helpmate for theological work, transposing them and submitting them to a necessary critique, sterilizing the instruments before using them in his theological operations.

He has made use of them the way Thomas did the Aristotelian categories, which to philosophy would seem illegitimate or at least “supererogatory”. Fundamentally, we cannot object to such a transposition of categories. Revelation has never revealed that it has been predestined to be expressed in one, single human thought *form* (this is not to say anything against the content of a “perennial philosophy”). The Old Testament itself thinks and expresses itself in Babylonian and Iranian thought forms. Paul and John use Hellenistic, Platonic and perhaps even Philonic schemata and concepts. Was Platonism not a form of Idealism and is Schleiermacher not a Platonist? And has not Joseph Marechal proven that certain basic intuitions of modern speculative philosophy are in complete agreement with those of Scholasticism, that the ontological and the transcendental modes do not finally contradict but complement each other?

Everything depends on the discretion with which theologians know how to handle their instruments. And so our last task in this second section of Part II is to describe how well Barth has made critical use of the “instruments” of the thought forms of German Idealism within his own theological framework.^{[63](#)}

Chapter 9

IDEALISM AND REVELATION

Barth has repeatedly stressed that he has not been trying to build any system at all, not even a theological one, that he was simply trying to trace everything back to the mystery of the God made man. Barth is especially insistent on this at the very place where systematization seems to loom the largest, in the doctrine of predestination: "We cannot gather everything up into a system and look at [this issue] directly. We can only look at it by gazing on the face of the living person Jesus Christ."¹ According to Barth, the biblical narratives are not given to us so that we may submit them to our systematizing; on the contrary, they compel us to contemplate the same scene from continually new starting points (5, 258-59).

If there is no fulcrum point in revelation that one can definitively select and use as the center of gravity around which everything else is ordered, then theology too is forced to think from ever-new perspectives (2, 963-90). Above all, it is impossible "to bring into one system the work of creation and the work of reconciliation as if we were dealing with two pillars of *one* building" (5, 439).

Let us, then, begin our investigation at this most delicate of points: at the issue of whether there is an inner compulsion in Barth's theology to become a system.

1. Systematization versus the Existential Moment

The critical point of Barthian thought has always been predestination. Barth himself feels this. A kind of vertigo seizes him when he gazes on the immense light that radiates from this highest of summits overlooking everything else. Should one trust this light? Is not such gazing a presumptuous survey of all, a form of hybris, a Gnosis, a lapse into "philosophy"? Should any human being be allowed to eavesdrop on this, God's most "primordial decision" (4, 53), this "aboriginal will" (6,175), this, the most primary of all the words God spoke to himself, in whose "bracket" everything else

takes place (5,123) and in which—as Barth says with Hegel—God simultaneously goes forth from himself and remains true to himself (ibid.)? Is it really given to man to possess the key to all God’s works and ways? Was this not the very crime of Prometheus?

Or perhaps it *is* permitted. Perhaps this is the prerogative of the Christian. And if it is permitted, could it perhaps also be *commanded*? Perhaps we *are* called to climb so high that every fall from those heights, every rejection for our hybris, has already been anticipated and allowed for from God’s very first decision in Jesus Christ, the Crucified One, rejected in our stead. Is it not true that in the whole of God’s work, God never ceases to govern—of course in different ways but never so that his work is deflected or interrupted but moves inexorably toward the goal already determined by God himself (4, 97)? Can we ever interpret God’s wrath in any other way but as the “shadow side of his blessing” (6, 741)?

Does the “mysterious illumination” (4, 160) not finally come down to this: that in God’s revelation he has been utterly and totally revealed (as *The Epistle to the Romans* already said), even if this revelation is paradoxically veiled, that is, meant for faith? But is not faith, as Barth has often insisted, true and real knowledge? Is this not the very Pauline mystery that is known to the whole Church, since “Jesus Christ is its content”? Granted, this revealed mystery is hidden, but does not this hiddenness mean simply that it could never be grasped or dissolved or flattened? Does not this mystery signify that our part is but to stand in awe and amazement, gratefully and hopefully worshipping a mystery that is accessible to us only in the form of faith (4, 329)?

It is useless to try to get any other answer out of Barth than this one. To faith, the mystery has been revealed, so radiantly that all shadows can only be interpreted from its light. “However presumptuous it may sound, one may not deviate from this position even by the length of a finger” (7, 419).

To defend himself against the charge of indulging in a Gnosis, Barth had only to point to faith itself: revelation cannot be had except through faith. But faith is pure event, it is both being seized and seizing hold of something, in worship and obedience, it is both God’s decision and man’s. “There is no knowledge of predestination

outside the circle of the electing God moving to the human person elected and back again to the electing God" (4, 204).

Faith *means* the annulment of this impossible neutrality, the abolition of a purely "theoretical" contemplation of this truth. Whoever does not really stand *under* the judgment and grace of God (and only the believer does so) has no knowledge whatever of the truth and mystery of predestination" (4, 857). The light that this mystery radiates is "no natural light but the light of revelation, of God" (4,173). And if, in spite of all this, we really want to pile on the words, then this remains to be said: with Barth it is the existential character of faith and Christian life that serves as the counterweight to the revelation of predestination, and it alone makes it possible for us to bear its dazzling splendor.

Only the one who really abides in faith has a right to that truth. But of course the one who really is alive in the faith will also have no time to abuse this truth by building a systematic and theoretical construct. When a believer believes, he cannot look away even for a moment from the decisive and judging character of God's truth. And as a theologian, the occasion will never arise that would justify bracketing the existential character of the faith, as if some theoretical content would be left over after these machinations. And inasmuch as God's decisions are always situated in time, fulfilling time, indeed constituting time as true time, the believer will never have the opportunity to abstract from time to satisfy a curiosity about what these decisions look like in eternity, considered abstractly and definitively.

As we have already seen, the deeply existential character of Barth's dogmatics is rooted in the supporting categories of actualism. It is crucial to understand this, for it is actualism alone that justifies the boldness of his doctrine of predestination. Both stand or fall together. A theology that tried to mitigate or exclude the event-character in favor of a merely "essential overview" of the content of dogmatics would have lost the right to enjoy the illumination of that central light:

What the hearer of the Word or the reader of theology must understand is that ultimately, and transcending all definitions of it, the whole point of predestination is that it *summons* the hearer or reader. As Nathan said to David: "*Thou* art the man!"

The promise constituting the person is no theory about an object but an address to a subject. Of course, this involves a “doctrine”, but in the old authentic sense of *doctrina*: teaching, instruction. A pupil who submits to instruction, or the apprentice to training, has already been claimed and first submits his trust to teacher and subject matter before beginning to learn the material. So too with the Christian proclamation. It is in the hearing (or not hearing), the believing (or not believing), the thanking (or not thanking) that the subject determines in what sense this truth will be a truth for him. In any case, the truth will still be the truth that he too is elect of God, since this truth is rooted in the election of Christ and encounters the believer as a commission to the elect community of Christ. But the word of promise does not itself decide whether the subject will confirm this truth by living a life in defiance of this election or according to it. That only occurs when one takes a stand and decides [4, 355-56].

Now we can see why, for Barth, ethics is an inherent part of dogmatics, why each article of faith has a corresponding ethic, not as a practical “corollary”, but as the equally essential “decision-side” of the truth of an article of faith. Indeed, without a corresponding ethics, dogmatics would not be the full and complete presentation of revelation. Ethics brings dogmatics out of the realm of pure theory. But even when ethics is included, dogmatics remains only a “signpost” (4, 357) and an ordering of the proclamation of God’s Word, which must still encounter the individual in community directly. Even with the doctrine of predestination, dogmatics cannot be *more* than it is: it cannot attempt to be a self-sufficient system of knowledge.

But as this ordering of the proclamation, dogmatics cannot be *less* than it is. It cannot abandon living at that mysterious boundary where Scripture speaks of election, creation, reconciliation and the final victory of God. It cannot try to be more certain of itself by saying *less* than the Word of God wants to say.

But even the Word of God speaks in this matter “unsystematically”. It speaks in this never-resolved ambiguity and gap between the revealed mystery and this judgmental and decisional character of the truth. Any dogmatician who tries to conjure away either one of these two sides in favor of the other has in one way or another made a selection and ventured a decision that the Word of God has not called for.

The same applies to exegetes (4, 401f.): whoever avoids the decision set forth in Barth’s dogmatics is *still making a decision*, in fact an extremely consequential decision, with immense

repercussions for the interpretation of revelation, one that will constrict revelation and force it into the contortions of a limited schema and thought form. For whoever refuses to do his exegesis from this mysterious boundary but chooses another point of view has then decided to judge one set of scriptural passages by another set. But this deprives the whole of Scripture of that light dwelling within the whole canon, which alone can illumine Scripture as a whole.

Barth is well aware that we are standing before *the* crux of theology. The urgency is equally pressing on all sides of this crux, and we can never get at the truth it signifies by hovering in some neutral no man's land. But then how can we *truly* speak of the simple knowledge of God's victory and lordship? For Barth, we can do so only by acknowledging the fact that

we are able to do this only by clearly depicting the necessarily *broken* and fractured nature of all theological thought and life. Every form of theology is a *theologia viatorum*, a project that can never meet the natural aspirations of all human thought and speech for perfection and conclusiveness. Theology is not the full voucher [*Ausweis*] of its object, giving us the right to get a "purchase" on the object, but only a signpost [*Hinweis*] to it. A fragment, not a system. . . . If this is true in general, all the more is it true at this point where the relationship between God and creature has been disturbed by a foreign element: sin, with its consequences of fall, wrath and curse. This is an element that can never be incorporated into a harmonious system of binding truths. Here, least of all may theology let itself be compelled or seduced into constructing a system [7, 332-33].

The break that sin has created in the continuity of truth—not the truth of God as such but his truth as it is being worked out in the world—also affects and is mirrored in our ability to know and to express that knowledge. But more than that, it affects all history. Sin is but a moment, alien, destructive, disruptive, to be sure, but, because God is Lord, it is but a moment. But a moment within a history of God's dealings with his creature, the history of God working out his will in human affairs to fulfill his will determined from the very beginning. "And theology is the report of this history. . . . Under all circumstances it must be a *narration*" (7, 334).

Thus theology can never abstract from history and promise us another light than the one given to us by revelation. This is a light that, because it is given in revelation, can never be divorced from history and event, from struggle, from fear and trembling. Theology

must put the accent between the totality of victory and the total seriousness of decision exactly where revelation puts it. By doing so, theology resists the temptation of presuming to be the “enlightenment” of revelation. And thereby, says Barth, theology allows the two aspects of revelation to be brought to the fore and made clear: the aspect of the revealed mystery [of victory] and the aspect of the now even more urgent decision, on which everything hangs. Maintaining this delicate balance between essentialism and existentialism, theology can in its own way mirror the many dimensions of God’s Word. Far from anticipating God or truncating revelation, theology fuses the daring boldness of faith with the humility of its calling.

In the light of this perspective on Barth’s way of thinking, we should not prate on so easily about the philosophical “a priorism” in his theology. Even if it is true that there is an inner necessity compelling theology to take up this question, this does not mean that it is not a genuinely *theological* necessity. Since, according to Barth’s constant reiterations, the freedom of the creature to decide has not been jeopardized but finally given its right object, and since God’s own aboriginal decision is a free one that is not essentially tied to his nature (though it tells us a lot about it), therefore there can be no convincing objection to the theological character of this necessity.

We might add that Barth has shown a certain courage in this regard. Whereas other theologians have undertaken to do their thinking from the same boundary but carefully obscure their tracks so that others can see only their conclusions and not their operative presuppositions, Barth prefers to play out all his cards openly, in spite of the expected difficulties. Many peers, especially from the Lutheran camp, have criticized him for this and have summoned him to return to the proper boundaries of theology. But theology has no boundaries save those of revelation itself.

2. Word and Faith

Next to predestination, no other feature in his theology has generated the charge of philosophism more than Barth’s adoption of Schleiermacher’s principle of “absolute dependence”, whose form

Barth took over but which he recast in terms of the encounter between the Word of God and faith. After everything we have said, no one would dispute the fact of Schleiermacher's influence here. But the real question is whether or not Barth was justified in taking over and transforming this principle.

Nor should we forget the point already made in the last chapter that Schleiermacher's principle was (and could be) nothing but the basic theme of the old Reformers that had been secularized in Pietism and systematized by Kant and Fichte, just as the Reformers drew it out of revelation itself. Was not this *spoliatio* of Schleiermacher by Barth but an act of restitution, restoring to its rightful owners what had once been theirs? And is there really any other way of describing the core of revelation than by seeing it as the interplay of the Word of revelation and responding faith?

This is, of course, a closed circle. But this is what revelation demands, that we accept this circle beforehand as virtuous and not vicious. But was that not the whole point of Reformation polemic? And would this not make a fruitful starting point for interconfessional debate? For the Reformation speaks for the purity of this circle, while it is Catholicism that allegedly severs the perfect arcs of the circle with its *praeambula fidei* and *analogia entis*. But however that might be, does not Catholic dogmatics also have to begin with the basic recognition of this primordial interplay between Word and faith?

Therefore, we cannot detect, a priori, any kind of so-called philosophism in Barth just because he has elevated this circle as the foundational truth and starting point for every form of Christian dogmatics. The question is simply whether this systematic starting point has been described properly and given its right content.

Let us begin with a negative assertion. Barth has *not* constructed his circle of faith purely from transcendentalism or Idealism. It is true that he shows extraordinary familiarity with Idealism from his Marburg years on.² But he has quite explicitly distanced himself from Schleiermacher and the Idealist theology of the nineteenth century. Nor does Barth allow the question of being to be bracketed in the manner of Kant's transcendentalism, dissolving everything into a philosophy of praxis. In this context, Barth makes his own the

warning of Erich Przywara in this regard (1, 178f.), and he unfolds his doctrine of the Trinity in conscious opposition to this philosophy.

Nor does Barth equate the question of being with the question of *actus* in the manner of the Idealists, as Fichte and Hegel do, unless in the Scholastic sense, in which God can be named *actus purus* (3, 288f.). Because of the Idealists' habit of seeing God so much as the absolute subject (behind the finite subject!), it might well be true that an objectification of God must seem to be *the* sacrilege. And perhaps traces of this still remain in Barth, as in his placement of the doctrine of the Trinity in the prolegomena of his dogmatics, its development from the sovereignty of the act of revelation, and perhaps also in the angelology of volume 7 (Barth's angels resemble not a little Philo's potencies and radiances emanating from the inaccessible essence of God). And perhaps too, the influence of Idealism lingers on in Barth's pervasive contrast between Being (as condition and objectivity) and act (as constituting the truth of this Being).

But such tendencies count for nothing when measured against his clearly expressed intention to offer an objectively valid doctrine of God. Nothing could be more evident than Barth's firm will never to understand God in the manner of the Idealists as merely a further extension of the subject (reflecting on itself) but to see God all the more as a genuine Other, a real Thou present in the continued existence of the objective world. This has been the dominant characteristic of his thought ever since his rejection of the pure actualism of his Romans commentary and his turn to "analogy", that is, to a concept that can explain more soberly and cleanly the relation obtaining between God and creature, between absolute and relative subject.

The foundational circle of Word and faith is now inserted and described in terms of this analogous relationship. That is why Barth rejected his first attempt at a dogmatic Summa, reporting in the first volume of the newly designed *Church Dogmatics* that

the human being as hearer of the Word is indeed necessary *de facto* to the concept of the Word of God but not *de essentia*. Man is not, as I had previously stated (now to my great amazement) in the first edition, necessarily "included" [*mitgesetzt*] the way Schleiermacher's God is in the feeling of absolute dependence [1,145].

When Barth says “necessary *de facto*”, what he means to exclude is every form of immanent necessity: God is not immanent to the act of faith nor is human faith immanent to God’s free revelation. Thereby he bursts the closed circle of Idealism. Barth leaves no room in theology for something like a *gnothi seauton* [know thyself] as a method for coming to know God’s will (4, 600f.) or for any other form of mystical or theoretical introspection. “Human self-knowledge must above all be characterized as a circle that we can never enter into on our own” (6, 87). The innermost core of the *I* can never go beyond its relationship to a *Thou*: “For the *I* is not pure and absolute, nor is it self-sufficient. In other words, it is not empty. It is not an abyss. The being of the *I* does not consist in the myth of the abyss” (6, 294).

The *I* is an *I* only in the movement and countermovement with other selves in the world, and this is the presupposition (in both senses of the word) for the fact that it lives in the encounter with God (6, 160). Accordingly, Barth has managed to protect his doctrine of *concursus* (the circle) from all theories about God’s presence being infused, theories that recall the Idealist and pantheist relation of the infusion of the divine and human *I* or speak of God’s power (*virtus Dei*) suffusing the creature (7, 155).

Finally, Barth rejects the Idealist doctrine of the “moment of eternity” (6, 622). The basic relationship established by the Word of God is that of a free interplay (5, 123-26). That also happens to be the significance of the Sabbath: God steps back from his activity of creation, leaving room for a freely chosen and contemplative interchange (5, 240-58). The core phenomenon is not the intentionality of the real in and through the *I*, as the Idealists would have it. The most basic of all realities is the encounter of two polarities that confronts our consciousness in faith (5, 399).

We now approach the most decisive reason why Barth distances himself from Schleiermacher’s principle: the definition of the feeling of “absolute dependence” is hopelessly abstract at the very point where it should be the *concretissimum*. In this view, God appears as “total power” and man as “totally dependent” (4, 614). But what is missing in this picture of this most intimate of relationships is Christ. The same criticism can be made against Kant’s categorical imperative: God’s Word is certainly always categorical, but not

merely as a *form*. It has a content that itself is the *concretissimum* and can never be separated off from form. The vacuity of the categorical imperative proves that we are not dealing here with the true God and with man as he really exists (4, 439-43). This central moment in the teaching of Idealism prevents us from coming to terms with what it means to experience a real encounter or from coming to a true sense of sin (7, 363). The unique style and manner of both partners disappear in a cloud of forgetfulness (7, 382).

To say that man is being judged by God only makes sense if we presuppose that “man is a member of God’s household, a member of his people, a citizen of his Kingdom” (4, 820). And that is true only in Jesus Christ. Theology speaks of and from this relationship, indeed it is allowed to speak of and from it alone. And it does so from faith, which is simultaneously prayer and obedience (7, 278-321). But faith is a gift of grace given to us through the Incarnation of the Word of God. And Schleiermacher merely offers us an intellectual framework, a schema for thinking, in order that we may express this singular content.

3. Dialectics and Divine Judgment

German Idealism is a philosophy of dialectics. As an intellectual method, it undertook to interpret the essence of being as nature and spirit through contradiction and its dynamic overcoming. In *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth took up this method and managed through his extreme application of it to dissolve any real relation between God and creature, leaving only a pantheism with a tinge of eschatological actualism.

In his turn to analogy, Barth was able to overcome this philosophical dialectic as an exclusive method of theology, both in its static form in Kierkegaard (in the idea of the infinite qualitative difference) as well as in its dynamic form in Schelling and Hegel (whereby, as the self-movement of the spirit, dialectics was only the mobile form of identity). Because of analogy, Barth was able to discover the basic compatibility of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. And because of Christ he found the same compatibility of the divine and human in Christians, in all human beings and in the whole

of creation. According to our earlier exposition, it would seem that Barth had finally taken care of the problem of dialectics.

He had not. Dialectics crops up time and again in the very center of Barth's thought, this time as a purely theological dialectic, now victorious over a purely philosophical application. Dialectics now serves to characterize the nature and effect of God's judgment and sentence, of God's Yes and No.

Therefore it is essential for us to recognize the vast difference between philosophical and theological dialectics in the course of Barth's development. To do so, we must bear in mind what Barth has said with ever greater urgency and clarity in his doctrine of creation: the contrasting pairs of light and darkness, right and left, power and weakness, fullness and emptiness, which are inherent to the nature of God's creation, are not "dialectical" in and of themselves. These pairs are meant to be. They do not impair creation but are part of its natural "perfection". Indeed, as Barth says,

all these contrasts cast a shadow and a question over our existence, but they do not signify a contradiction or resistance to God's creative will. On the contrary, these pairs are its fulfillment and confirmation. Not a perversion of nature, but nature itself [7, 335].

In fact, it is only because of the "nasty trick" of "vanity" (*das Nichtige*: Barth's term for evil) that these goodly contrasts become perverted and defame creation.³ It is true, of course, that the good creature has a certain affinity, a kind of neighborliness to vanity because of its "shadow side". It is prone to temptation and allurement. Indeed, we can even say that the creature, of itself in its relativity (outside the grace of God and his victory) is no match for evil. Vanity, wickedness, everything that God has rejected and condemned from all eternity, all that is pure opposition *to God* (and thus really is vain: that is, nothing), all that is basically *God's* enemy and can only be conquered by *God* (7, 409), none of this can be something that a mere creature could dare oppose on its own (7, 88).

God has created the world by snatching it *from* chaos, by banishing chaos from it, but he has not taken away all its affinities *to* chaos. Only the power of God is sufficient to keep the world from imploding back into chaos. To turn away from God and to trust in

one's own powers would already be to open the door to chaos, kept at bay only because of God's gracious decision not to abandon us. And the inbreaking of chaotic indifference is the necessary consequence of sin, indeed is one with sin, as Scripture repeatedly depicts.⁴

Thus Barth characterizes evil, "vanity", not simply as the consequence of the contingency and deficiency of the creaturely spirit and the limitations of its freedom. It is primarily that to which the good and wise God in his eternal wisdom has said No from all eternity. Evil is by definition that which God has expelled, what he has "passed over" in creation, what he has rejected and forbidden to his creatures. This of course is not meant nominalistically, as if what God "happens" to forbid "happens" to be evil, for God's decision is one with his wisdom. But God's decision and judgment is nonetheless intimately connected with what makes vanity what it is. God's No is the corroboration and confirmation of his eternal Yes. Just as creation has its being and truth in the divine Yes, so too does the nonbeing and untruth of empty vanity and evil attain its reality through God's No.

Let the reader be warned here, however: Barth is not setting being and nonbeing in contradistinction to each other in the manner of the philosophers, for example, in the sense of Hegelian dialectics, in which we can speak of the power of negation arising within certain determined boundaries. Barth's issue goes beyond Hegel's philosophy of being or even Kierkegaard's philosophy of the negative side of free will, with its temptations to rebellion. Barth's whole problematic arises from the absolute actuality of God's decision. The real issue is the theologically valid concept of truth, which must be delimited from a philosophical or neutral concept. Truth is now directly constituted by the divine Yes just as untruth is brought about by God's No.

They are related, however, but only because of the *separation* that God's judgment has effected. God's "*anti*-thesis" is ultimate, and it leaves no room for a subsequent, more ultimate "*syn*-thesis". We are not given a further "systematic overview" after the sentence of divine judgment. There is no place either in the world or in God from which one can neutrally survey good and evil. Therefore we cannot

maintain that the lie (which is essentially what vanity is: 7, 616) has any place within the totality of truth. The lie has no density of its own, it is but the shadow of the substance of the truth. It is a “*fleeting shadow*” (7, 86). At the same time, we cannot say that evil is nothing. It *is* something, but a something that draws its whole being [*Wesen*] from God’s negation: “It is the shadow of God’s work that both arises from God’s wrath and is hunted down and destroyed by that wrath. . . . In that very act, God has ascribed to that negation the being of non-being, the existence of not existing” (7, 87-88).

It would therefore be utterly perverse to accuse Barth of implicit Manichaeism. These are not two powers or principles counterpoised to one another, fighting to a standoff because they are both based on the equilibrium of God’s simultaneously eternal Yes and No. On the contrary, both stand to the eternally creative power of God’s Yes as its necessary determination and corroboration, which makes vanity the empty vanity of nothing that it is. From God’s point of view, the vain is what absolutely should not be; and because God is almighty, it *is* not. And if man then gives it being against God’s judgment, then he is giving being to what is not and is making the impossible possible.

Sin is the “impossible possibility”. From all eternity God has determined to be with the human race in Jesus Christ:

Godlessness, therefore, is an ontological impossibility for human being. . . . This does not mean of course that there is no godless human being. Sin does happen. But even so, sin is the ontological impossibility of human being [6, 162].

Man *in concreto* is the human person destined to be a member of the Body of Christ, whereas man *in abstracto*, far from being “impossible”, is “necessarily and ontologically” a sinner (6,174-75), because living “in the abstract” means evading one’s destiny, which is the very definition of the Fall. Christ, however, is inaccessible to all abstractions. He exists in the establishment and building up of his community (6, 411).

Because Barth’s thought is so starkly supralapsarian, the evident contradiction in this definition of evil (the being of nonbeing) and of the sinner (the impossible possibility) must finally be traced back to God, author and conqueror of sin. God has taken upon himself the

responsibility for this “contradiction” by allowing his Yes to be accompanied by his No. Only God can and chooses to bear the whole of this responsibility. When his creature becomes enmeshed in contradiction by sinning, when his predestination casts its shadow of eternally fixed decision over the whole of creation and salvation history (because as light and “fleeting shadow” his Yes and No are reflected in the persons of the elect and reprobate), then it is up to *God* to resolve the contradiction. It is up to God to direct intraworldly dialectics to his ends. The knot of eternal judgment is both tied and untied in the figure of Jesus Christ, who, as *the* one who has been chosen and elected, is at the same time *the* one rejected and despised. He has been chosen so that those who have fallen prey to the vanities of the world will not be cast off forever. And he has been rejected so that all those who have been enticed by the emptiness of sin may be chosen in his place.

At this, the very center and heart of his theological dialectics, Barth does not shirk from expressing his position in the strongest terms: In the Incarnation, Barth says,

God has declared himself guilty of the contradiction that we, enmeshed in sin, have leveled against him. He has made himself the object of the judgment of wrath. Indeed God bears the whole misery of the creature in himself. . . [4, 179].

The contradiction of the creature has not remained foreign to God. God has even made it his own, first and above all, and only then has he made his creature in his own image. Before our rejoicing and sighing, there was God's. For before we could rejoice in the light and quake with terror before the darkness, God knew of both, separated them from each other and thereby gave them order. Before life greeted us and death threatened us, God was already Lord of life and death, and he bound them both together in indissoluble unity. Not so that he could be superior to all of this but so that he could share in these contrasts and their common bond with the entire majesty of his Godhead. So that he could experience these contrasts from within his own being in the eternity of his mercy. So that they could have their origins in him. . . . God has placed himself first in line to submit to this strict law of the two-sidedness of being. What does the sharpness and harshness of this contradiction mean to us next to the keen harshness that God himself with his whole heart has let himself experience, even before he began to create? . . [5, 436].

And if Barth is talking here first of all of the “good” kind of contradiction that inheres in creation as such, nonetheless there still stands that other, sharper contradiction that God has taken on himself and endured in the eternal act of judgment we call

predestination, foreseeing his Son becoming the object of the rejection of sin. "We live from the fact that God himself wanted to become the bearer of that contradiction, that he wanted to bend down so far to us even in the majesty of his Godhead" (5, 437).

From this analysis, we can see that Barth is not trying to resolve the problem of evil from the perspective of philosophy but is consistently framing it in theological terms. By doing so, Barth takes more seriously the question of evil than a purely human experience or reflection could do. But he also does not take evil any more tragically than God does. Thus Barth comes to the conclusion that evil in its cosmic power is superior to man as a creature but as a force is inferior to God as Creator and Redeemer. Evil is a "reality" inasmuch as it is the correlate to God's No but is an "unreality" inasmuch as this No does not equally balance off God's Yes but is only a byproduct of that Yes.

Nor does Barth grant the same ontic density to the demonic "spirits" as to the angels. Just as the angels are the pure expression of God's will, so too are the devils nothing but the expression of his rejection and reprobation. Because faith presupposes a positive relation to what is being believed, it is illegitimate to speak of a "faith" in devils:

Fear of God and fear of the devil do *not* belong together but are mutually exclusive. The only task of theology in this matter must consist in showing and proclaiming that the fear of God has overcome and excludes fear of the devil [7, 613].

Demons arose out of and are a mode of vanity, *emptiness*, the element of contradiction against God. In biblical terms, they are the element of chaos, darkness, evil and Hades (understood, not as a place, but as a power).

One can call it the unbeing [*Unwesen*] that exists only as it denies all true being and is denied by it. The same with demons. They are void, but they are not nothing. They are, but only in their own way. They are, but *not actually* [*uneigenlich*]. Their being is neither that of God nor that of the creature, neither that of heavenly creatures nor that of earthly, for they are neither the one nor the other. They are only as God affirms himself and the creature and thus pronounces a necessary No. They exist by virtue of the fact that God's turning-to involves a turning-away, his election a rejection, his grace a judgment [7, 613-14].

They are, in everything and to their very core, the Lie: they are the Lie when they purport to be existent, since they are unreal. They are the Lie when they purport to be nonexistent, since they have reality as a lie. As a lie, vanity has “something like substance and personality, vitality and spontaneity” (7, 618). But as such they can claim no corner of the truth. Just as one cannot say that God created them, for God hates nothing, so one cannot say that he maintains them: their reality consists in being the expression of rejection and thus destined for the eternal fire of nothingness (7, 611).

What vanity and emptiness really are can only be known from God’s judgment. Accordingly, Barth can dismiss those *enfants terribles*, Heidegger and Sartre, rather summarily, the way a grandfather would do with wayward grandchildren when he rebukes them for trying to give their ciders the shivers with vain stories of spooks and ghosts. Barth points out to them that what they call vanity or nothingness has nothing to do with what vanity and nothingness really consist in. With Heidegger, this concept is so ambivalent that it could just as easily be replaced with the concept of Being or the divine (7. 383-402). Even in Heidegger, the “power of negation” is understood more in the manner of Hegel or the existentialists. Barth, however, wants nothing to do with such philosophical approaches. He develops his thought on the reality of the theological negative on an entirely new level, one fundamentally inaccessible to philosophy: the plane of God’s absolutely creative power inherent in his Yes and No, that is, from the “dialectic” of divine judgment.

In this sense, the theological concept of truth and its inner systematic and continuity are self-sufficient and self-justifying, beyond the reach of the eyes of philosophy. Truth has its correlate, not in some neutral faculty for knowing, but in that organ for divine truth, which is inseparable from the moments of faith, prayer and obedience (cf. 4, 853-54).

4. The Concrete and History

For Barth, theological dialectics only begins to unfold at that juncture where, according to Hegel, it can no longer take place, whereas

Hegelian dialectics takes place at that juncture where, Barth insists, dialectics is inappropriate: in the relations between God and creature, or between infinite and finite “spirit”. Similarly, they both operate with entirely different notions of the concrete.

By a subtle feat of conjuring, Hegel managed to demonstrate that what the immediate understanding takes to be the concrete—that is, the sensible, the uniquely historical—on another level is really the abstract, while the apparently abstract—the concept or the idea—is actually the concrete. This is because the concept or idea is filled with the whole fullness of the sensible and historical, but under the rubric of what has overcome and superseded the sensible and historical.

Kierkegaard adamantly opposed Hegel, insisting on the indissolubility of the concreteness of the I in its relation to God. And he did this by pointing to the ego’s relation to the historical and concrete Jesus Christ. But even in his opposition, even as a theologian, Kierkegaard remained enmeshed in the categories of Hegel.

The only way one can succeed in overcoming Idealist dialectics is to demonstrate that the indissoluble concreteness of history is also the “fullness of time”. In other words, we must realize that the true fullness given to us by God in Jesus Christ is the fullness of created time itself. Therefore, this fullness must be presented *within* the *concretissimum* called Jesus Christ, which lies above and beyond what philosophy can make credible. It is not enough merely to *assert* that this fullness lies in Jesus Christ and must be believed. It must be developed out of that principle according to the dictum of *fides quaerens intellectum*, which falls within the purview of dogmatics. Only faith’s wealth has the wherewithal to spread before us the implications of this starting point.

In carrying out this task, dogmatics must show that the fullness of the riches of Christ is the very *concretissimum*. This fullness is not only the inner fullness of God but its revelation in worldly form. Nor is it merely the fullness of creation but its very setting and context in God’s revelation. It is this setting, the most concrete reality of all, that manifests to us that the world is for God and God for the world.

The theological concept of the concrete, then, is quite genuine. *And it cannot be founded on any philosophy of history or of the Idea.* It is true that this formulation still bears the traces of the Hegelian influence, as we can see from the following passage:

The truly specific, concrete and uniquely determined is not, as we might easily imagine, our brief moment in time. It is not the variety and multiplicity of creation and its history that are the real basis for diversity. It is only because, first of all, the one and only God is himself manifold, because he is the eternally rich and abundant God, that there are diversity and riches even in his creation. And once more, it is not our human individuality and vitality in time and space, it is not the mystery of our personality and the contingency of our possibilities and decisions that are the actual reality of the individual or of vitality. Rather, what we know and recognize as such is but the created reflection of the individuality and vitality of our God. Whatever freedom we have is but the reflection of the freedom of his personality: the contingency of his will and action, the uniqueness of his grace, his mercy and patience would all still be part of his nature even if we did not exist [4, 738-39].

But despite the echoes, Barth does not arrive at these conclusions from a philosophical analysis. On the contrary, this divine prototype of our concreteness and historicity cannot be made tangible and concrete to us except in the historicity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, any philosophy that tries to bypass this historical event is bound to end up with a radically different concept of God. And yet this historicity of Christ's—even as our prototype and standard—is also the presupposition for the Incarnation. In other words, it is not possible to think of the Incarnation without its own inherent connection with our human and “natural” historicity.

This obvious truth, however, must not be made to imply reciprocal causality. The image of the hourglass is once more helpful in this regard: In the center is Christ, the fullness and absolute concretion that endows all other creatures with their ultimate concretion and meaning, without whom every creature would remain hovering in the pale world of abstraction in the worst sense. The conditions that make possible the historicity of the Incarnation, therefore, cannot be understood in terms of a simple reciprocal causality. For even the possibility of creatureliness being a condition for the Incarnation ultimately comes *from* the Incarnation, from Christ. For it was for his sake that creation came to be at all. And the reason that there is

something like a potential meaning within its confines is because it is open to the possibility of being fulfilled in him.

This has important implications for the debate on nature and grace. Now excluded is all talk that the question of meaning is to be solved by invoking a kind of equilibrium between “nature” and “supernature”, where Christ represents the moment of “supernature”. For nature comes from Christ and is destined for Christ. Neither nature nor Christ’s “supernature” can be found anywhere but in his “becoming a nature” [*Naturwerdung*]. We have no option but to think from him. There exists no logical compulsion to abandon that center in order to see something that could not be seen except in him and from him.

Christ is therefore the real ground of creation. Indeed, he is so in his eternal readiness to become incarnate, to humble himself even to death on a cross and to descend into hell (5, 53; 6, 580-81). And as he is the ground of being, so too is he the ground of obligation: he—and nothing else—is the concrete commandment of God (4, 619-32). Just as we have our being in Christ, so too do we have life by following him (4, 632f.). “We are meant to be the answer to the existence of Jesus Christ” (4, 640), and in this sense we become “imitators of God” (Eph 5:1).

This discipleship and imitation do not occur simply because of ethical obligations and freedoms or because there is a lack in being that we must fill. “In the person of Christ, [discipleship] is already a fulfilled reality. This person in and of himself is the ground and content as well as the form of the divine claim on us” (4, 674). Not only is God’s commandment always personal (4, 677). Not only does it differ from all other commands in that “however much it also applies to other persons, it above all applies to this one person” (4, 677). But more than that: it is no empty ideal that is up to us, left to our own devices, to fulfill. No, all commands from God come from the prior fulfillment of them by Jesus Christ, the *concretissimum*.

Once more, this constitutes, within the order of revelation, the distinctive difference between the Old and New Testaments. While the former laments loudly against human infidelity, in the latter this is almost muffled into becoming an admonitory reminder: “But this is not because”, says Barth, “it no longer has an object, for it has found

in Jesus Christ its real object. God's commandment can now only be understood and proclaimed as the commandment that has now been kept and fulfilled through him" (4, 638).

Now it becomes the intention of God's grace to ensure that man's actions will allow God's activity to take effect (ibid.). In this sense, the form of the commandment is now essentially meant to protect our limited freedom and give it room to grow, whereas all other commands express a mistrust of this freedom, a fear of it, which is why they forbid rather than allow (4, 650). "God's law prevails and establishes its justice by setting us in a context of freedom" (4, 657) and by "unmasking the alleged freedom and license of evil as the deception of an alien lord and tyrant" (4, 660).

Because the obligatory dimension of the Christian command stems from its fulfillment in Christ, it is based, despite all its strictness and seriousness, on the command not to fear and not to worry (4, 603f.). There is something inviting about Christian obligation ("come and stay") (4, 667f.), something fundamental to it, that makes it seem like we are now being *allowed* to do something previously beyond our ken. For, "in everything Jesus does, we find our permission, our freedom, our willingness to volunteer" (4, 672). "Everything that Jesus does is irradiated and suffused with the *manner* in which he does it" (4, 673).

This explains why what Barth has to say about Christian freedom is so extraordinary. Freedom can only be understood from the point of view of its *fulfillment*, from the place where it finally becomes clear why it was created and preserved by God in the first place and how he wishes it to be used and handled. But that becomes accessible to our view only where the Son of God has the freedom as man (and God!!) to obey the Father in the act of surrendering his human (and divine!) decisions to the Father in order to be free with the Father.

Christ's manner of being human is not to be for himself; his humanity is a function of his mission to be human for the Father and thus for humans. Because of this, his freedom as *liberum arbitrium* has already been *overtaken* by his freedom as surrender, obedience, prayer. The Son is "God in his self-surrender". And since the Son is the beginning of all the ways of God, this fact is the beginning of all creaturely freedom: "God and man do not approach each other

simultaneously. God initiates. God decides, and his decision establishes the possibility and the reality of human decision" (4, 193).

The paradox of freedom: it is so great that "the electing God can create man as a real partner, who for his part can freely choose God, thereby confirming and preserving his status as one chosen by God" (4, 194). "The act of willing implies obeying, but the act of obeying also implies willing" (6, 215) and choosing (6, 216). But this choosing can never be divorced from the concrete reality of obedience; nor can the concreteness of the demands of obedience be understood in terms of a neutral choice between indifferent alternatives. God's transcending choosing, which has chosen man to be God's covenant partner, is reflected in the choice immanent to human nature in which man *willingly* chooses to live as one human being among others, as an I relating to a Thou.

This willingness is *the* mystery of human nature. And it is no part of this mystery that man might have the choice and power not to be willing to follow God's will (6, 318-21). In Scholastic terminology, the ground of the *voluntas elicit*a is the *voluntas ut natura*, but the ground of the *voluntas ut natura* is the *electio Dei in Christo oboediente*. Where God works in his freedom, that is the very place where freedom arises, but only insofar as this freedom allows itself to be taken captive in God's true freedom (7, 170).

Only when this last ground is kept in mind will the meaning and essence of human freedom not be misinterpreted. As Barth says,

man in his nature has no possibility, no point of departure for making another choice. If we must maintain *de facto* that he does have such a possibility, then this cannot arise from his nature. God the Creator is not the one who should be made responsible for this fatal possibility. And it would even be worse if one were to praise God the Creator of man for having given to man even the possibility of another choice. . . . We should not call this kind of freedom nature but *sin*. . . . It is man the sinner fallen from God who intends to find in his nature such a false freedom [6, 328-29]. . . . Therefore the doctrine of the *liberum arbitrium* of sinful man is a caricature that must be smashed and scattered to the four winds if it is to have anything to say about the knowledge of the goodness of God, even from afar [6, 43].

Barth's notion of freedom is extremely Augustinian: freedom is authentic only inside liberating grace, which elevates the will into the mystery of an exalted spontaneity that is given by God and

participates in God's freedom. The encounter of human with divine freedom in the *concretissimum* of the Word of God that is Jesus Christ can have no other name but that of prayer, and indeed the original prayer of Christ himself:

The eternal will of God is the man who is completely and entirely a witness to the Kingdom of God and as such is himself sovereignly [*königlich*] free: the slain Lamb of God who bears the sins of the world and by doing so is also the conquering Lion of Judah; the man who in a deed of the simplest, humblest and most devoted surrender to God recognizes God's absolute priority, but in doing so is *the* sovereign being and thus the very image of God. The eternal will of God is the act of prayer in which all self-reliance vanishes in favor of trust *in God*. This is the true human self-consciousness being born. . . . If this man was Jesus, then we must now say: God's eternal will is directed to the life of this praying human. This is the man who was with God at the beginning [4, 197].

In prayer we come to a true knowledge of God and of the truth sent to us by God.⁵ Only in prayer are there objectivity⁶ and freedom. Not of course an Idealist's or mystic's prayer of "feeling one" with the universe, but in the Christian, evangelical prayer of the Word that has its culmination and acme in petitionary prayer (7, 304f). In the humility of the plea of petition, we finally reach back to what in Schleiermacher made its appearance as the "feeling of absolute dependence". Petition of God is "the most basic form of Christian obedience" (7, 306). It is not only permitted, it is commanded. But even more, in its attitude of "take and receive", it is a form of gratitude! *This* is what Schleiermacher should have been aiming at if he had wanted to describe the true and concrete encounter between God and man and the source of all historicity.

After all that has been said, it hardly seems necessary to add that Barth does not hesitate to ascribe freedom to man, indeed to human *nature*. "Consequently, it is the concept of freedom that is decisive when we come to describe what we mean when we describe man as subject" (5, 231). We can even call this freedom freedom of choice, provided we understand this choice once the act of choosing has been made (for that alone is what makes it perfect freedom!). "This freedom is indeed freedom of choice. But, as the freedom given by God, it is the freedom in which the right thing is being chosen" (6, 234).

And since this possibility is real and indeed derives from this reality, we cannot say that man can lose this freedom through sin or that human nature as such is evil or could become evil. Man can be evil only because his nature is good (6, 235-36):

Man can will this and that because he first and above all can will the One. He makes use of his freedom of will only when he wills this One in everything, even when he wills this and that other thing. . . . Even so, the merely apparent freedom of his perverted will will, in its complete “unwillingness”, give witness to how he has come to such a pass to be able to will only unjustly, impurely and under the spell of a mirage. Man can will, he can decide over his appetites, he is an acting person only as he stands in immediate relation to God. That is, he can decide *for* his longing for God, and he can decide *against* his godless longings. . . . And God appeals to this capacity in man when he claims man for himself [6, 498].

Therefore, man has an immanent, “natural” freedom in relation to his true and ultimate freedom:

By reflecting and willing, man gets a certain distance on his choices and appetites, he surveys himself and makes himself an object. In the freedom of this distancing and reflecting, he confirms himself as the soul of his own body. The body lacks this freedom; it can only receive a portion of it [6, 501].

But this immanent freedom depends on the “freedom for obedience”, on the “freedom for humility”, on man’s power to make way for God (5, 302).

If we try to generalize this relation and express it in abstract categories, we can say that there is indeed for Barth true Being, a true nature, but that its authenticity depends on the nodal point of a highest reality that can be described in no other terms but those of the actual and eventful. Being and nature are event and history in their innermost core, and, because they are such, they are also still Being and nature. That is why at one time act can replace Being in Barth’s writings,⁷ while at other times he can equate Being with decision,⁸ depending on whether the concept of Being is employed polemically or purely as a matter for explication.

There is no doubt that in *The Epistle to the Romans* Barth took the concept of act so absolutely that every form of nature, conditionality and Being was excluded. But, in the *Church Dogmatics*, he so uses it that those other concepts seem to be included in it. And indeed it is precisely where the event-character seems to reach its highest

potential—in Christ—that even the ontological continuity seems to reach its highest density. But of course that would be true: it is the very continuity and seamlessness in the event of Christ that first ground, enable and guarantee the ontological and natural continuities in creation (6, 401, 405).

It is in Christ that the absolute seamlessness of the presence of God's providence over all his creation is guaranteed (7, 60-61), that over against the eternity of God there is in fact a "being in time" (a *permansio*) instead of nothing (7, 70). This does not mean that creation's eventfulness must be understood as if it were always being created anew, as if God's conservation of the universe were a *creatio continua*. God genuinely preserves the identity of the creature in its continuity, and this is guaranteed in Christ (7, 78-79).

So the various concepts of being, properly understood in their rightful place, cannot be avoided after all, since they give to the concepts of actuality their acuteness and preeminence. Similarly, even abstract concepts cannot be avoided, since they throw the right light on the concrete. Precisely because this light, properly used, is unique, there must be places from which one can get a view of concrete realities, and these places must be in the realm of abstraction.

We have no choice but to speak of conditionalities and possibles if we are to characterize the actual and real. We cannot help but observe the concrete from some perspective. And this contemplative, understanding, interpretive overview is inherently abstractive, even where the categories of genus and species have not come into play. Barth well knows that every form of the interpretive work of the spirit is abstraction.⁹ Just as the concept of act is complementary to that of being, so the concept of action is complementary to that of contemplation.

Contemplation is a form of sight that, because it is not identical with the object, is the very expression of the reverence with which one should approach it. The way Barth has gone about writing his *Church Dogmatics* proves this: aware that he must describe events that are necessarily distant from us, aware that his style must possess a freedom peculiar to the project he has undertaken if he is to attain the highest reaches of exactitude in his task—all this shows

that he has not forgotten the positive role of distance and abstraction.

If we look back on the problems Barth has taken up, especially where he has managed to set off theology from philosophical Idealism, then we can grant that Barth has indeed preserved (or won back) theology's autonomy even where it chooses to make use of the terminology and schemata of Idealism. It should not be a matter of dispute that such thought forms have performed unmistakable service to Barth in his task of ordering his theological thought. Through all his tractates, from the doctrine on God and predestination, past the doctrine of revelation, creation and covenant to the doctrine of Christian faith and life, these categories have proven their power to infuse theology with a style of often intoxicating power and conviction.

But Barth has recognized that no philosophical style of thinking can claim sole supremacy in theology. The measure of its usefulness depends on the needs of theology, not of itself. Barth was often forced to use, and in fact did not shirk from using, other category systems as a complement to Idealism. In his essay on "Fate and Idea in Theology", he mentioned that when dealing with the two opposing schemas of Realism and Idealism, he "picked out this pair almost at random" and could easily have chosen another schema from the whole series of philosophical systems in his attempt to understand reality.^{[10](#)}

One can describe the relation between God and creature using either Platonic, Aristotelian or Stoic concepts. In any case, it is *for theology* to decide which philosophy is most useful for itself; and it must decide for itself how that philosophy is to be used. Thus, contrary to the assertions of much of Protestant polemic, there is nothing in Aristotelianism *per se* that corrupted Catholic theology. If such corruption did occur, it had to have been because of the illegitimate exertions of theology that made use of this thought form in a way that was theologically inappropriate.

This holds true even of the doctrine of the analogy of being. Theology does not directly judge the philosophical value of this doctrine. Theology renders a judgment only about whether this

formula is suited for expressing a datum of revelation. Its only question can be: Does this formula form a part of revelation itself, or is it a necessary presupposition demanded by revelation itself?

Thus we are not required here to offer a disquisition on the validity of transcendental philosophy but only on the use of Idealist thought forms as a “presupposition” (in the sense we have defined earlier), and indeed only insofar as Barth has tried to express revelation using such schemata. Barth’s one goal is to defend and give expression to the priority of Christ over creation and the fall of Adam. And that theological position should be the real focus of any critique.

In both cases we should ask: Will the philosophical schema be broad and flexible enough to preserve the full freedom, mystery and uniqueness of the datum of revelation? Or has this mystery been “explained away”?¹¹ Have the breadth and freedom of revelation been forced into the constraints of a system whose netting is too tight to allow faith to unfold into, and make use of, other truths?

For whenever theology is shoehorned into a system at one point, this will necessarily constrain its teachings at other points as well. To contort the doctrine of predestination, for example, for the sake of a system will automatically have consequences for Christology and ecclesiology. For to say A is implicitly already to have said B and Z.

It is in this sense that we must conclude Part II of this book, which has set out to present and illuminate Barth’s theology. We must submit his thought to searching critique and especially ask about the boundaries of his form of thought. We have already fully demonstrated that Barth has not thoughtlessly taken over transcendentalism. It is pellucidly clear that Barth intends to transform this philosophy and to bring it back to its genuine theological origins.¹²

But this is precisely the question. We must now ask whether Barth’s (certainly critical) use of the categories of Idealism does not presuppose certain intratheological proclivities and tendencies that themselves generate a dubious and one-sided view of revelation, a one-sidedness that then gets expressed in terms of his philosophy. We shall summarize our reservations about Barth’s theology in three points:

1. Protest though he will and despite the “open-ended” use he makes of the transcendental categories, a tendency toward constraint and system is unmistakable in Barth. Indeed, this constraint clings to the whole project of the *Church Dogmatics*, so much so that it affects its articulation at every limb and joint. It is not so much a matter of Barth omitting some crucial doctrine as it is a distortion of nuance, an inappropriate coloration to the whole. In Catholic terms, we may call it an exaggeration, an overstatement, a failure of balance.

We are referring to Barth’s christological starting point. Such a starting point is quite legitimate—indeed if we want to take the Bible seriously, it is absolute essential. But it is a big step from there to the *narrowing* of everything to that one point. The priority of Christ over creation and sin in no way requires that the whole work of creation has to be so painfully forced to occupy the Procrustean bed of Barth’s christological schema.

This straitened schematization becomes evident at that juncture in his argument where we notice that he has not left enough breathing room between creation and covenant. Barth certainly pre-supposes creation, but it is still too much merely a presupposition: he does not give it its proper due. Though its autonomy is merely relative, it is nonetheless real. Yes, it may well be true that meaning ultimately comes from Christ, that we can say nothing conclusive about the (provisional) meaning of creation until we have considered Christ. Yes, it may well be true that this ultimate meaning is the ontological ground for the presence of every other (provisional) meaning. But it remains no less true that this very relationship requires us to preserve scrupulously all relative meanings as proper to themselves and to avoid any appearance of *deducing* them from their ultimate meaning.

But every time Barth tries to draw out the proper essence of an anthropological or universal cosmological principle, he ends up slipping back into the old danger of not only reducing the sought-for meaning to its christological roots but also deducing it from them. Now one might object that Barth is doing theology and not philosophy or anthropology or natural history, that he is only trying to describe all created natures from the foreground of revelation. Does

not revelation itself look on man, indeed all creatures, under the formal aspect (*sub ratione formali*) of their relation to God initiated by God in Christ?

But this objection is not persuasive. Revelation does not presuppose creation in such a way that it equates it with the act of revelation. In giving ultimate meaning to creation, revelation does not annul creation's own proper and original meaning. Revelation does not say that just because everything comes from Christ and returns to him we are justified in marshalling everything into a speculative system or that other, freer versions of christocentrism are excluded.

Christocentrism knows nothing of that narrowing [*Engführung*] that makes one suspect that Barth is continually trying (in spite of his universal tendency) to force the facts into an a priori matrix. To the Catholic ear this will seem typically Protestant. There is in Barth an uncomfortable whiff of that all-too-heretical attitude that insists "I have to be right" no matter what the cost. There is a tendency in Barth to equate the human construct with divine revelation itself. There is a partiality in him that then goes on to insist that it be taken for the whole.

As a result, Barth ultimately leaves the relation between philosophy and theology unclear. On the one hand, Barth will allow nature its own science, its own methods of research, provided the deduction of nature from Christology is not called into question. But, on the other hand, he does not really accord this science any room to operate. Barth ends up talking about Christ so much as *the* true human being that it makes it seem as if all other human beings are mere epiphenomena.

The consequences of this eclipsing are not minor: since the rest of the members of the human race are not Christ, we are incapable of *determining the distance between Christ and all other human beings from within theology*. We cannot measure the difference between Christ's "being *for* others" and our "being *with* others". To determine this, *theology needs the open or covert help of philosophy*.

Barth's distinction, as he makes it, between this "for" and "with" only proves my point: it is completely arbitrary. Or rather, as a way of looking at things, it is determined by his Protestantism. For we ordinary mortals can only be "with" others; only Christ is "for" us. But

that means we cannot be “with” his being “for” us. We cannot share “with” his merits, thereby helping to be “for” others.

The same thing holds true for Barth’s individual descriptions of human nature. We must repeat the accusation that has been raised often enough against Barth and whose formulation we will leave it to Barth himself to give:

Such unanswered questions—and therefore the dismissal of the problem that goes with this—always have something dubious about them, because they practically go hand in hand with one or another unavoidable answer. But then—because they are given so casually and incidentally, without methodological control—they can all too easily end up being simply wrong [7, 158].

This dismissed problem that Barth is referring to is, speaking generally, the legitimate independence and autonomy of the natural order and of the philosophy ordered to that nature.

2. Closely related to this difficulty is a second: Barth has a tendency (which is *no more* than a tendency, but also no less!) to overstep the legitimate limits and competence of theology. And this overstepping of boundaries often takes the form of over-systematization. Strangely enough, an inner affinity between Protestantism and metaphysics shows up at just this point. Barth’s christological narrowness is systematics because it closes doors on possibilities that are still open to God. If it is true that Christ is prior to nature, then he is also prior to sin, and his Cross is not actually conditional on sin but on his eternally decided act of self-emptying, which as such forms the matrix for God’s conceding the possibility of sin. But this sets a bracket around all conceivable sin, so that it becomes completely impossible to render a definitive judgment on the sinner. Barth recommends the Christian look forward joyfully and radiantly to the Last Judgment (4, 824). God’s grace works “unconditionally and irresistibly” (7, 147).

But is that how the Bible speaks? Are we not really sneaking a look *behind* the mirror that we are only supposed to look *at*? Are we not trying to sneak a look at the hand of cards God holds? Is not the mystery being explained away to such an extent there no longer is any mystery? Does this not smack of. . . the Enlightenment? Has not this “merciful God” of Barth, who does not himself punish but spares

man and gives him grace, suddenly become the dubious and innocuous God of Harnack?

Admittedly, it is difficult, in fact almost impossible, for theology to represent the double-edged message of the Bible about judgment and grace without eclipsing one side in favor of the other. As soon as one makes even the slightest move toward abstraction, as soon as one distances oneself from the Word to get an overall understanding of its mystery, then one has already immediately fallen prey to this difficulty. Admittedly too, Barth has made great exertions *not* to speak metaphysically, *not* to rob the mystery of its mystery, *not* to speak banally.

But can Barth really master this difficulty, given the nature of his presuppositions as we just outlined them in the first point? Barth is well aware that he has “constructed something from a relatively few passages of Scripture that must be considered as *the necessary background* in all the other statements about the relation between God and man” (4, 161). But by setting up this all-determining background, Barth has yielded to abstraction, has overstepped the legitimate boundaries of theology and has given in to metaphysics. The reader will have noticed that we have accused Barth of metaphysics in an entirely different place in his thought and much more carefully than earlier critics have done, above all Gogarten.

But how can Barth be defended against this accusation—ironically, the very one he himself raised so insistently against Thomas Aquinas and Schleiermacher? He would have to be much more flexible at the very places where he presses down, ties up and locks in. He would have to be more flexible, but not so much that he loses his basic idea that—however deeply rooted evil may seem in its various twists and turns—it is still fundamentally conquerable.

Granted, we are talking here more about a tendency in Barth than a fully formed and explicit doctrine. And one cannot even say that this tendency represents as such Barth’s deepest, ultimate intention. But its influence counts.

An example might help here. We should not overlook the fact that, even in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth’s depiction of the creature retains something of the dialectical ambiguity of *The Epistle to the Romans*. On the one hand, the creature is a reality grounded by

God, radiant with light and safeguarded by God. In no way is it demonic in itself, or chaotic, or inherently oriented toward darkness and evil. Barth loudly protested against the detractors of creation. Yet for all that, he cannot help but depict creation, in its very creatureliness, as given over and submissive to chaos. God alone can snatch creation from the overwhelming power of the chaos to which it is necessarily subject. In God alone does creation achieve victory over the powers of destruction.

This portrayal seems to be an open admission that his dialectical picture of the world is still operative. Why? Because Barth's ultimate aim is to highlight God's victory. But this is *God's* victory in his creature. So Barth feels he has to stress the darkness in the creature for the sake of the light by which we are made victorious in God. This same tendency could be pursued using other examples too, which would be even more convincing.

3. The greatest doubts surround what Barth means by Church: the place where God's Word resounds. Our first question simply is this: Does this space, considered as a concrete reality in the world, suffice to bear witness to the presence of faith and revelation in the world?

We have already seen how much Barth dynamically opened up the space of the Church to the world. In fact, this opening up is not without its connection to the presuppositions that govern his thought and that we submitted to a critique in the two points above. For if the essential content of the Church is, at the same time, the foundation of creation, the Church must be something very temporary and provisional. She can only be openly what the world always has been, though with a certain hiddenness. Barth was forced to stress this relativization of the Church—even to the point where the Church would completely merge into the world. But he was likewise forced to proceed rather cautiously on this score, because otherwise the necessity of the Church would disappear from view entirely.

As we have already seen, Barth basically could not explain how it was possible for a human being not to have faith. If one takes seriously Barth's presuppositions, unbelief can only be the refusal to admit the truth of the faith that is already present. Man of course has

the power to say No to God, but his No can never be strong enough to annul God's Yes to man or even to call it into question. In Christ, God has triumphed for all and over all, and all human beings are what they are through Christ.

And this "for all" means that faith is the ultimate ground of being, of reason and will, of the whole of human nature. And so the unbelief of sinners can only persist as a rebellion against the truth of God that has *already* been conquered and proven to be in vain. Once God sent Christ into the world, every human being "is thereby affected, for he has already been touched" (6, 169). Every human being is already a hearer of the Word (6, 176f.). And this Word is not some general Logos but the very incarnate Logos of God, who is just as much the ground of being as he is the ground of knowing and through whom every human has as such a share in the image of God (6, 157, 269).

If this is true, then once more it seems to be another dialectical exaggeration, a counterassertion made for the sake of dialectical balance, when Barth then goes on to say that God can be believed and recognized only in the precincts of the Church (4, 634). Given his doctrine of predestination (which is both universal and particular), this statement certainly seems rather questionable. Even more flagrantly inconsistent—to the point of violence—is his inquisitorial labeling of all "religion" and "mysticism" in mankind as disguised forms of atheism.

But if Barth reverses himself and stresses the other side of the dialectic—the invisibility and intangibility of that faith that is nonetheless *de facto* present in the world—then its *de facto* visibility, together with that of the Church, will dissolve into a purely external "representation". Once more, we have encountered a tendency that has been with Barth from the beginning: his sharp anti-institutionalism and his attraction toward the universal vision of socialism.

And here we can finally see the common roots to his opposition both to Romanism and National Socialism. However different they are, Barth has to say No to both of them, because in both, however differently they each conceive it, there is a claim made by an institution that will not admit of being relativized. Of course, in nazi

ideology this claim is sheer effrontery, whereas the claim of the Roman *ordo* bears on the truth. But Rome still makes a worldly and total claim on the spirit and conscience of man, whereas such a claim can only be raised in the name of Christ. The point here, though, is to see that in both cases what Barth sees is Institution writ large.

What is a Catholic to make of this? Catholics of course will reject the ecclesiology of point 3. But that is not the issue. From the Catholic perspective, Karl Barth's theology has now reached its severest test. The question is whether the tendency we noticed in points 1 and 2 is *only* a tendency—and therefore correctable, so that point 3 is not a necessary conclusion from them—or whether the two earlier points, instead of being genuinely theological, are actually systematic and therefore ultimately metaphysical, so that then of course the third point follows necessarily from the first two.

But there is even a more pointed way of asking this question, one that does more than merely turn the screw one more round. Has Barth not finally formulated the first two points for the sake of the third, that is, deliberately for the sake of a polemic against Roman Catholicism? Or does the christological starting point really remain the center, so that his theology must renounce metaphysical narrowness for the sake of Christ, thereby providing a suitable—indeed perhaps the only suitable—basis for interconfessional understanding?

But before we try to give an answer to these questions, we must first try to unfold what it means to think as a Catholic. We have already tried to show what Barth's thought forms were like, and now we must do the same for Catholic theology. But is it really legitimate to speak at all of a Catholic form of thinking?

PART III

THE FORM AND STRUCTURE OF CATHOLIC THOUGHT

Chapter 1

IDENTIFYING A CATHOLIC WORLD VIEW

Karl Barth once noted in a well-known book that there can be no “essence of Christianity” or an “essence of Catholicism”. God’s revelation is as infinite and mysterious as God himself. It is, as Pius XII says, so rich and deep *ut nunquam reapse exhaustiatur* [that it can never be exhausted]. If it is to understand, arrange and understand this revelation, human understanding will be stretched to the limit. But we can meet this challenge by the very fact that God has set it before us.

Thus, revelation also taxes to the limit the noblest fruit of our human understanding—philosophy—putting its results in the service of this understanding. So even this challenge can be met, and the Church has constantly done so. Now insofar as the concept of reason excludes a priori any relativism of truth, since what is genuinely true can never cease to be true, there must be something like a *philosophia perennis*: a philosophy that is not corroded by time or the powers that be but remains as the form of truth in vital development, adapting and offering itself as such to the vessel of revelation.

It is Aristotle’s most basic thesis that this strenuous form is continuously developing as a living thing. The fact that “what changes accommodates itself to this rigid boundary” corresponds to the worldly and human essence of reason and truth. For the truth is too profuse to be caught in the net of any finite concept. But more than this, the kinetic variety of forms and styles used to express the one truth also arises because of the unimaginable fullness of individual traits in peoples, epochs and personalities in their unique talents and missions. Just as there is not only a “history of style” for beauty, there is also one for the true. And what is astonishing in both is that the most felicitous expressions, the most personal, the ones most touched by genius, are precisely the ones that are the most

universally valid. And consequently they are the forms that are most easily brought into relation with other unique forms, which in their juxtaposition let new and yet more fruitful aspects of the beautiful and the true come to light. Roman style, no matter how distinctive, is unthinkable without the Greek; Romanesque could likewise never occur without both Greek and Roman models, and the Gothic could not occur without all three. And what would so distinctive a style as the Baroque be without all the elements of antiquity, which it presupposes, exploits, develops, supersedes? Certainly not what it is.

Stylistic forms exclude each other so little that actually at their deepest level they presuppose each other; and this, precisely *in* the mystery of their uniqueness, reveals the overarching validity of the beautiful.

The same holds true of the true: What would Aristotle be without Plato? What would the Stoics and Plotinus be without both? What would Thomas Aquinas be if he had not been able to presuppose them all in their uniqueness and unrepeatability? Forms of thought do not exclude each other but, like personalities (whose expression and product they are), they are open to each other. But just as in architecture it is not a matter of merely accumulating and randomly assembling stylistic elements (all you get then is the pseudo-historical pastiche that so characterizes the last century) but rather of taking what remains valid in each of them and making a new creation of genius of equal rank, so too in perennial philosophy: one cannot merely pile up the bricks of true statements of all kinds of past systems.

On the contrary, when the challenge is to make use of previously formed elements, it is much more an issue of absorbing the malleability of different philosophic styles. In Aristotelian terms (as well as in those of philosophy in general): it is a problem of form. What Thomas Aquinas built is a form—and he displayed this form so widely and convincingly that not only elements of the past but also those of the future could have room in his thought; either by being able to incorporate the new into itself or by being fruitful enough to let itself be transformed *by* the new.

But if the sign of philosophic power is already to permit to every style its unique form without descending into an otiose relativism and to make use of that style for its own configuring of the truth that is appropriate to it, with the full certainty of truth, then this forming power will be required and expected all the more of theologians, whose object towers over every individual form while needing all of them in order to express the wealth of revelation. This does not mean that the content of revelation hovers over all concepts like some irrational presence and can be expressed no better, as Pope Pius XII says, “than in disparate propositions that complete one another, even though they are almost completely contradictory”.¹ If this were true, it would, as the Pope well knew, logically entail that “any kind of philosophy or opinion can, with a few additions or corrections if necessary, be harmonized with Catholic dogma.”²

What it does mean is that the content of revelation, as the highest *ratio*—the personal, divine Logos himself—needs all the forms of the worldly *logoi* of truth in order to present its inexhaustible fullness: the abstract and general as well as the concrete and individual. Theology must work from below, where, as Newman loved to show, all the truths of cultures and peoples are gathered up by the Church and made serviceable to theology. But theology also works from above, where the divine Logos wants to enrich all *logoi* in his mission to the world and lead them back to the Father in himself. But in any case, Catholic theology will burst the confines of any specific and limited structure of thought.

For it is precisely a Church that claims she is obligated to protect the totality of revelation as a *depositum fidei* that will never be able, as Church, to hold fast to a closed-off and finished system. Hermann Schell has seen this, which is why he also sees a correlative “material and formal principle” in heresy as well, for the essence of heresy means “choice”, and this will necessarily affect its respective theologies too.³ Heretics are constantly amazed at and lament over the fact that Catholicism never seems to find definitive expression in a system, that for every statement there is something more that could be said, that it is common for Catholic theology to distinguish even in papal and conciliar statements the time-conditioned mode of

expression from the transtemporal content that strictly obliges the believer.

Barth's line—which he no doubt means as an accusation but which, according to his own presuppositions, could be meant as high praise—is not without justification: “Roman Catholic theology. . . is dialectical to the core” (3, 360). This is true because human words and concepts, though quite useful, can never exhaustively echo God's word and wisdom, whose inner fullness can never be delivered up for our handling, even to the very end of the world. Heretical thought has the tendency to close off certain avenues, to overlook certain aspects and to speak in definitive, apodictic formulae. Catholic thinking, however, remains open. Indeed its special characteristic is that it tends to keep opening up even more. From the standpoint of systematics, this might easily seem rather unsatisfying and formless, lacking definition. And its apparent evanescence and elasticity might seem to be contradicted by the clear and definite *pronunciamenti* of dogmatic statements.

But there is no contradiction here, but only the deepest correspondence. No matter how definitive and irrevocable an ecclesial definition is, its object is still revelation alone and not the philosophic system from which it borrows a concept or a term to give more appropriate expression to its meaning. The doctrine of transubstantiation does not solemnly canonize the Aristotelian philosophy of nature, nor does the doctrine of the two natures of Christ mean that the Council of Chalcedon pronounced a definitive and conclusive word on the relationship of nature and person. Rather, the concepts are taken in a simple and generally accessible sense, unburdened by systematic reflection. Concepts are preferred that are particularly useful and flexible and that can be adapted to all schools of thought in the Church because of their general use and wide semantic range. The last thing they intend to be is the expression of one limited period of history that, after its brief candle has flickered but a moment, can no longer be understood.

We must not forget that the Church, precisely at the moment when she is speaking polemically in the heat of controversy, must immerse herself in the terminology of an epoch, even in a specific way of thinking, so that her definitions do not dispense with the task of

assessing the value of this terminology. And so, we who come later and want to understand the position taken by the Church must know the semantic range [*Denksprache*] of that century's language to evaluate the specific extent of the pronouncement in question. However much Catholic theology seeks to bring order and precision to her exposition of revelation, we cannot mean that she does so by building on the analogy of a philosophic system. Nor can we speak of an underlying "systematic principle", motivating the whole and building up a fully ramified systematic whole. We cannot even speak of what Barth calls "the great sham doctrine of the analogy of being" as being the "foundational schema of Catholic thought and doctrine" (3, 658).

Once we realize this, we can see why it would not do to set the structure of Barth's thought, which we have outlined, over against a "Catholic" framework of thought. This becomes all the more evident when we recall that Karl Barth is a single Protestant theologian. Even his closest neighbors, for example Emil Brunner or Rudolf Bultmann, would draw the dividing line between Catholicism and Protestantism quite differently and would vigorously dispute Barth's drawing the boundary with the help of the analogy of being. Barth's assertion that this doctrine is what makes Catholicism distinctively Catholic represents his private opinion and is not shared either by Catholic theology as a whole or by his own fellow Protestant theologians.

Moreover, the dialogue partner of a theologian is not a church—except when she feels duty bound to pass official judgment on a particular theologian's teachings—but another theologian. The Church as such cannot possess a rigid, enclosed metaphysics. She attempts to be what in obedience to Jesus Christ he calls her to be: the steward of his graces and the proclaimer of his works and words. As part of this task, she is to sanctify, preach, teach and shepherd souls, and in doing so she will occasionally have to take a position on certain issues in human thought, above all where an intellectual trend might restrict the range of her proclamation or block her progress. All theologians must think with the Church and serve her mission if they are to join in the task with her and in her spirit of

expressing the content of revelation in thought and concept without throttling its always greater content or prejudicially getting in the way.

Before we pursue this line of thought any farther, let us pause a moment and ask what *Erich Przywara* actually meant by his formula, analogy of being. His book *Analogia ends* (1932) brought the first phase of his thought to a conclusion, where in the final paragraphs he characterized the principle of the analogy of being “as a creaturely principle and thus internal to the limitless openness of the movement of becoming”.

If this were something like *the* formula of the creaturely realm—and consequently of the relationship between God and creature—then it would become the absolute starting point of an absolute metaphysics, from which we would be able to derive everything, including the deepest mysteries of theology. But it is only the expression for how the restless potentiality of the creaturely is unfolded as thought in the starting point of thought, all the way to the *potentia oboedientialis*. It is not a principle in the sense that the creaturely is grasped (and thus is graspable) but in the sense that it uninhibitedly hovers over the created world in its restless potentiality.⁴

Rightly understood, the analogy of being is the destruction of every system in favor of a totally objective availability of the creature for God and for the divine measure of the creature. But what could still seem like a philosophically constructed system in Przywara’s book and thus inevitably arouse the suspicion of Barth and others⁵ was set out more clearly in all its theological contexts in his second period. Indeed, Przywara already saw these connections in the earliest period of his thought,⁶ but they became much more essential to him while working on the second volume of his *Analogia ends*. A short article, “Philosophy”,⁷ took up the position regarding the place of this doctrine in Christian thought in this way:

Since there is only one, single concrete existing order between God and creature in this concretely existing world—that between the original sin in Adam and redemption in Christ—the concretely existing face of philosophy only comes to light from within this order, in which (as an objectively general order) every concretely existing human being stands, whether he knows it or not. The question of a Christian philosophy is consequently not the question of a special philosophy alongside others in the framework of philosophy in general but is the question of the concretely existing pattern of philosophy as such. For this pattern is duly qualified in the double sense that goes back to Thomas Aquinas: the grace [of faith] does not destroy but presupposes and provides the final, perfected form of nature [of reason]. In accentuating grace and nature this way, this sentence means for our question: Being

and history, as the object of history, have for their final form (*perfecit*) the grace of redemption in Christ, but only by remaining preserved in its natural form. In the corresponding accentuation of faith and reason, the same sentence reads: thought, as an act of philosophy, indeed has for its final form (*per-fecit*) faith in the redemption in Christ, but only by remaining in its natural lawful identity [*Gesetzlichkeit*]. Christianity means: the Incarnation of God, redemption on the Cross, incarnation and redemption as Church (where Christ is “head and body”).

This is how Christianity stands over against original sin: God's becoming man as opposed to the original sin of man wanting to become God; redemption on the Cross against the original sin of man wanting to prevail in eternal life on his own terms; the Church (of blind obedience in the religious sphere) against man's original sin of wanting to be independent. This is the only true “over-against”: whereas Adam and all human beings in him who are on the path of unconditional self-assertion are falling into sin, death and hell, Christ's self-surrender opens up salvation, eternal life and heaven for all who are being redeemed in him. Life moving through death in the mystery of redemption steps in against death moving through life in the mystery of original sin.

What is the consequence for philosophy? Insofar as it has for its final form the form of the Cross, it preserves its natural form. Concretely existing philosophy in the one, single concrete order of original sin and redemption occurs to *the* extent, as authentic philosophy, that the Pauline dynamic “we are called dead men and yet we live” (2 Cor 6:9) is its working principle.

The either / or of existing philosophy stands between “originally sinful philosophy” and “redeemed philosophy”. “Originally sinful philosophy” wants to be absolute, “to know as God does”—to quote the way the formula for original sin runs, and not in vain, in Genesis 3:5. Thereby it only falls into the thrall of a “pure logic” of dead absoluteness, of “pure concepts”, or into a “pure dialectic” of the hellish absolute of an all-analyzing critique—thus truly moving from sin to death to hell.

“Redeemed philosophy”, however, is vitally aware that it stands before the One Living Absolute [God] in its creaturely distinctiveness [and thus in a redeemed, creaturely mobility of authentic becoming]. But it also recognizes itself as having fallen prey on its own to the death of the “pure concept” and to the hell of a “pure critique”. And so it finds perfection in an ever-new Becoming as an ever-new resurrection from an always-new death and ever-yawning hell, when it suffers and dies through each new enthrallment to its original state of sin and finds ever-new redemption. In this way Christian philosophy, in its true meaning, consists in this: that Christianity transforms an “originally sinful philosophy” into a “redeemed philosophy”.

Corresponding to these views, Przywara had already adumbrated the issue in *Analogia entis* with this formulation: “In the final analysis there is only the either/or between God and idol and thus between *catholicus* and *paganus*.”⁸ Similarly, when he had developed his christocentrism in the article “The Extent of Analogy as Basic Catholic Form”, he once more phrased it with unmistakable clarity:

That is why there is for the *real existent* no purely natural religion, no purely natural morality, no purely natural politics. Rather everything without exception [because everything belongs to this one concrete human being who is in fact ordered to God] expressly or inclusively, consciously or unconsciously, in full measure or in paltry reflections, bears the one “God in Christ in the Church” as its final form. For every *real existent* without exception there is only the either / or of saying Yes or No to the one order.⁹

In any case, both versions reach the same conclusion: there must be no philosophy as a rigid, formal framework into which the content of theology would be poured. Rather, Przywara draws every concrete philosophy of Yes or No to its supernatural order of revelation. This summarizes and demarcates with sufficient clarity his intention. And thus we may say that nothing whatever can be found of that ogre that Barth has made of the analogy of being. The battle over the competence of reason and its concepts within the boundaries we have now demarcated should be an entirely secondary dispute. This is an issue that hardly merits Barth getting so excited over it, and it is certainly not worth splitting the Church because of it. But if Przywara nonetheless speaks of a “basic Catholic form”, then he is obviously not referring to one form of thought alongside others. What he means is finally the way and manner in which in Catholicism space has been opened up inside the all-comprehensive Yes to revelation, for everything in creaturely thought that can be and has been redeemed.

So now we come to the issue of how we are to use philosophical categories within Catholic theology. Here we find a certain age-old tension between two types of theology: a more concrete and positive theology that builds upon the historical facts of revelation and thus makes greater use of the categories that apply to *events* (although it is not always aware of doing so); and a more speculative theology that steps back into a certain contemplative distance from these immediate events and takes for its object the events’ rationality or the implied connections between the individual truths of revelation. If patristic thought leans more toward the first, Scholasticism tends more to the second—although both forms of thought can be found throughout both periods of the Church’s intellectual history. We have

only to consider how much Thomas Aquinas operated from the concept of act both in his ontology as well as in his epistemology.¹⁰

We should not forget that Dante stood alongside Aquinas in the Middle Ages and that Calderon was next to Suarez in the period of the Baroque. And these two artists, poet-theologians both, gave supreme and theologically trenchant expression to the actualistic and dramatic side of Catholic thought. An either/or between a theology of the actual and existential and a theology of the prior capacities and essences is impossible. For both forms overlap and condition each other: first of all, because that is the very essence of worldly being and thinking, but then, and even more importantly, because revelation itself is two-sided: action and contemplation, faith as deed and faith as vision, obedience and prayer.

We are not permitted to characterize the second moment as an “abstraction” in the usual sense and then slough it off without further ado. For it is an intrinsic and inseparable dimension of the event of revelation itself, giving it room and distance and stillness, enabling it to be itself. Even the most extreme forms of a theology of the actual cannot dispense with this moment, as we have already seen in Barth’s case and as he himself was compelled to admit. But contemplative theology too must not ever lose sight of the revelation *event* as its true object either.

Here Catholic and Protestant theology find themselves caught up in the same tension: between being led on to the central event and a serene meditation on this event in contemplative distance. Indeed, the parallel cuts deeper, since the question arises of where the actual event really is to be found. In history? Then every “timeless” speculation will always be led over into a theology of the Kingdom of God, as we so richly find in Augustine, throughout the Middle Ages and on up to the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Or perhaps theology should look past the merely factual and plunge into the contemplative and mystical depths of that realm that precedes all history by cultivating the *sensus spiritualis* with a spirituality that focuses on the Holy Spirit. In that case, the seemingly abstract approach of the Scholastics and mystics will look—paradoxically enough—like an effective way of reaching the core of the event of revelation.

Of course, even Catholic theology will not be able to shed the suspicion that it is indulging in a crypto-philosophy. This accusation is usually leveled from the Protestant lists: even in such early hours of the Church as the time of the Fathers, goes this accusation, the terminology, concepts, patterns of thought and categories of Greek philosophy were raided, “despoiled”, thereby falsifying revelation. This corrosion then reached its crowning monument when Aquinas expropriated Aristotle and thereby completely removed himself from the outlook of the Bible.

As we have seen, however, Barth spoke against this massive and sweeping accusation. He did so not only because every theology needs philosophic forms, not only because he himself undertook the same experiment as did the Scholastics, but more importantly because in many cases he felt that the use of Greek forms of thought—for example, the concept of *physis* and the problem of secondary causes—was felicitous and helpful. Indeed, looked at in broad outlines, Catholic theology can seem very similar to Barth’s, insofar as both have couched revelation in the intellectual structure of their time: in the case of patristic Catholicism, in the categories of a philosophical, mystical Neoplatonic Hellenism; in Barth’s case, in the categories of German Idealism. But in both we find a general schema of egress and regress, a pattern that started with the first great theologian, Origen (who clearly used profane sources),¹¹ continued on up to Thomas Aquinas and reappears once more in the Idealists (in the same way and, ultimately, using the same profane sources).

The schema of egress and regress dominates Barth’s doctrine of predestination, so much so, as we have seen, that one is in danger of somehow getting “behind” the curtain of God’s judgment and sneaking a peek at the cards in the Judge’s hand. But this schema also shaped the style and thought patterns of Catholic theology at its very beginnings with the Alexandrians, setting the pattern for the next thousand years. We find it in all the speculative Fathers of East and West: in the Cappadocians, Augustine, Dionysius the Areopagite, Gregory the Great, and Scotus Erigena. But it is also there in Aquinas, who had such high esteem for the *Liber de causis* and the writings of Dionysius.¹²

So really, both Catholic and Protestant theology find themselves in the same situation, and thus the real question is simply whether the schema of egress and regress, when used as a *way of ordering* the elements of revelation, is not so general and vacant that the event of revelation will not be harmed if we use it in our thought. But even more. For an even more telling question is whether this ordering form might not be so suitable that it lets even the most ultimate, mysterious and ineffable aspects of revelation come to light, for these aspects are that “background”, as Barth says, that silhouettes all the events and even all the judgments in the Bible, giving them their true illumination and meaning.

If the answer is Yes to this second question, then we would certainly have to add that the general schema of egress and regress possesses its *authentic* truth *within* the particular confines of Christian revelation. It does not so much confirm a universal and natural presentiment in the human race as rather assert that this apparently natural presentiment has for its origin a proto-revelation or perhaps derives in some way from the irradiation of God’s revelation in history. This latter point is so important that over against the blind application of this empty schema—as if it were itself something with content and even something final and definitive, which it undoubtedly was for Origen—we must rightly stress with all due emphasis the side of the event and of God’s sword of judgment over the world. Only by hewing firmly to the thought of God’s judgment will Christian theology be able to preserve its authenticity against the ever-present danger and temptation of Origenism.

At this juncture, we can hardly fail to miss a curious and rather paradoxical kinship between *Thomas Aquinas* and *Karl Barth*. This is most evident in the fact that the doctrines of the Trinity and Church do not play a central role in shaping the overarching structure of their respective theologies. Rather, the accent in both theologies falls on treatises on the *one* God, on creation and its exaltation, on divine conservation and providence and especially on ethics and eschatology. At the center is the overall relationship between God and the world, God and man, nature and the supernatural, or creation and covenant. They both focus on a cosmos that comes from God, points to him and is being led back to him; and they focus

on a Christ (more Pauline and Johannine than Synoptic) who in every way is related to this cosmos.

Of course, the tracts on the Church and the sacraments are not missing, since they gain their importance from redemption. But still the main interest of Aquinas and Barth is no doubt the doctrines just mentioned, where they both hope to gain a kind of broad, sapiential overview of the world and its relationship to God. Even the deep contrast in the way they use their respective categories (with Thomas stressing man's natural and innate prior capacities, while Barth emphasizes more the historical event) cannot obscure this kinship. If one were so inclined, one could even push their affinity even closer together, mooring Barth and Thomas to their common immanent philosophy (this would be Neoplatonism), interpreting Barth from his *Epistle to the Romans* as an Idealist system of identity and Thomas on the basis of a necessity for "God to be born" in the creature that can be espied beyond nature and the supernatural.¹³ But such a forcing of the issue into the mold of identity (however bewildering the kinship of both thinkers might be in this context) would still be all too forced: for in what philosophy can one not spot a hidden identity, at least in some way or other?

The fact that Thomas managed to resist Origen's temptation to dissolve the Last Judgment into a shallow, superficial schema of *apokatastasis* [universal restoration] suffices to show that that schema is nothing more for him or for Catholic theology in general than an ordering principle, not an autonomous "thought form". We should also not forget that Catholic theology had found its essential form long before the problem of "natural theology" became so acute in its classic formulation in late Scholasticism (from the time of Baius on). Thus this problem could not possibly be what gives to Catholic theology its basic structural form any more than the problem of the analogy of being can do so. The whole patristic tradition right up to the High Middle Ages—even Thomas himself, for the most part—conceives the issue within the *unicus ordo realis supernaturalis* [the one and only real supernatural order], and thus within the analogy of faith, which nestles within itself the analogy of being as an subordinate moment. And the Fathers and Scholastics made use of

Greek categories only that they might better give expression to this order.

The issue gets a little more tangled when we move from the overall schematic order that dominates virtually the whole of Catholic theology, binding together all the major schools, and look at certain specific individual thought forms—for that is what they are—of Aquinas, especially as they have lived on in Neo-Thomism. And not surprisingly, in this stricter sense of intellectual method [*Denkweise*], we obviously see contrasts with Barth's method. We must recall, if we are really serious about the real opportunities for dialogue, that even an Aquinas is only *one* Doctor of the Church among others. Even if he is the greatest of cathedrals, there are still others built in different styles from his Gothic.

When the recent popes expressly recommended him as *dux studiorum*, they were not canonizing his theological system or holding it up as the only valid theology for the Church in its every detail. Even Pope Leo XIII bestowed on numberless Greek Fathers the sobriquet “Doctor of the Church”—which surely must mean something for theology. And, in his encyclical *Studiorum ducem*, Pope Pius XI added in his own hand a *passus* on the freedom of theological research.¹⁴ A lot of the intellectual habits that have become rote in the Church have frequently prevented us from gaining true insight into earlier and later intellectual worlds because they were not sufficiently related to each other. For example, not much time has passed since Joseph Marechal managed so generously to transpose for the first time transcendental categories into the Thomistic schema. And this was only in philosophy: the corresponding task in theology has yet to be taken up.

What is most characteristic of Thomism is probably its strong emphasis on using philosophy *before* and *within* theology. The inseparability of this “before” and “within” perhaps characterizes Aquinas' historical position more than anything else could: before him, the *unicus ordo concretus spiritualis* [the one and only concrete spiritual order] of the Fathers governed theology; and ahead of him lay the *duplex ordo naturalis et supernaturalis* [the twofold natural and supernatural order] of modern times, which found its culminating formulation in the decree of Vatican I (Denz., 1799).

Thomas is positioned as the most important representative within the Church at a moment when profane philosophy was announcing its entry into the *Sacrum Imperium Christianum*. This was that transitional period when there were still elements of the old theological unity but when the profane sciences could first espy their growing autonomy—and history shows their victory. Whoever does not realize how Thomas was open both to the past and to the future will misunderstand his position in the history of human thought. His strong emphasis on a pretheological philosophy and his initial clarification of the concepts to be subsequently used in theology¹⁵ are justified, because this was a time when the natural and human sciences were beginning to realize (without having fully done so) their own respective autonomies, each in its own sphere. This culminated in an ontology of worldly Being, at the periphery of which (as *principium et finis* [Denz., 1785]) looms the question of the Absolute. Thomas stands foursquare in the middle of this incipient development, which explains the early and as yet incomplete movement to separate philosophy from theology, culminating in the *propriis principiis et propria methodo* [using the appropriate principles and method] of Vatican I.

Two points are worth noting about Thomas Aquinas' transitional situation. First of all, it *is* transitional, and precisely as such it serves as a *model* for Catholic theology: his thought cannot be pinned down one-sidedly exclusively in terms of either what preceded it or what was to follow (as we shall see in the next chapter). Secondly, Aquinas should be interpreted and read in terms of the historically irreversible *line of march* into which he fits and which he did so much to determine: because he came from a world of undifferentiated unity and points toward a world of increasing differentiation, we should interpret him, in his transitional situation, much more in terms of the future than of the past. And that is why the *propriis principiis et propria methodo* [the notion that each discipline has its own principles and method] is the authentic spirit of Thomism.

So we can say: what corresponds to this spirit is to accept this new situation proceeding from Thomas' accomplishment and, *in ever-increasing measure*, to safeguard the genuine methodology of both sciences. Not in the sense of a growing indifference of each to

the other but in the sense that both should increasingly appreciate the task of the other, and thus of their maturing independence, which alone will permit them to have a mutually beneficial effect on each other.

For theology, that will mean: taking increasing pains to distinguish between a pretheological and philosophical use of concepts and thought forms and their intratheological application. We must not equate these two usages. Rather, the theological application will always involve transposing the first usage into a quite different field of inquiry. Moreover, there should be no philosophical predeterminations that delimit, inhibit or restrict theological thinking a priori. Rather the suppleness of the theologian's thought will be even freer and *more* sovereign thanks to the help of philosophy, for philosophy prepares the way by "cleansing" concepts of their lack of clarity.

We had earlier spoken of the treatises that interested Aquinas the most. Among these would *not* be the three central theological tractates: *De Deo trino*, which gave Thomas an excellent formal training but which had no further role to play in shaping the course of his *Summa*; *De Christo*, which Thomas wrote with extraordinary care but introduced only after he had treated the whole of natural-supernatural ontology, epistemology and ethics in the Tertia Pars; and *De Ecclesia*, which never did have much of an impact, either on Thomas himself or on any other theologian of his time. But it is precisely these three subjects that are the central theme of theology! And in *this* sense they are theology's *propria principia*, which formally and materially structures and dominates everything in it and upon which theology must continually reflect if it is to develop according to its own most intimate identity.

But why did they have so little structuring impact in his theology?

In accordance with the Aristotelian way of thinking, Thomism emphasizes thinking from below up: it moves from the world of concrete experience and sensation, through abstraction, to universal concepts and a demonstration of the principles contained in them. Here again we have a methodology that is predominantly philosophical, whose use in theology is quite limited. For theology deals primarily with God, the *concretissimum*, from whom nothing

can be abstracted. And insofar as theology deals with the revelation of this one, only and unique God in the world, its object is historical: *sacra doctrina tractat de singularibus, puta de gestis Abraham, Isaak et Jakob et similibus*.¹⁶ The trouble is, of course, that this sentence stands as one of the initial objections to which Aquinas must later respond, and his answer shows little inclination to let these *singularia* be the main focus of theology:¹⁷ *Particularia non pertinent ad perfectionem intellegibilium*.¹⁸

In short, in Thomas' *Summa* the particulars—that is, concrete events—were not allowed to stand as the chief object of theology. In his thought, they rather represent examples of God's eternal, supratemporal wisdom vouchsafed by God only because of our temporality. And sacred doctrine has for its primary focus this wisdom. That is why Aquinas was so interested in the general, suprahistorical essence (*quidditas*) of things, while the historical and actualist dimensions must step back. And so he focused on the lasting structure of the universe, in contrast to which the temporal nature of salvation history as standard-setting *singularia* recede into the background.

Now Thomas' style of thinking with its decided predilection for induction (working from below, drawing examples from there for the realm above and finally explaining theology in philosophical terms) is obviously in sharp contrast to Barth's exclusively theological way of thinking, far more so than with other thinkers' methods. However much Barth might have felt at home with the *theological* rationality of Anselm, he could not feel at ease with St. Thomas' *philosophical* rationality. But we must not miss seeing the relativity of these contrasts—however much the content of their theologies might differ. Granted, insofar as “Thomism” as a system can be interpreted from the perspective of what it points toward—Vatican I—it cannot avoid an encounter with modern Protestant theology. But insofar as it is interpreted as historically transitional, this encounter is already taking place, as we will show in the next chapter.

In conclusion, we would do well to think back on the words of Yves Congar, O.P., quoted at the outset, about how dearly Catholic theology must pay for schisms and heresies. When Protestantism proclaimed that “Scripture alone” was valid and used it exclusively,

the Catholic Church was forced to stress the rights of tradition and reason, which forced her into taking a certain stand in opposition, stressing once more the already hypertrophied philosophical side. And when, the third time around, modern philosophical and theological agnosticism and fideism denigrated and distorted God's natural creation, the Church once more was forced into opposition.

The Catholic Church and her theology have taken a great deal of abuse for this, when, apparently so loudly and one-sidedly, she took on the role of defending nature and reason. But she really was faced with heresies that—presuming to stand on Scripture, claiming historical revelation for itself—did indeed foreshorten the work of creation and thus undercut the work of redemption too.

Of course, the opposition between the two sides: with Protestantism as defender of revelation in Scripture and Catholicism as the sole defender of revelation in nature, was never total. If that had been the case, then Protestantism would have chosen the infinitely better part by far, for the other part (natural revelation) would still have to be implied and presupposed, whereas Catholicism would have had to dispense with the exalted heights of revelation, not even being able to content itself with the full meaning of nature. For that too would have been lost, since its true and final meaning can only be found *in* revelation.

But of course, we never came to such a pass, and the alternatives were never that narrowly drawn. On the contrary, Vatican I defended the *duplex ordo* and therefore the totality of reality in God. Yet we can still ask whether the sense in Catholic theology for its *propria principia*, its *propria methodus*, has always been sufficiently vigorous and fruitful after the stress that was put on nature in the Middle Ages, in the Counter-Reformation and in the nineteenth century.

The direction to go, therefore, is not along the path that leads to the medieval contrast between a more rational theology (as in Aquinas) and a more affective, mystical one (as in Bernard, the Franciscans and Bonaventure and renewed in the efforts of, for example, von Soiron, among others). Nor does it lie in the contrast between philosophical realism and nominalism—which historically was a starting point for Protestantism but no longer has any role to play in dividing us. Nor does it lie in the contemporary contrast

between Realism and Idealism or a purely philosophical existentialism. In fact, it does not even lie in the contrast between ontology and actualism, which is a contrast that Barth has with all rigor proven to be indefeasible.

Rather, the real issue centers around what Barth tried to accomplish with his actualism: to pursue theology in the incomparable uniqueness of a theological *scientia de singulations* or, as Barth says, of the *concretissimum*, where we get beyond the contrast of the mere historical fact and purely transhistorical doctrine; *where, in other words, the essence of event as well as doctrine is embedded in the person and activity of Jesus Christ.*

Perhaps this was the theological point that historical nominalism meant to drive home. But, because it confined itself to the philosophical level and did battle only there, it failed. And the worst consequence of that failure was. . . Martin Luther. Today our task must not be to trace back once more the path that led to that mistake. Rather we must hold fast in philosophy to the justification of ontological and normative inquiry, keeping it alongside a philosophy of existence and history, so that we might maintain the foundation and full conceptual panoply [of philosophy] for explicating the theological *datum*. Barth's accomplishments in dogmatic theology could impel Catholic theology to this new reflection, even where we do not adopt his specific conclusions.

Chapter 2

THE CONCEPT OF NATURE IN CATHOLIC THEOLOGY

1. Its Transitional Role in History

“Medieval” means “middle”, and in that sense all medieval thought is, to us, transitional. And Thomas Aquinas, as the culmination of that thought, can be seen as the most transitional figure of all. Now nothing illustrates better Aquinas’ transitional position between antiquity and modernity than his concept of nature. The two-sided character of his view of nature gives us access to the Janus-faced character of his entire theological synthesis. But although this double-sidedness has to some extent become outmoded—to the extent that it has been overtaken by later developments—it still has a basic and permanently valid character that we will never overtake. On the contrary, it is up to us to take it to heart, for it will prove extraordinarily helpful in our wrestling with Karl Barth.

As we saw earlier, Barth gradually strove to move beyond an unserviceable dialectical concept of nature to an undialectical but exclusively theological concept of nature, as presented in his section “Creation and Covenant”. Perhaps in the discussions of the concept of nature presently going on within Catholic theology we can now get beyond an all too univocal and undifferentiated concept toward a middle ground, where the concept of nature is properly differentiated. If we can do this, a platform will have been established where mutual understanding and agreement may be possible.

Now Thomas’ transitional place in history finds its clearest expression in the fact that he attributes only *one* end, a *supernatural* one, to the created spirit.¹ Like the Church Fathers, he sees the one, indivisible world order, in which nature and grace *together* form a unity: nature exists for the sake of grace and is ordered to it, having its ultimate finality in it. *Karl Eschweiler* has stressed this unity:

Thomas, and with him all the masters from the twelfth to the fourteenth century, are unanimous in their agreement with Augustine in seeing the realm of natural knowledge gained by reason, not as a sealed-off and windowless, monadic globe, but as a component of an overarching whole. The natural man and the Christian raised up by the grace of Christ are not two essences [*Wesenheiten*] in competition with each other. The effect and reality of divine grace are by far the higher, and thus the more comprehensive, principle of natural created reality. This is analogous to the way, in the life of plants, vitality is the higher and more comprehensive principle of the material changes that proceed on the lower level by mechanical laws.²

In no way did Aquinas object to the problematic that arises on the border between the two orders, any more than did the Fathers. In fact this was for him even the very rub of his whole understanding of the world:

The beatific vision and knowledge are to some extent above the nature of the rational soul, inasmuch as it cannot reach them of its own strength; but in another way they are in accordance with its nature, inasmuch as it is capable of them by nature, having been made to the likeness of God, as stated above.³

This sentence, which could be replaced by any number of others, opens up a whole scale of interpretations of Thomas that do nothing, however, to change this one, central fact: the nature of created spirit is directed beyond itself. Thus it is a *nature* that cannot be fulfilled through its natural possibilities alone. One can later say with Cajetan that what Thomas means by nature here is the nature already raised to the order of grace and thus to be interpreted according to grace (this had always been the opinion of the Fathers). Or one can share the opinion of Sylvester Maurus that Thomas meant a “pure” nature set off against the bestowal of grace in the more modern sense. In this view, Thomas gave to nature an objective finality but also a subjective longing for the vision of God, whether explicitly or implicitly, either with differentiated levels or not. This would be a longing and striving that nature itself could neither realize on its own nor force grace to bring about. Or one can once more interpret this striving as a *potentia naturalis* [natural potentiality] but not *naturaliter implenda* [one that will be fulfilled naturally] or reduce it to a *potentia oboedientialis* in the sense of a nonresistance to one’s elevation to the state of grace.

All these ways of interpreting Aquinas are secondary to the previous insight: as a created being of nature, man has no other goal

than the supernatural vision of God. It is essential to realize that Thomas does not regard this as a hypothetical goal. Indeed he knows of a *finis naturalis*, meaning a fulfillment corresponding to the immanent structure of human powers. But he sees this fulfillment either as a goal for this life as opposed to the next, in the Aristotelian tradition, the ideal of the seeker after wisdom. Or he sees it as the *cognitio verpertina* [evening knowledge] as opposed to a *cognitio matutina* [morning knowledge], in the Augustinian tradition where this distinction first arose. Or finally, he might have meant it in the sense of a distinction between the *praemium essentiale* and *praemium accidentale* internal to a supernatural glory. But Thomas never entertains, *even hypothetically*, a final goal that could be unmoored from the supernatural vision of God. According to his medieval presuppositions, it would have been impossible for him even to make the conceptual distinction implied by this problem.

To pose such a hypothesis, to maintain that a graceless order of nature or creation is at least *possible*, only became urgent for theology when a heretic wanted to make the fluid bond between nature and the supernatural a forced and juridical one. This happened when Baius chose to derive a *de jure* compulsory right to grace understood as a strict requirement (*debitum*) from nature based on the *de facto* configuration of both orders, which were linked because of free grace, not necessity. The No that the Church had to pronounce against this sclerosis of the mystery of grace and of its laws and necessities must be understood within the confines of this intent: because, even in relation to concrete nature, grace always remains free and voluntary, God does not therefore “need” to give grace to nature. And thus a natural order without grace is both meaningful and possible.

This conclusion gave birth to “natural theology” in the modern sense of the term, that is, to a theology of *natura pura*. But a natural theology in the sense of a theology of the natural realm within the concrete world order as it actually presents itself is as old as theology itself, finding a home in the thought of the apologetes, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement. But this theology of *natura pura* belongs within a structure determined by Christian theology and was developed as the hypothetical conclusion that was meant to

preserve the *supernatural character* of grace. In other words, the concept was functional, intended to preserve God's freedom vis-à-vis nature and the underivability of the Covenant from creation. But this conceptual hypothesis, which was not even necessary as an expressed statement before Baius,⁴ soon managed to develop into a full system detached from its *theological* presuppositions, and on that basis it took on a life of its own.

Of course, we cannot form our critical reflections on the meaning and impact of this development simply by pointing to its late appearance in theology, its complete absence in the earlier theology of the Fathers and Scholastics, nor even by stressing its hypothetical character. A critical evaluation of this theory must move beyond this and include reflection on the ambiguity of the concept of nature, since Thomas' historically transitional position on this point is of genuine value here. This ambiguity lies this side of all the ways of interpreting the Thomistic concept of nature that we have mentioned (in its relation to the *visio*). It really is situated in the presuppositions that are implied in the use of the word and concept of *natura* itself, and thus we must treat this first before understanding the Thomistic concept of nature.⁵

2. The Ambiguity of the Concept of Nature

It is a well-established fact that the crucial theses of Baius, Jansen and Quesnel that the Church condemned can be found, almost word for word, in Augustine and to some extent in the canons of the Council of Orange (527 A.D.). The Church, however, was not contradicting herself here any more than she once did at the Council of Chalcedon (453) when she explicitly rejected the very formula of the one nature of Christ (*mia physis*) that she had previously approved at the Council of Ephesus (431). For the expression "one nature in Christ" at Ephesus meant: Christ was one single being [*Wesen*] in whom God and man were bonded not only through love and inclination ("morally") but also ontically ("physically"). But when Eutyches sought to interpret this unity as a fusion of the natures of God and man, the Council of Chalcedon had to refine the conceptual material and distinguish between nature and person in Christ.

What Cyril *meant* at Ephesus was that the ontic union of divine and human natures resulted in one entity, the person in Christ. But only by distinguishing the natures was the *true* unity between God and man made first and foremost possible. But, if this union had been conceived as a kind of “fusion”, then that would have given rise to a kind of third being, a *tertium quid* that is neither God nor man. Maximus the Confessor summarized this unity by distinguishing the two meanings implied in the one word *sozein* (to save): Christ can “save” humans only by “safe-guarding” them.⁶

Now a similar development occurred in the history of dogma between the time of Augustine and Baius, at least in outline: in the first case of the Chalcedonian shift to speak of two natures where previously Christ had been defined in terms of one nature, the issue was the christological concept of nature as the presupposition for the true soteriological unity in Christ. In the second example, the issue was the universal and theological concept of nature as the presupposition for the charismatic union between God and man in Adam and in every human being endowed with grace. In other words, it was precisely because there was a need to understand the bonding that took place in grace between God and man that God and the creature had to be differentiated in the pure concept of nature.

Now Augustine and with him all the Church Fathers had stressed, as did Cyril in Ephesus, the *de facto* physical and ontic unity of man. Adam had been established from the first moment of his existence in this unity, from the very point of his origin (Latin: *nasci*; German: *Ursprung*). This unity of creaturely essence and free gift of grace Augustine called “nature”. But he was quite well aware, as were all the Fathers, that this unity that was the foundation of Adam’s existence was itself no necessary synthesis but a *de facto* one. It belongs to the very essence of the creature that it must indeed be creature, but not a creature who has been exalted to a new order by grace: by nature a creature is the “servant” but not the “friend” of God.

The Protestant Reformers, however, and the later Catholic theologians who followed their line of thinking, Baius and Jansen, fell into an analogous temptation that lured the Monophysites of trying to

understand that *de facto* synthesis as a necessary one too. For Baius it is part of the *essence* of man that he must participate in grace to be fully developed and integral as a creature.⁷ Only in the person endowed with grace does it become evident what being human means in the fullest sense of that term. Only in grace are intellect and will able to perform their true natural activities.

The lack of grace, whether this be due to a hypothetical creation of an ungraced human nature or because we have fallen away from God in sin, not only impoverishes, robs and weakens human nature but more to the point destroys its very essence. If grace is lacking, human nature is missing its best part: the meaning and totality of that nature itself. Sin *ruins* nature. It should be clear that this doctrine, as in the case of Eutyches, was intent on guaranteeing the deepest intimacy and mutuality between God and man and the fullest orientation of man to God imaginable, but it succeeded in transforming grace into *an essential component* of nature: man is a *person*, particularly at the height of his powers (in his intellect and will), only when he is graced.

Thus Protestant thinkers take up the concept of nature the way Severus of Antioch used the concept of *physis*: dialectically. "For Calvin, nature means original creation."⁸ But this original nature no longer exists as such, especially in man. Here "the ambiguity of the concept of nature, being at the same time something positive and negative, reaches its culmination. Calvin can mean two things simultaneously: (1) sin is unnatural, *contra naturam*; (2) sin is the very expression of human nature."⁹

But this simply will not do. If we are to hew firmly to an authentic concept of nature, we cannot allow *this* kind of ambiguity, with the concept slipping from one meaning to the other. Nature cannot include grace at one moment and then exclude it the next. When the Catholic Church formulated a theological concept of nature that did not include the concept of grace as an integral part of nature, in opposition to this naturalization of grace, she had but one purpose: to safeguard the purity of the concept of grace. Faithful to the spirit and meaning of Augustine and the Fathers, she made their terminology more precise.

As the Council of Chalcedon had already demonstrated, the true and deepest unity between God and creature could only be guaranteed by effecting a clean *conceptual* separation of God and creature. Just as the Council of Chalcedon had definitively clarified the christological issues of the patristic debate, so too did the period from Trent to Vatican I mean that the Church was able to develop definitive safeguards for the whole order of grace. The twofold order (*duplex ordo*) that Vatican I speaks of represents the capstone of a development that first began with a defense of nature against Baius. In its deepest meaning, this concept is *identical* with the two-natures doctrine (*duo physeis*) of Chalcedon. Both decisions are irrevocable and unproblematical.

But there are still other questions, however, about the concept of nature that had never even entered the field of vision of Vatican I and that it did not seek to resolve, even in anticipation. Above all, it is quite obvious, and it is becoming ever more striking, that when we use this concept—which expresses the essence of what it means to be a creature—it cannot be *neutral* either in its philosophical or theological usage. Of course, theology can utilize the philosophical concept of nature for its own purposes, but it will still have a wholly different angle on the issue from philosophy when it seeks to determine the essence of created reality. If this were not the case, we would possess along with philosophy and theology a *neutral* zone of thought, which means there would exist a standpoint hovering over both of them.

But this is ruled out by the very nature of theology. And so our only option is to recognize a certain kind of *analogy* between the two uses of the concept of nature. This analogy represents the middle ground between two extremes: (1) a metaphysics (which is necessarily pantheistic) that does not distinguish between philosophy and theology; and (2) a radical Protestant dialectic in which the concept of nature actually diverges into and denotes two utterly distinct meanings. The concept of *physis* was an analogous one even by the time of Chalcedon: it expressly encompassed both human and divine nature, of which one was a *universale concretum* (there is *no genus* above the divine Persons!) and the other was a *universal abstractum*. So too, the concept of nature between Trent and Vatican

I expressly encompassed human thinking and divine revelation. And so it was used both as a philosophical and as a theological concept. In other words, it was used analogously.

Let us look at this analogy now more closely. The *philosophical concept of nature*, of which Aristotle built the foundations and the Stoics and Scholastics constructed the edifice, understands by nature

first of all the origin of a being by reproduction, and thus it means that which is conveyed in the act of reproduction: that is, the *specific* essence (= essence as a species). . . . First formally, insofar as it is the principle of a definite action or passion (*principium motus*) especially of a definite *immanent* activity. In other words, nature is a property corresponding to the constitution of the essence of the same in respect to definite life functions.¹⁰

Accordingly, the concept of nature is both static (as essence) and dynamic and teleological, for it explains nature from its *meaning* and effects, that is, from its finality. Moreover, this dynamic aspect includes everything that seems to be indispensable and ordained to that nature's continued existence: the environment and social world of a being, including all the hierarchical levels and more distant reaches of that world.¹¹

Take the example of the bird. Its nature not only includes the abstract ability to fly but also flight itself and thus flight's own presupposition: the air. A bird not only has an abstract need for food and the abstract ability to metabolize it, but it also actually finds and digests food, which also presupposes the existence of real food. It not only has the abstract ability to reproduce itself, it actually produces its young. Of course this does not mean that every individual potentiality and proclivity of the animal must be realized in each individual of the species.¹² But it does mean that the teleological and dynamic schema of its being—even its “nature”—can only be conceived in a world context thought of or presupposed as *real*.

This teleological and dynamic schema is so much a part of the actual core of “nature” that it cannot be grasped apart from this dynamic meaning. In determining the meaning of nature, the circle of finality is just as important as the actuating dynamic-active potentialities that are brought about in this circle and “formed” in it.

Also everything that this nature essentially “requires” for its continued existence belongs to its full logical constitution. Aristotle correctly formulated this philosophical concept of nature when he accounted as inherent in nature everything that belongs to it, as the Latin manuals say, *constitutive, consecutive, et exigitive* [constitutively, consecutively, appetitively].

But then Baius asked what at first was a patristic question: Why should this concept not apply to the dynamic unity of Adam’s being too? The finality of *his* nature is founded on the ordination of his nature to be a child of God and thus to his immediate contemplation of God. Within this final space, all the ways and means of reaching this goal are available to him *consecutive et exigitive*. Adam possesses an intellect enlightened and a will fortified by God’s grace; he has faith, hope and love; he is given an unambiguous complex of divine commands and prohibitions, and so on. Thus should Adam not be precisely the highest instance and prototype of a dynamical and teleological nature?

Looked at from a purely philosophical perspective, which would know nothing of the revelation of the Word, there seems to be nothing objectionable against this position. Just as Greek thought before Chalcedon would never have come to the realization that *physis* as such cannot also be equated with *hypostasis*,¹³ so too the philosopher working strictly on his own powers would never have been able to formulate such a delimitation of the concept of nature as Catholic *theology* since Baius has taken upon itself to do. If theology needs this new precision—and it does—then it could only arise based on a completely new theological insight.

This insight, which cuts right across the definitions of the philosophers and is based on faith, involved the realization that a creature’s vocation to the beatific vision—as well as everything that is teleologically ordered to this goal or that exists and is given to the creature solely for its sake—can never be interpreted from a purely philosophical perspective, that is, from the being of the world as such.

But why not? Because of a philosophically justified exception to the universal concept of nature? But how could we ever justify this philosophically? No. It can *only* be done theologically, with the insight

that our vocation, the vocation to the beatific vision,¹⁴ can in no way be derived from the *essence* of the *creature*. If that were the case, then we could conceive of a creature to whom God *would have* to be gracious. And that would mean that it essentially would no longer be a mere creature.

If God is so open that he not only posits an Other, which is of course a form of imparting himself, but also opens himself up and gives himself, then the second form of communicating himself can never be necessarily derived from the first.¹⁵ Therefore, if the beatific vision of God is made the goal of a creature and thus if its whole being is directed and equipped for this goal, then it can indeed be expressed with the dynamic Aristotelian concept of nature. And theology is free to utilize this concept, just as the Fathers and Thomas did. But it must be made clear that this application is only *analogically* valid.

Most Catholic manuals of Catholic dogmatics proceed from the philosophical concept of nature: "The natural is whatever pertains to nature either constitutively, consecutively or appetitively."¹⁶ As one can immediately see, this definition begs the question, since it presupposes the concept *natura* as already defined: as the static-dynamic essence-schema of an entity. The definition of the adjective *naturale* also merely repeats the presupposed definition of the noun. As the example of Augustine and the Fathers shows, this definition can only be used to describe the theological fact of graced nature. This is a valid tradition and would serve as one example among many for the appropriation of philosophic conceptual categories by theology. But if we should seek to avoid this application, then we will have to look for a theological counterconcept to nature.

For this purpose, the concept of grace will have to be negatively set off against the philosophical concept of nature: "Supernaturale est quidquid *non* pertinet ad naturam aut constitutive aut exigitive" [The supernatural is whatever does *not* pertain to nature either constitutively, consecutively or appetitively]. This delimitation (which falls into the same "mistake" of begging the question as the previous statement did) is only "correct" if the "supernatural" is grasped in its most universal meaning, as *supernaturale late dictum* [the

supernature in the loose sense of the term]. But this meaning is indifferent to a theologically understood nature and supernature.

All that this analysis yields is a reified region into which grace falls “materially” but in which grace is not formally delimited against a theologically understood nature. Accordingly, the theologically relevant concept of nature is finally not to be had from philosophical analysis. If this is ever to be reached, we will have to look elsewhere, that is, from the perspective of faith, which alone can tell us what grace and revelation are in themselves and how *they themselves* are defined against the background of what we—now theologically—can term “nature”.

That is why the theology manuals are compelled to go farther. For the first time they finally get to the heart of the matter by defining the concept of nature by proceeding from the definition *of grace* (as *supernaturale stride dictum*: the supernatural in the strict sense). But this concept points to a material and ontic presupposition *from which* grace can proceed. But then the concept has secretly undergone a metamorphosis in meaning when it moved from the supernatural in the wider sense to the supernatural in the narrower sense, which people rarely notice with sufficient care.¹⁷

If, for example, Pohle demands “right at the beginning a scientific treatment” of the concept of nature “in order later to be able correctly to construct the contrast with the supernatural”¹⁸ and, after managing this, then determines that “now we can derive the essence of the supernatural from its specific contrast to nature”,¹⁹ then we are faced with two alternatives: either this “supernatural” is still a concept under whose umbrella a great deal of natural and preternatural reality is subsumed (theologically), or—if it really is the theologically supernatural—it is quite consciously deduced from its contrast to nature. Even Bartmann, as it seems to us, misunderstands the issue by putting the “main moment” of the concept of grace, not in the material moment (“God’s beneficence to himself”), but in the formal moment, where “no kind of legal claim from the side of man corresponds to him”²⁰—which really should be a *proprium* of the concept of grace.

We might be able to pose a question that could take us farther: How would it work if we used the term “claim” as the criterion for the

content of the concept of nature? The whole of creation and its order is undoubtedly the free gift of God to which creature has a “claim”. Only within the already posited world order does this concept have any meaning. But even here there remains the widest latitude for something like “grace”. Palmieri enumerates five moments that can throw light on this (purely natural) “grace”:

1. Every act of conceding that something is “necessary” in nature belongs to an infinite hierarchy of *gradations*, of which each one can seem like a “grace” to the other more narrow gradations.
2. The *de facto* immense *wealth* of creation, for example, of the animals and plants ordered to man, has a specific “graced” character as such.
3. Much that corresponds to human nature in general is not meant for each individual, for example, bodily and mental integrity, prosperity, and so on, especially since certain natural laws exclude the possibility that each isolated individual can partake of all these goods. They are thus, for the individual, “grace” in a preeminent way.
4. God could have ordered the world in many other different ways: that he chose *this* total arrangement that furnishes so much beneficence to the individual as well as to the whole can certainly be characterized as a “grace”.
5. Finally the whole environment, necessarily ordered to an innate dynamic as such, is *de facto* and constantly contingent and so has a “gracious” character to it in all its details.^{[21](#)}

If one looks at these moments together, it becomes evident that any “claim” that can be meaningfully discussed in this context cannot mean a genuine *ethical* or *juridical* claim on the part of any already constituted subject^{[22](#)} but above all expresses the *logical* context for this nature itself. This context is posited with God’s primal act of creation itself, to which no one has a claim. And this act of God is so perfect and superabundant that every genuine (ethical or juridical) claim of a creature made within this prior deed is not only fulfilled a priori but is utterly *outmatched*, so that the relationship is already reversed in the origin itself. The only one who can and must raise a claim based on creation is, as Thomas expressed it so supremely, God himself, to whose claim upon the creature every claim of the creature upon God must absolutely yield.^{[23](#)}

Every “claim” of the creature, even in the order of creation, is *de facto* so outmatched by the divine goodness that this goodness itself is expressed to the creature as a claim upon it. Naturally we should not conclude from the intermediate reflections that the “grace” of creation is to be equated or approaches the actual grace of God’s supernatural self-disclosure, for that would imply Pelagianism. The conclusion we should draw actually goes in the other direction: the underivability of actual grace is so total that even the concept of claim (or of its inappropriateness) does not come near to defining it. First of all, “claim” is already a concept that is deeply problematic within the intraworldly sphere. But more importantly, grace must have been revealed in its own inner essence so that its reality, mysteriously transcending all of nature, can be realized in its very essence.

The positive definition of grace can only be given through grace itself. God must himself reveal what he is within himself. The creature cannot delimit itself in relation to this Unknown reality. Nor can the creature, as a theologically understood “pure” nature, ever know wherein it specifically is different from God. Only the light of revelation can draw this distinction and make this clear—not a philosophy that ascends from the world to God, or even (especially!) the mysticism of a Plotinus. But philosophy cannot do it even where what is called its *charts* has already been touched by the light of the reality of revelation. If we are to understand grace in the theological sense strictly as coming “from above to us below”, then it does not suffice for us to settle on the one meaning of “freedom from debt” as a definition of grace. Even creation and still more everything within it is undeserved and holds no claim of debt [*ungeschuldet*]. Grace is a participation in God’s own life and, in common with creation, it *also* has—secondarily but necessarily—the character of being free of debt.

So we must define the theological concept of nature primarily by working from grace. “Nature consists in that aggregate of things that is *set off from* grace and the supernatural order.”²⁴ “Wherefore is everything natural that is not truly supernatural in the specific sense.”²⁵

But now we have reached the point, within theology, where the recurring logical defectiveness of this usage has lost its dubious character. Now it finally and clearly reveals the essence of the theological. Every time we say “set off” to describe nature, we are saying that “nature” must be “abstracted” or pulled away from a totality *that we are given from the start*. This abstraction takes place a posteriori in the world order as it *de facto* exists, through a process of *subtraction*. We simply cannot make out a priori or from below what belongs to Adam’s nature as a teleological whole, for it already is directed to the beatific vision even in its smallest details.

The philosopher does not know what that nature is theologically. Rather, this is the situation: the final end of nature with its static and dynamic context of meaning (which is what establishes the basis for a philosophical concept of nature) cannot be established naturally, at least not in the theological sense. God’s real world order is the *de facto* unity of two *materially* distinguishable and distinct orders that can be differentiated in analysis but are still not separate in reality. Insofar as the philosopher knows nothing of revelation (of God’s Word) and looks out upon a cosmos that is noetically and ontically saturated with moments of the supernatural, he will *also* be, at the very least—without knowing it—a crypto-theologian. The outlook of his reason will not be the outlook of a *ratio pura* but of a reason that already stands within the teleology of faith or unbelief.

By contrast, however, it is the theologian who will study nature as something distinct from grace, trying to discover those traits in the concrete essence of man that belong to him by virtue of his being a creature and not in view of his vocation to participate in the life of God. Thus only the theologian can scrutinize the object of a pure philosophy—which certainly does not mean that he can map out this territory concretely. In other words, “reason” will always be a form of theological thinking, however unconsciously, while faith can with a clear conscience indulge in a bit of pure philosophizing.^{[26](#)}

As a faith seeking understanding, theology can distinguish between the two realms and grasp the structure of the complex, concrete reality. In this theological activity, faith will make use even of the concepts of philosophy, but only when critically translated. But its use of these concepts is not arbitrary, for its object is that very

creation whose immanent laws reason strives to express. Therefore, there cannot be any strict disparity between the philosophical and the theological use of the same concepts, but rather *analogy*. This is a noetic analogy *imbedded in the unceasing suspension of nature between its concrete and its abstract sense*.

But the order of creation cannot be deduced as a whole from the order of revelation, no more than it can be deduced from grace. Grace is something *for* a nature and *in* a nature. And thus it *presupposes* a nature, logically if not necessarily chronologically. Indeed, insofar as grace is flowing out and nature is receiving, it is also already a graced and transformed nature. And so nature exists concretely in the transformed, exalted “mode” of being graced. But the subject that has been so transformed is none other (*non alter*) than that of nature, even if it has become something different (*aliter*). In this *aliter, non alter* we encounter that ontological *fundamentum in re* of the noetic analogy in the concept of nature.

Both analogies—in being and in concept—do not neatly overlap, otherwise we would be able, with Hegel, to derive a “movement of the object” from the “movement of the concept” in the Idealistic sense. The analogy that inheres in our concept *cannot* be covered adequately by the analogy that inheres in the object in our creaturely thinking. For then there would be no analogy! The analogy in the concept does express for its part a certain objective process going on in the object—namely, the mysterious “movement” captured by the axiom that grace does not destroy but perfects nature. But, on the other hand, analogy also expresses that no human concept can unambiguously, systematically, neutrally and univocally depict this ontic movement as it is happening in the eyes of God. The mystery remains because the standpoint of faith does not allow itself to be adequately covered by the standpoint of knowledge.

And so we can assert—even relying on the usual definition of nature as being that which does not belong to grace—that this negative definition (*nec constitutive. . .*) is itself analogous. So, when the textbooks speak of “no rightful claim”, they are using *one* concept for both cases, in reference to God and man, and so the usage is analogous. To take an example, just as one human being has no rightful claim to the full self-disclosure of another human being,

which is inherently a free act, so *analogously* (and only so!) creatures have no right to God's self-disclosure in his gracious revelation. Here a true analogy governs inasmuch as a true analogy exists between the divine and human subject. And to that extent the formula *nec constitutive*. . . can be stretched to apply to the relationship of grace in a permissible, even a superabundant, sense. But it is still *only* an analogy, because the divine subject stands both much farther from, and yet that much nearer to, the creaturely subject than any other human Thou does.

If we had only appreciated the import of this insight at one juncture in the history of theology, then we would no longer have become undone by the paradox of the Thomistic texts (and of all the texts that predate Baius). For they bind the connection between nature and the supernatural much more tightly than we would dare do (with their concept of the *desiderium naturale visionis* that moves toward a single, visible supernatural fulfillment). But when it comes to realizing this goal, they seem to be quite anti-rationalistic: they require that God freely disclose himself both as ontic grace as well as noetic revelation within history.^{[27](#)}

3. The Theological Concept of Nature: Formal and Material Aspects

The theological concept of nature is primarily a negative one: it draws a boundary line. It can only be distilled into a pure state through a process of subtraction, because God's original creation was already supernatural to begin with and continued to remain so after the Fall.^{[28](#)} Just as an abstract formal "blueprint" pervades an actual building without ever being seen as such, so the theological concept of nature pervades the concrete structure of the world without ever being tangible as such, even though, like the blueprint, its presence shines through the whole building.

Now common sense claims to know what nature is. But the more exactly it tries to grasp it, the more difficult—nay, impossible—it becomes to isolate it neatly from the other dimension: supernatural grace. But it is equally difficult to espy the negative effects on the realm of nature of the loss of grace. The questions, for example, of how far "ignorance and hardship belong to natural existence",^{[29](#)} how

much concupiscence, disease, death (and the forms that death takes) are the result of sin or are part of the definition of being human and animal; but also questions about marriage, community, the State, our relation to a God who might not have revealed himself in his personal, interior life, the necessity for prayer in a natural state (which many people deny, for good reasons), the eschatological fate of the soul, resurrection of the body, Last Judgment, eternal bliss: all such questions addressed to pure nature are simply unanswerable.

To be sure, there are any number of theologians who do not hesitate to come forth with a ready-made answer to all these questions. One should once more bear in mind, however, that it would only occur to theologians in their work as theologians to pose such a question. But as soon as they come up with something remotely pertinent to this question, they inevitably give us a “system of pure nature”, that is, merely a pale, phantasmagoric double image, a hollow phantom of the real, existing world order. The success with which this pale film was laid over the real order has only meant “the loss of feeling for the infinite qualitative difference between grace and nature”.³⁰

In other words, the content of the concept of a pure nature cannot be exactly specified. Based on the belief that it is possible to give a clear exposition of intrawordly structures in their *eidos*, at least up to a certain point, some people then think they have discovered *purely* natural and purely isolable relationships. Then they feel justified in continuing this construction and likewise in drawing conclusive boundary lines, even going so far as to specify the relationship of this hypothetical “being” to God and its ultimate fate! But it is obvious how questionable the results of this are. For where do we get the right to understand these intrawordly structures as if they were disengaged from transcendence? How can you drain marriage, for example, or the whole of morality of its *concrete* relation to God and to the Last Things? The only end we know in our *de facto* world is our supernatural one. So how can we so blithely maintain that the world possesses a self-sufficient, *definitive* ground of fulfillment apart from this end? Only God, God alone, can have the final word. The fact that grace is free in its relation to nature does not suffice for making pure nature so governing a concept.

The right approach for theological thinking will be different. It will move within the complex order of this world, which is the *only legitimate object* of theological thought. Living inside its vocation in grace, a grace that has *already* been poured out, theological thinking will step back reverently and acknowledge that this grace is totally undeserved and that the creature is wholly unworthy to receive it, that it is a servant who is, through no merit of its own, called to become a friend of the master.

While we do not need to describe it in great detail, this image of the servant who has been simultaneously clothed in the grace of friendship captures the contrast between nature and grace. Nature is to be sought in that *minimum* that must be present in every possible situation where God wants to reveal himself to a creature. And that minimum is expressed by the term *analogia entis*. If there is to be revelation, then it can only proceed from God to the creature—to a creature that precisely as a creature does *not* include revelation in its conceptual range. The “nature” that grace presupposes is createdness as such.

We shall call this concept of nature the *formal concept of nature*. This minimum is therefore the presupposition of all grace because its *necessity* must be prior to the *facticity* of any and all revelation. As revelation takes place, nature is set off from it as the antechamber that is not, of itself, the grace of participation. When the inconceivably free event of grace occurs, it becomes simultaneously clear how truly gratuitous this freest of all gifts really is and how much it *does not have to be*.

The necessity that seems to be presupposed for this free grace to operate is, however, not an absolute one, independent of God’s majestic decision. For even this necessity to have a nature as well as the freedom of grace both depend on the freedom of God’s decision as to whether there should be a world or not. That is for God to *decide*. But *if* he decides to create a world, then of course this decision can only take the form of the analogy of being, which is grounded in God’s very “essence” itself. Created being must be by definition created, dependent, relative, nondivine, but as something created it cannot be utterly dissimilar to its Creator. And if this creature is a spiritual and intellectual being, both its ontic as well as

its noetic nature must bear some relation to its Creator. In its thinking, however blinded and rebellious that thinking might be, it must be touched by God the Creator, for it has God's *cogito* as the form of its *cogito*. Otherwise it would not even be a creature.

Thus we can conclude that the philosophical "necessity" of a nature, upon which the theological "contingency" rests, is not a kind of foundation to which the latter could be reduced. Theology is not a "superstructure" built atop philosophy. Rather, the relativity of philosophical necessity becomes evident when it is set off (*dividitur*) by the contingent facticity of revelation.

Philosophy focuses its thinking on this real world, which as such is created for the sake of revelation. Thus the necessity of the God-creature relationship is supported and circumscribed by the contingent facticity of revelation, without thereby ever becoming identical with it. Philosophy and theology form such a symbiosis that we can fuse neither one of them into the other either by moving from below upward, as philosophy does, or from above downward, as theology does. And so it is impossible to attain either a "total philosophical metaphysics" or a "total theology". "There is no way for such a metaphysics to find 'a third way'. . . .³¹ Pure thinking will be driven to the dilemma of choosing between the 'twins' of necessity without reality or reality without necessity."³² These two movements point to each other and converge, but they never meet in a totally unifying embrace. This very fact is the lasting proof of the difference between them.

Based on what we have just said, one might be tempted to interpret the analogy of being and the formal concept of nature in a way that simplifies their complexity: by saying that "nature" simply denotes the moment of dissimilarity (that aspect of creation that makes it "not God"), while grace bespeaks the moment of similarity (of participation). But that would be a dangerous oversimplification, and indeed it would lead us right back to Baius. The creature is not dissimilar to God because of its nature as a creature. Rather it is similar to the God *who is* always ever dissimilar.

It is quite right to say, as Barth does, that being *God* and being *creature* [*Gott-sein* und *Geschöpfsein*] are utterly dissimilar, contrasting with each other in every way. And inasmuch as we focus

on this relationship in our formal concept of nature, our stress will be quite properly on the dissimilarity. But even here we are already talking about the contrast between *being* God and *being* a creature [Gottsein und Geschöpfsein], So we have already introduced some kind of similarity of the creature with the ever dissimilar God. This becomes clearer when we establish the possibility of distance between creature and God in the intra-trinitarian distance between Father and Son (in the unity of the Holy Spirit!).

Of course, for its part, grace certainly emphasizes the aspect of similarity, since by definition it gives a participation in the divine nature, but it does this precisely by allowing man to know the ever-greater and thus the ever-more-unknown God.³³ And it accomplishes this by operating concretely—in other words, not by rapturously tearing man away from this world and bringing him up to God but by having God descend to this world, not only in the creaturely form of “God’s servant” but even more in the “form of *sin*” (*forma peccati*)—which could not be more dissimilar to God.

Therefore, the theological analogy does not abolish the philosophical one, nor does it fulfill it in such a way that it would no longer be a truly philosophical analogy. Actually, the theological analogy sheds definitive light on the philosophical one by showing us what similarity can mean here (namely, participation and adoption) and how far dissimilarity can really go—all the way to God’s own abandonment of himself.

Yet we are quite right in saying that nature *emphasizes* the distance, while grace stresses the communion between the two. For nature, defined as creatureliness, “ensures” that grace is “only” grace and does not turn into nature, meaning a natural participation in God’s nature. It also “ensures” that the gospel of grace appear not only as *love* (which is what it is in God) but also as law and command, as reverence, *religio*, distance and fear of the Lord. Fear is not abolished, nor is distance eliminated, when grace is given to nature but shows up now in its authentic form in Gethsemane and on the Cross and is transfigured as a “holy fear of the Lord” lasting into eternity.

The theologian will not fail to point out the theological foundation of this distance entailed in the concept of formal nature. For all creation

is grounded in the Logos, more exactly, in Jesus Christ. And the possibility of creation being distant from God derives ultimately from the *divine* Son's readiness to empty himself in service and obedience to his Father. The relationship between necessity and contingency becomes evident when we realize that the distance of formal nature is an *authentic presupposition* for the descent of the Word of God into the flesh; but also that this same formal nature, on a *higher* plane, has for *its* presupposition the Son's willingness to make this descent into creation, just as the diver is connected to the diving board, whose purpose and teleology exist only so that the diver may leap from it.

The formal concept of nature, it is now clear, embodies the bare minimum of content: the abstract contrast to the analogy of being. In using it, the theologian cannot strip it of its ambiguity and philosophical and theological double-sidedness. This is the case all the more when we try to inject some content into this formal concept. In fact, the more we try to fill more and more elements from the concretely existing world (we do not know any other kind of world, after all) into this formal concept, the more we shall expropriate elements that have already been affected by the *de facto* ordering of nature toward its supernatural destiny: such as man's original state, his fall from grace, God's redemption and the awaited transformation of the universe at the end of time.

What the formal concept of nature tells us is that everything touched by grace retains its natural side: grace is always a grace in a nature and for a nature. It remains modal to nature and is never itself substantial. But while this is all true, so is the converse: grace so radically transforms, exults and irradiates nature with the divine reality that no aspect or corner of nature can escape its impact. Yes, even the most apparently god-forsaken realm—where sin took hold and reigned—was chosen as *the* site for God's revelation of grace in Christ!

This already means that nature *de facto* has only one, single, supernatural end. It means that not only its individual "acts" but the very seat and center of these acts—nature itself and its entelechy—must *de facto* be radically transformed, raised up and realigned. There is *in fact* no slice of "pure nature" in this world. Even though

the sinner may be denied the life of actual grace, his “nature” is still (precisely then!) no longer pure nature. A negative relationship to the God of grace is still a relationship, even a very real relationship, to him!

Grace is still grace when it is rejected and refused. Even in the state of sin it remains the goal, the “state” of elevation, in which the sinner finds himself directed together with all other creatures, for weal or woe. It remains as the struggle between offer and refusal. And it is still the case that God hears everything that man does as an *answer* to the Word he has spoken. Adam’s loss of the *possession* of grace does not mean that he has thereby lost the *order* of grace (as the supernatural vocation of nature to be redirected to the heights of God). The Fall does not mean that a pure nature endowed with purely natural capabilities now has stepped forth into the foreground at the first sin, to be restored to the supernatural order only later within the economy of salvation. And when would that have been? With Christ? With Moses? Or Abraham or Noah or the promise first made to Adam and Eve? And thus to all their children: Christian, Jews and pagans?

In solidarity with Adam and Eve, all human beings share our first parents’ hope and its fulfillment in Christ. All, in their own way, share humanity’s supernatural goal; hence all somehow share in the supernatural means to attain it. Through Christ, who died for us all, and through the Church his Bride, outside of which there is no salvation, all human beings somehow, either openly or hiddenly, partake in the grace of the divine-Christic-ecclesial order, whether they lived before or will have lived after him.

It only confuses things when we try to equate fallen human nature with some “pure nature” that stands outside the order of grace, quite apart from the fact that this hypothetical concept of pure nature cannot be given any content and thus is unsuited to serve as a model for a condition of nature that actually does obtain.^{[34](#)}

Certainly there is room in Catholic theology for several ways of understanding this *de facto* unity of the two orders of nature and grace and the ordination of the former to the one supernatural goal. The range of views stretch all the way from Ripalda to Billot: at one extreme is Ripalda’s version, according to which every act, no matter

how remote from or misdirected toward it is with respect to our supernatural goal, is borne up by grace (*entitative*). The middle ground is occupied by those systems (with varying emphases) in which a nature that functions at first purely naturally is “intercepted” at some point by grace and directed to its supernatural end. Finally there is the other extreme—and extreme it is, as it has hardly any adherents, or even could have, for that matter—which leaves room for a full-blown (if subordinate) finality of pure nature in the *de facto* world order (as in Billot).

In all these systems that have been developed since the Counter-Reformation, we notice a distinct tendency to protect the concept of nature from the danger of Protestant subversion. But the tendency goes so far that post-Tridentine Catholic theologians not only try to set off nature from sin and grace but also feel obliged to prove that the sphere of nature can be isolated and depicted *in fact*. This was probably the price that the Age of Reason had to pay to rationalism.³⁵ But there was too little thought given to the insight that the analogy implied in such a use of the concept of nature and the concomitant formal character of the theological concept of nature do not permit so simple a procedure.

The pure nature that theologians presumed had been set off against grace was really the concrete nature that is enmeshed in the order of grace, only raised to some cruder (or more subtle) level of abstraction. As a result, when they tried to put some content into their discussions and not speak merely formally, they were actually talking about the tension between creation and covenant that Karl Barth portrayed and that exists only within the concrete total order of grace. They were really discussing the old patristic and Scholastic tension of *natura* and *gratia*, which was always theologically sufficient to characterize creation’s distance from the gift of grace it received. Whoever wants more than this will end up empty-handed. And the older, transitional concept of nature (which, when we project back in time, we should not think of as our modern, abstract notion) had the advantage of pointing to the double-sided ambiguity of nature. The older concept at least knew that “nature” entailed an amphibole [ambiguity]: two possible meanings that can be *conceptually* depicted but never actually mastered or resolved.

This does not prevent us from being concerned with the phenomenology of nature or of human nature in particular, provided that we not forget that an unbridgeable chasm remains between the concrete nature of salvation history and the abstract concept of nature and that both concepts are to be seen according to their appropriate positions in the chain of being. The concrete concept is the essential and predominant one, while the abstract one, which cannot be fleshed out with any content, is a kind of “servant concept” to help protect the concept of grace and, in that function, has a legitimate place.³⁶

But it happens all too often that theologians have projected aspects of this concrete concept onto the abstract one without realizing it. Or they began to construct the concrete one according to the image formed by the abstract concept. This subtraction, as we mentioned earlier, cannot be conducted along the lines of a mathematical theorem or a scientific experiment. The attempts, for example, to analyze the act of faith psychologically in order neatly to separate out the part played by reason from the part played by grace—the portion allotted to grace and the portion where freedom enters in—have only led to deeper obfuscation. It is no different in the case of a “philosophy of religion” that tries to uncover the supernatural moment in the pagan’s nonecclesial, non-Christian knowledge of God. We also find it in ethics, when it wants to distinguish the natural and supernatural motivation of the moral deed, and in mystical theology, when it pretends to unravel the purely natural from the supernatural strands of the mystical phenomenon.

All that is possible for us to do here—in fact it is all we can do—is reverently and gropingly investigate the whole matter from the attitude and with the eyes of faith. Only this can keep us from posing questions and pursuing answers that are ultimately inappropriate in the study of grace. Because of the ambiguity, there will always be a certain *room for maneuver* in the realm of nature that we should not further circumscribe. Its lower limit will be the formal concept of nature. Nature is basically *creation* as such; or, in terms of the hearer of revelation (be that man or angel), nature is the conscious, free subject.

For man in particular, this reality of being a subject can be analyzed in terms of his body-soul unity, with all that each of these two terms implies, singly and when united in one subject. Using the analogy of the human person, we can then sketch a corresponding doctrine of the essence of subhuman natures and at least a schematic doctrine of a created “pure spirit”. In this doctrine, God will tower as the *principium et finis* (Denz. 1785) of the world. For created spirit, in order for it to be such, must necessarily be recognized as such. And thus we will be able to develop an ethics of created being as such (*religio*). This natural moral law will emerge from man’s dependence on the Creator, which is itself bound to his specifically human, physical, psychological, sexual and social nature.

The more our investigation moves from the abstract to the concrete and individual, the more distant from this abstract construction (the realm of “pure nature”) will the experimental material become. And the more this happens, it will become all the more obvious (which was not so obvious before) that all the fundamental concepts—“nature”, “spirit”, “subject”, “reason”, “freedom”, “religion”, “morality”, and so on—already stand within the concrete analogy. The more concrete our philosophy becomes, the less it will be pure philosophy.

The formal concept of nature gives us the bare minimum, but there is *no upper limit* to the *content* of the material concept. Philosophy basically is *open* when it moves upward. It demonstrates its essence as the thought of a creature, who of course cannot set prior limits to what God actually has said or could say to us. This is all the more true because the concrete object of philosophy is never a purely philosophical object but always transcends the boundaries of philosophy.

Of course, philosophy does have a *formal* object, that is, the nature of the creaturely world as such. But it has no purely isolable material object, because the actual world of creation actively participates *de facto* in the Word of revelation, either positively, in grace, or negatively, in sin. By nature man is a subject, because he is meant to hear this Word. But we must not forget that the grace of the Word gone out to all the world not only presupposes man as a subject but radically raises, deepens and fulfills him in the *summons*

of grace that enables us to become partners with God, exalting us as hearers of the Word.

Let us say once more: the distance between subject and subject is not created by grace. It is a distance that belongs to nature, but it has its deepest foundation in the intradivine distance between the Persons in the Trinity, which only becomes visible to us in grace. Only when grace is imparted to us is the distance between God and creature given the power to transform that distance into a genuine and fruitful conversation between God and faith. And if participation in this personal trinitarian life is the purpose for which the substrate of our creaturely, natural nature as subjects was established, then that goal is also what grounds and makes possible this natural substrate.

So we cannot speak in this context univocally but only dialectically: the stronger the union between God and man becomes, which the Word of God effects, the more clearly we see the difference between them, especially as it applies to the categories of subjectivity and personal character. Ultimately, according to Paul (1 Cor 2:9-16), it is in the impenetrable mystery of the Holy Spirit that we are given an ever-increasing share in God's nature as spirit the more we are truly identified with our own creaturely nature as spirit.

In present-day discussions of this question, three contributions deserve special mention. The first impetus for resolving this issue came from the philosophy of *Joseph Maréchal* and his numerous disciples in France and Germany.³⁷ The reason he became a founder of a whole school of thought was because he was the first to recognize (and demand) a positive relationship between Thomism and German Idealism.³⁸ But even more, he introduced the closed metaphysics of Kant (and, much more stealthily, of Fichte and Hegel) into the more yielding and flexible Thomistic edifice. But, in this attempt, he inevitably moved toward that systematic focal point that we have already seen in Schleiermacher and found once more in Barth.

Two characteristics typify Maréchal's approach: First, he fashions his vision of the finite spirit from the identity of the divine *intellectus archetypus*. For Marechal, the finite spirit in its inmost being is a

dynamism moving to the Absolute, to the immediate vision of God that transcends it. Second, by the very nature of his interests, he is divided from the outset between the areas of mysticism and metaphysics. An early work on the sensation of presence³⁹ provides the key to the unity he was always trying to give to his work as a whole but never managed to do. The feeling of presence, which includes an existential judgment, is that experience of reality from which all conceptual thinking derives. In the higher stages of mysticism it unfolds as an intuition of being that prolongs the initial movement of our intelligence even though it is inaccessible to the unaided efforts of that intelligence.⁴⁰

The “point of identity” where God is immediately present to the spirit, which is given only by grace and cannot be attained by nature, is the actual object of mysticism, but also of metaphysics. Why? Because it is the Why and the Wherefore, the origin and goal, of the whole structure of spirit even in its most concrete worldly activity.

Metaphysics is the science of the absolute, which as such can only be the existing absolute: God. But the formal-absolute of the Neo-Kantians emerges from within the concept itself and so must fall prey to empiricism. All abstraction proceeds from the absolute concrete, and no absolute can maintain itself apart from God.⁴¹ Thus an inductive, semi-empirical metaphysics that seriously purports to move from the sensible world to the spiritual world, and from there by logical deductions, is an intrinsic impossibility. “A metaphysics of this type imagines a pyramid whose base a geometrician thinks he can measure and whose angles he thinks he can construct without determining at the same time the position of the summit.”⁴²

But for Maréchal, we do not seize hold of the Absolute, it lays hold of us: “A metaphysics and a science of the absolute: it conveys with all immediacy the seizure of our intellect *by* the absolute, a seizure that is in no way a harsh yoke but an internal principle of life.”⁴³ Maréchal is so confident of the truth of this that, starting *from* this absolute point (of the vision of God, or mysticism), he undertakes to explain all spirit in terms of its orientation *toward* the ultimate end: “The absolute end of the intelligent subject enters, as a constitutive element, in all acts of judgment.”⁴⁴

The human spirit, then, must be construed outside the framework of abstraction, on the one hand (which must always proceed from an intuition), and outside intuition, on the other (which naturally is not something we can possess, otherwise we would relapse into ontologism). For the human spirit is that potentiality wherein reason and will form a deep-rooted unity. It is constructed for the sake of an intuition that cannot be reached on its own power. And it is so constructed that the spirit must strive for it with all of *nature*. And, as nature, it possesses a relative or inchoative intuition open to the transcendence of the absolute spirit.⁴⁵

Now Marechal, of course, never did manage to find the unifying point between mysticism and metaphysics. His work tended to split into two separate parts, all the more so as he labored to protect metaphysics from the threat of ontologism with cautionary rules and pauses in the argument to cover his rear flank. He kept having to “regress” to that Neo-Thomistic doctrine that says that the *desiderium naturale visionis Dei* in nature as such (*natura pura*) is a *desiderium inefficax et conditionale*, a mere *velleitas sei*, a view that hardly harmonizes very well with Marechal’s final dynamism.⁴⁶

The contradiction in the spirit seemed to him, then, to be something already avoided if the *possibility* of fulfillment (but in no way the actual fulfillment) corresponded to the striving of nature.⁴⁷ He relied on Aquinas here as well as on the whole Baroque Thomistic school. It seemed to him, with Thomas, that a certain grade of the vision of God (*aliquem modum videndi Deum*) was required by the structure of the human spirit for its goal, whereas it would have been impossible to probe from this structure (which remains infinitely open-ended to the realms above it) to discover how high God might be thinking of exalting his creature.⁴⁸

Although we see, here and in other places, how Marechal kept going back with such scrupulosity to the statements of the Scholastic tradition, we should not forget that a great *reversal of perspective* lies at the root of his thinking.⁴⁹ But, if the point from which Marechal basically *thinks back* to the point of mysticism, the Schleiermachian point of “resting in the Absolute” beyond all discursive potentialities of the intellect and will, if this point of convergence of mysticism and

metaphysics is “the true unifying point in the work of Marechal”,⁵⁰ then this unifying moment in his philosophizing is in truth a hidden theology. He is therefore a thinker who tried to probe in his philosophy the conditions for the possibility of the supernatural vision of God as the ultimate goal of man in his human nature. If this is so, then the question naturally arises whether or not the object of Maréchal’s investigations—human nature—is not already in a hidden way a “theological object”.⁵¹

At this point Marechal’s thought reached the limits of its possibility. His disciples remain within pure philosophy, since they follow him more in his capacity as a philosopher, especially as a philosopher of religion, than as one who researched the concrete experiences of the mystics. They think more or less clearly and consistently from the transcendental and Idealistic perspective, starting from the same principle as Thomas (*intelligibile in actu est intellectus in actu*), taking its nucleus and gradually unfolding its implications.

From that starting point, they can approach a philosophical actualism and, using Heidegger’s and Jaspers’ conceptual language, overcome existentialism.⁵² From the idea of a nature transcending itself in a “prior anticipation” (*Vorgriff*) of the Absolute, many thinkers go so far as to move from a pure philosophy to a vivid anticipation of theology. They get very close to a concept of the spirit that hears God’s “silence” “before” any revelation goes forth from God. And with that conviction, that is, from the sensate-intellective-spiritual structure of that silence, they can postulate God’s revelation (should it occur) in *history*.

One can see here, as with Bonhoeffer, a very far-reaching incursion of philosophy in the realm of theology. For revelation seems to occur in the already known framework of the “analogy of being”. And so Marechal’s theological a priori needs to be clarified much more explicitly than it has been so far.

We now reach the second phase of this recent history, when theology would take up the problems still unresolved in Marechal’s philosophy. This would require the historical and systematic inquiry of *Henri de Lubac*.⁵³ In *Surnaturel* (1946), he pointed out that the whole problem of man’s natural longing for the vision of God and of the nature presupposed by this longing finds its origins and

justification within the concrete concept of nature that was held by the Church Fathers and the medieval Scholastics. The whole discussion of the problem moved within the presupposition of revelation and grace. In other words, this was one more instance of *fides quaerens intellectum*. His historical conclusion was, therefore, that the shift of the theses fashioned by the Fathers and the Scholastic theologians to a hypothetical “pure nature” at the end of the sixteenth century resulted in a historical absurdity.

De Lubac thus was able to throw a powerful spotlight on the hidden theological a priori in Marechal’s thought: in creation as it actually exists concretely, the “point of identity” on which Marechal based his thought is not a *purely* philosophical one at all. It is actually a theological identity-point: namely, the one and only goal that God has set for human nature, the beatific vision. In the face of this irreducible uniqueness of our concrete goal—which is the only reason the work of creation was undertaken at all—it was otiose and pointless, says de Lubac, to ask about some other world order that might possibly have some other “purely natural” goal.

To think from the theological a priori means that we will make the self-communication of God—culminating in the pouring out of the inner life of Jesus Christ to us—the starting point of all our reflections. And we will abandon any attempt to work around or get behind this focal point. In one stroke, such forced and clumsy “solutions” as positing a nature that is certainly directed to the vision of God but that must be defined as a pure “velleity”, or an “ineffectual desire”, drop away entirely.

Of course, de Lubac conceded this point to Marechal: the spirit is characterized as *nature* by virtue of this dynamism, unless (which de Lubac also conceded) we do without the word “nature” altogether and recognize that man’s spirit is a paradoxical creation that straddles the threshold between natural and supernatural and belongs to both orders in the concrete creation we know.

But then, if this is so, are we not once more letting both orders collapse into one another in some chaotic mishmash, thereby going against the whole trend of Catholic theology to keep them distinct, especially after Vatican I kept them apart so precisely? No, says de Lubac. For although creation in its own way is completely

undeserved [*ungeschuldet*] and so is a grace, its elevation to being adopted by God is a second and loftier work that should not be explained in terms of the first level but from its own intrinsic character.⁵⁴ And this is the personal communication of God's trinitarian life and essence, which as such will always seem to every creature—however endowed and prepared it might be—to be completely free and undeserved.

The *certainty* of the natural striving for the goal of our life and the *gratuity* of grace do not rule each other out. The supernatural does not need to be defined in terms of the infrastructure *it* supports and without which that structure could not exist.

De Lubac's whole way of thinking involves an even more radical reversal of perspective than did Marechal's. He not only starts from perfect act to potency as the condition of act's possibility. He thinks from the real world of *de facto* history (and from the fact that the supernatural goal is pure grace) to nature and its qualities:

The goal is what determines in all things the ontological ground for the properties of an entity. . . . The major objection is based on an ingrained habit of proceeding from the creature (it does not matter whether that creature is understood as nature or as a person who can raise a rightful claim) in order to think toward the goal that is either hidden or denied (to the creature). But that is the order of realization, and, if we keep that in mind, then we will not lose sight of the intentional order that moves *from the goal to nature*.⁵⁵

To be sure, if one thinks of the usual habits of thought in Catholic philosophy and theology, this entails "a fundamental shift in posing the problem".⁵⁶

We can make two observations about de Lubac's overall conception. First, it is a daring, almost aristocratic line of thought according to which what is most important to God always remains most important in actuality: de Lubac moves from above downward and does not judge the worth of heavenly realities by their sheer distance to us below but on their own terms. His is a thought that does not fear to make what has been revealed a function of the mysterious and esoteric. This is a style of thought that imitates the radicality of the saints, to whom everything seems insipid and meaningless that does not resonate with the name of Jesus Christ and is not brought before his light. De Lubac's is a thought, finally,

that unites the highest confidence with the greatest fear of the Lord, because he knows that the deepest aspirations buried in the heart of nature are nothing but the obedience to a grace that has already gone forth.

Secondly, we should not fail to notice that we have traced the same movement from Marechal to de Lubac that has led us from Schleiermacher to Karl Barth: that is, from philosophical and natural thinking to theological and historical thought. In other words, we have moved from a “natural desire” to that answer to grace that must bear the name of grace. At this point a dialogue on the theme of nature and grace is feasible without either side of the dialogue having to give up its own most deeply held position.

The question is simply whether de Lubac’s theory, certainly Catholic in its basic intention, can hold up when all its implications are thought through to their logical conclusion. And so we see Catholic theology necessarily moving toward a reflection on de Lubac’s theses. While most Catholic theologians who cavilled at de Lubac’s intentions misconstrued and distorted his starting point, *Karl Rahner* it seems was the only one to subject his thought to a competent, careful, informed critique.⁵⁷

Rahner begins by agreeing with most of de Lubac’s basic positions. Yes, we must reject the older “extrinsicism” that made grace seem like some accidental appendage of a nature already well constituted in itself. Rejected too as being religiously dangerous was the presupposition that one could in the concrete order neatly divide the realm of nature from that of grace. Rahner agreed that in the concrete spirit’s experience of itself, we cannot ignore the supernatural existential, whether that spirit is in the state of grace or not.⁵⁸

And so de Lubac is right when he sees the dynamism of the spirit not merely as a “velleity”, because otherwise nature would once more have the potential of closing in on itself. And finally it is correct to say that grace should be understood in terms of itself, that is, as the personal self-communication of the trinitarian being and not as that which is merely “not-nature”.

But Rahner is anxious to avoid the ultimate conclusions that de Lubac draws from these premises. He asks: “Is man’s inner

orientation to grace so constitutive of his 'nature' that the latter (as pure nature) cannot be conceived apart from grace, and thus that the concept of pure nature is unusable? . . . Can grace then still be seen as undeserved?" If we make this connection between a nature fulfilled only by grace and grace itself, then Rahner feels we have leveled the two orders, somehow making grace a requirement of nature. Why? Because we have fused the gratuity of creation and the gratuitous grace of God's self-revelation of the divine intimacy, which is still undeserved even according to the presuppositions of creation.

In Rahner's opinion, God cannot place an unconditional dynamism in nature and then leave it unfulfilled.⁵⁹ And so he proposes that we distinguish a twofold dynamism in our nature—an abstract one that we never see, but a necessary one nonetheless. The first makes our spirit-nature what it is; but we cannot simply equate it with the second dynamism that "we experience in the adventure of our concrete spiritual existence within the one real order."

Rahner thus believes that we must try out a difficult experiment in conceptual distinctions in order to preserve the concept of grace in all its purity. Yes, the supernatural existential openness to grace (which is the first and last, the truest meaning of all God's plans for us) is man's *most intimate and unique* feature; it is the center and root of all that he is. But if we are to maintain the concept of nature as a counterpoint to the concept of grace, we must disregard this center. Nature in the theological sense is a *residual concept*: it is what remains "when we remove the center from the complex of man's concrete being". What is left over would then be "pure nature"—which of course cannot in any way be made evident. It is only something we postulate, or regard as meaningful, on the assumption that God could deny to this "nature" the supernatural.

Here a few critical comments on Rahner's position come to mind. Of course, the concept of pure nature as a "residual concept" is both possible and even unavoidable in theology if we want to maintain a real correlative counterpoint to grace and the order of grace. We ourselves have attempted the same thing earlier by fashioning a "formal concept of nature" in the same sense by a kind of subtraction process. But the very presuppositions that de Lubac offers and

Rahner accepts show us the limits of this operation. Is it both possible and meaningful to say at the same time that the meaning of all of creation finally rests on the fact that God wills to give his grace (and to interpret the deepest essence of man from this meaning)⁶⁰—and yet in all seriousness to try to abstract from this ultimate meaning? How does one go about “abstracting the deepest core of things”? And how—this is the second objection—are we not going to end up simply equating the invisible residual product with man’s spirit-nature?

Are we not really trying to unite the incompatible? That is, can we really reconcile Marechal’s philosophy with de Lubac’s theology? For it seems we have not considered well enough that Marechal’s apparently philosophical “dynamism” really has a theological base. It will hardly do to want to define the “spirit-nature of man” as a Maréchal’s dynamism, on the one hand, and, on the other, to dismiss the thought of the *desiderium conditionatum* with de Lubac as a half-measure. For supposedly he wants to undercut Marechal’s views about what pure nature finally results in. For de Lubac, nothing else should remain but the biblical distinction of “creation and covenant” and the patristic distinction of the creaturely *imago* and the grace-given *similitudo*, so that we strictly maintain the underivability of the supernatural from nature. For grace can explain itself only on its own terms.

Rahner quite rightly insists that we preserve the relative significance and meaning of nature as such, but this does not have to be the absolute significance of “pure nature”. We must be content with recognizing the *real* as given, especially when this issue is the world order as a whole. Statements about what is not real, about merely possible worlds, may be tolerated, at most, at the frontiers of theological thought, but only if they serve to outline more clearly certain aspects of the one and only reality we have.

The relative significance of nature is quite sufficiently protected if it is looked upon as a particular and relatively self-subsistent sphere of meaning within the whole of creation. Examples of this would be the sphere of culture, interpersonal relationships of I-Thou and man-woman. This is a realm of provisional meaning that is not directly derivable from grace but rather serves as a presupposition for grace.

We need not assert categorically that the significance of this sphere is so great and so absolute that it suffices even *for God* that it be called into existence for itself.

Rahner felt that he had to complement the concept of “gratuity from above” (which we have called “aristocratic”) with the Scholastic notion of “gratuity from below” to undergird the former with the latter. And this is certain: from the standpoint of man, who receives grace as a totally gratuitous gift from God, any talk about its gratuity will necessarily and immediately entail speaking about how “it could have turned out otherwise”. This is the way a servant talks who only becomes aware of his status as a servant when he has just been elevated to the status of a friend. This is precisely the moment when the inexorable force of love lets him be taken up in rapture. And when this happens, the thought naturally strikes the servant about the “last place” that should rightly be his. But now friendship is offered to him, virtually teeming over as free “grace”—as undeserved as creation itself!

So Rahner is quite right not simply to drop the formal concept of pure nature *when looked at from the point of view of a “creaturely” theology*. But what happens when we look at it from God’s point of view? “Pure nature” hardly keeps the same meaning in this context. From all eternity God has willed one and only one thing: to open up his love to the human race. For that he created the world. Thus from God’s standpoint it is an utterly idle question whether there might have been a world even without this grace. And what has no weight in God’s eyes should carry no weight with us either, especially considering our humble estate.

But of course, inasmuch as we poor mortals cannot pursue a purely divine theology but must seek to clothe even the revelations of grace in appropriate human expression, we will in fact continue to be caught up in that tension that Przywara was referring to when he said in his *Analogia ends*: “ ‘Pure thinking’ is always driven between the twin horns of a ‘necessity without reality’ and a ‘reality without necessity’ ”.⁶¹ That is, between a pure nature that does not exist as such and yet necessarily provides the basis for the freedom of actual grace and the *de facto* supernatural order of the world that is the

only one we have—even though it has no necessity. And it is not necessary in both senses of the word: creation is gratuitous and so is grace.

Obviously we are at one of the outer reaches of human thought. Even confessional differences pale, as it were, before this innate incapacity for speaking adequately. Here is where the differences between Barth and Brunner must be resolved,⁶² where the Catholic-Protestant differences in this question are by and large balanced out and offset each other. If this question is to have any measurable meaning at all, it must boil down to this: How much of the “capacity” for God in the one, concrete human nature should we ascribe to “nature” and how much to “grace”?

The philosopher, even the Christian philosopher, will always have the tendency to extend the capacity of nature all the way to a vision of God. Theology, on the other hand, will follow the opposite inclination and see in the striving of nature the latent presupposition of grace, limiting the part played by nature to a passively understood *potentia oboedientialis*. But because the theological a priori in nature can never be neatly bracketed out, the battle can never be settled one way or the other. We are stuck with the tension that comes from asserting that nature has on its own no access to the world of grace, even though it has finally been created only because of grace and for grace and cannot be understood apart from grace.

Barth himself never did get around this paradox. Nor could he. Indeed he let it stand out sharply in his work. On the one hand, he locked nature up in itself, to the point where it becomes impossible to derive a truly transcendent concept from it. On the other hand, he opened up nature to grace, to the point where he almost deduced our natural capacities from the event of revelation and the act of faith.⁶³

Barth mitigated each tendency by the other and brought them to a center. So Barth did not ascribe the internalized resistance and closedness of nature to nature as such but to its contingent sinful condition (without, by the way, carrying this line of thought to the end with full consistency). Neither did he go so far as to deduce a natural capacity from revelation. Rather he tried to provide a

phenomenology of “concrete” nature in the light of revelation. Even Barth could not do without philosophy.

The important thing is that at this point even the polemic against natural theology and the analogy of being is overtaken and becomes superfluous. If both sides agree that the order of grace takes absolute priority over the order of nature in the order of intention (in *ordine intentionis*) and the created order takes relative priority over the order of grace in the order of executing the divine plan (in *ordine executionis*), then we are permitted—even obligated—to look at the order of nature from Adam to Christ and from created reason to covenant faith, *within* the prevailing order of revelation and faith.

This is true and must be said, even if the highest and noblest capability of human reason is to perceive God’s Word and even if created nature is anything but “pure nature”. Now Barth spoke eagerly and in detail about the interplay between natural and divine freedom. But the noetic side of the problem: that is, the interplay of natural knowledge (whose realm can never really be defined) and supernatural faith, he kept in the dark.

4. Nature in the Decrees of Vatican I

It seems that everything we have said so far will once more, however, be called into question if we confront the apparently so simple and direct words of the decree of the First Vatican Council: “Holy Mother Church holds and teaches that God, the origin and end of all things, can be known with certainty by the *natural* light of human reason from the things that he has made.”⁶⁴ Later it asserts:

Furthermore, the perpetual universal belief of the Catholic Church has held and now holds that there are two orders of knowledge, distinct not only in origin but also in object. They are distinct in origin because in one, we know by means of *natural* reason; in the other, by faith. And they are distinct in object, because beyond what *natural* reason can attain we have proposed to us as objects to be believed mysteries that are hidden in God and that, unless divinely revealed, can never be known.⁶⁵

Proceeding from the investigations we have just completed of the analogical use of the concept of nature and of the formal role played by the theological concept of nature, the question obviously presses upon us with a certain urgency: What is meant in these texts by

naturale or *natura*? Does the statement here pertain to “philosophical” nature as a counterpoint to the revelation of the *Word* but not to the whole supernatural order outright, or is it referring to the whole supernatural order that is left over as an (unperceivable) “residual concept” after the process of subtraction has been completed?

This is not an easy question to answer; in fact it will yield no univocally clear answer. Conciliar texts that address certain errors are shaped by the presuppositions and categories that the texts share in common with their opponents. Now the views that Vatican I opposed were those of the theological rationalism of Hermes and Günther, the fideism of Bautain and the traditionalism of de Bonald.⁶⁶

Now none of these positions was concerned with the question of the concept of nature as such, so that this question never came up in the Council’s deliberations. On the contrary, it was the common presupposition of both the Council Fathers as well as the theologians they were opposing that the “fixed realm” of nature can be—and indeed is—adequately circumscribed and need not itself be made problematic when doing theological research.

Now regarding this fixed field that both presupposed, many statements were made back and forth, *but these were all based on a commonly shared epistemology*. Rationalists went overboard, traditionalists were minimalist, while Vatican I struck a moderate balance. But the ontological range that lay hidden in the concept of nature was never thematized, although one could not help traversing this range in fact, *materialiter*. At least that will be the burden of this section to show, however sketchily.

Fideists and traditionalists had predominantly argued from the concrete *condition* of human nature: fallen and crippled in its power and intellectual range. Against this concrete argumentation, the Council expressly refused to counter with a statement about concrete nature. Rather, its focus was on the *natura absolute sumpta*, that is, on nature as such, prescinding from all its concrete states: *status naturae purae, elevatae, lapsae, reparatae*; on nature, in other words, as manifested in its essence and proper material domain [*Sachbezirk*].

On one side, this domain was to be distinguished from the other domain of grace, in which nothing was said about the type, depth and duration of the connection between the two. On the other side, it was believed that this domain could still be found, in its essential structure, in all the concrete circumstances of nature. And finally, it was assumed that this domain possessed this crucial potentiality: it was able to touch the Absolute: God as the origin and end of created things.

That and nothing else was the purpose of the decree. The Council did not touch upon the question of whether nature *in concreto* was ever raised to another state, the supernatural one, or whether there is within fallen nature an essential expression of nature that occurs without any relationship to supernatural grace, or whether *de facto*, if not necessarily *de jure*, a moment of supernatural grace is not at work either internally or externally in all knowledge of God by the human race:

The Council teaches the possibility but not the fact of a supernatural knowledge of God.^{[67](#)}

The issue at stake and what the statement is saying directly concerns the faculty of reason: it says that the objective revelation of God to creatures is suited to the constitution of human reason. Human creatures possess the means to recognize God based on this revelation.^{[68](#)}

In order to keep itself outside of every concrete, historical way of looking at things, the Council distanced itself with great care from every statement that could be applied, not to man in general, but to some actual human being in a specific state, whether that state be real or hypothetical.^{[69](#)}

Many suggestions for improving the decree pointed to just such a concrete assertion. So runs the tenth suggestion, that along with the general possibility of knowing God, the concrete impossibility of this knowledge also be expressed.^{[70](#)} But the fifty-first suggestion wanted to complete the statement with the opposite note: "Whoever denies that human reason *as it now is* can know God from the things he had made by its own rational light, let him be anathema."^{[71](#)}

To many of the Council Fathers, this abstract and absolute way of looking at things seemed so odd that they could not get used to the idea. They would have preferred to see it verified in the concrete

order and held out for a statement corresponding to revelation about man as he actually exists. New objections were raised to the schema.⁷² But in his declaration, Gasser had recourse to the old statements: “It seems to me that the honored Father who has raised this objection has confused two things that should not be confused: the *principia rationis* and the *exercitium rationis*. We are speaking here only of the principle of reason and assert that God can be known with certainty through these principles, however the case may be in the *de facto* exercise of that faculty.”⁷³

At this point he moved on past Plato and quoted passages from Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics* that irrefutably prove to every unprejudiced reader that its author, independent of every revelation of the Word, attained a true knowledge of God as the origin and goal of the world. In Gasser’s assertion, there is no overstepping of boundaries in relation to the previous statement, which spoke only of absolute human nature, but rather a necessary completion of it. The absolute statement cannot be so abstract that it is not applicable in some way to concrete human nature. Otherwise it would no longer be absolute.

But the Council’s application of its statements to concrete human nature were made with such reserve, caution and almost anxiety that one will find rather too little here in this regard than too much. For it is neither stated, in respect to this concrete application, that people actually have found God in nature *de facto* without any supernatural grace (that is a question of fact and does not belong at all to the theme of the Constitution) nor is even the opinion of moderate traditionalists excluded according to which a genuine *de facto* finding of God never occurs outside the context of a teaching that derives from the aboriginal revelation (of the Word). Nor finally did the Council ever declare what number of human beings actually attained a true knowledge of God outside the revelation of God’s Word in the Old and New Covenants.

But from this it only goes to prove that the Council never said anything against the analogy inherent in the concept of nature. On the contrary, the Council assumed as a matter of course that its assertions moved within this analogy, whose boundaries it marked out only negatively: with the abstract theological “residual” concept of

natura absoluta, which is distilled only by bracketing out all concrete conditions and circumstances.

It should be explicitly noted that the Council exercised the caution of not speaking of *pure* nature, and thus it did not in the least broach the question of its possible realization. Nor did it take up the issue of the concrete philosophical concept of nature. Here is the only place where the abstract concept could be verified. But the Council refused to treat the utterly transformed conditions that obtain in nature because of its actual location in the supernatural realm—either positively or negatively.

The Council's reserve on this point reaches almost dialectical proportions: on the one hand, it does not want to drop the *certo* [with firm certitude] of *the possibility* of knowing God (*cognoscere posse*) in spite of all objections against it. And so the Council maintains the “physical possibility” of the understanding to know God with certainty. On the other hand, however, it insists on the moral *necessity* of revelation so that human beings can attain to a knowledge of God in the fallen state *expedite, firma certitudine et nullo admixto errore* [directly, with firm certainty and without any admixture of error].⁷⁴ The *certo* that stands over against the *firma certitudine* belongs to the side of the *posse* and the *de jure*, while the *firma certitudine* that stands over against the *posse* belongs to the side of the actual *cognoscere* and of the *de facto*—based on revelation.⁷⁵

Just as clearly as the Council decided the *de jure* question, they just as clearly left the *de facto* question open. Nothing prevents the theologian from maintaining—not only for his own reasons but also according to Vatican I—that all natural knowledge of God occurs *de facto* within the positive and negative conditions of the supernatural order. Thomas Aquinas was of the opinion that in corresponding to the fact that man possesses only one single supernatural goal, every human being who has reached the age of reason must make a choice either for or against the God of grace.⁷⁶

And so man's spiritual and intellectual life, as well as his every act of knowing God (which always includes within itself a moment of decision), will be embedded within a supernatural reality. The Council only decided this issue: that *within* this concrete supernatural context, exaltation and transformation, human nature is not

destroyed or turned into its opposite. On the contrary, the natural capacity of a human being to know God continues to function.

Michael Schmaus has explained this in his *Dogmatik* in the most illuminating way, which we will cite in full, because of the richness of his explanation:

The Vatican Council asserts the possibility but not the factual actuality of a natural knowledge of God. Human reason possesses, without the additional infusion of grace by God to take it beyond its own powers, the ability of finding ways that lead to God. Human nature is thus capable in each of its conditions within salvation history—and thus even after the Fall—of finding valid reasons for the existence of God from contemplating creation in itself. . . . The Vatican Council says nothing about how real human beings, who live in the current order of salvation history and live out their lives in the here and now, come to be convinced of God's existence *de facto*. Wherefore, those theologians do not contradict the teaching of the Church who assume that the living "I" (in contrast to the general and undefined "one" or "they") usually comes to be convinced of the existence of God, not from the mere way of knowledge, but from within the living religious community, within a living stream of tradition, by way of being taught and raised (thus receiving external influences) and receiving grace (moving him internally). . . . Even if an actual human being should reach a conviction that God exists exclusively from the way of natural knowledge, the Vatican Council's definition still keeps its meaning. . . . Man is not moved like some piece of wood or stone. Rather, impelled by grace, he places himself and his knowing powers in a movement toward God. He is able to know God with the capacities that have continued to remain in him. But the act of knowing is sparked by God's gracious working within him. To judge rightly the factual question (the *quaestio facti*), one must also consider that there is never an utterly graceless condition in human history. God did not expel the first two humans from paradise without promising the Redeemer. God's words of promise, however, are not empty but are filled with power and thus are efficacious words. Our first parents, therefore, were not expelled without any grace or directed to seek God with their natural powers exclusively, without the aid of grace.

When raising the question of whether God exists, we cannot shut out the whole range of God's influence for human life, for man's interest in the question is pitched at the highest level. Thus to answer this question, it is not merely our power of knowing that comes into play but also that of our will and feeling; they too have an essential role. . . . So if the issue is one of not merely conceptual knowledge but an effective and living (Newman would say: a real) knowledge,. . . then specific attitudes of the soul are required too. The Church Fathers and the medieval theologians have always seen these as the indispensable presuppositions for a true knowledge of God. The source from God is that of love. . . . But only love can know love. Therefore, whoever does not have love does not know God. Hate blinds. But everyone who loves is born of God and knows God (1 Jn 4:7).

It is no objection against the Vatican Council's decision if natural reason has never found the way to the living God with certainty outside the sphere of the Bible, or even if we deny that God can naturally be known by those who are not illumined by the light of supernatural revelation. For the potentialities of the natural order here below will be better and more easily known when they have been raised to a higher, supernatural

level than if they had remained on the level of the order here below. So it is once more true: the spiritual person, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, judges everything but is not himself judged. He even judges the potentialities inherent in natural reason that remain hidden to itself.⁷⁷

Thus it becomes clear once more that Vatican I has in no way anticipated in its decisions the whole complex of questions we have described as the structure of Karl Barth's thought: thinking from the most concrete reality of being and history in order *from this perspective* to go on to describe the conditions for their possibility. It is really not possible to construct any genuine contradiction between Barth's statements in his anthropology about the capacity of human nature to know God within the concrete order of revelation (in *all* its conditions) and the statements of Vatican I. And if Barth explicitly maintains in each step of his thought the existence of the supernatural matrix encompassing everything, while Vatican I—concerned to refute a specific distorted doctrine—stresses a certain *individual* truth, that does not mean the contrast between the two is irreconcilable.

We will see in the next chapter that the radical christocentric vision that serves as the foundation for Barth's *Church Dogmatics* is a completely open possibility for Catholic dogmatics too. But before reaching that point, we must first add three points for a better and more precise interpretation of Vatican I: (1) an explanation of what "natural revelation" means; (2) a delimiting of what reason can know of God; and finally (3) a determining of what kind of power to know God remains after sin.

1. *Natural Revelation*: Even God's "revelation in creation", as the phrase already says and as the scriptural texts referring to it attest, should be interpreted as a revelation—that is, as a free *act* of God. In order to discuss the issue of man's ability to grasp this revelation, this revelation is not at all named or described as such. The focus rather is on the subjective, creaturely presupposition for perceiving it. This revelation is "natural" inasmuch as it occurs through the medium of created nature. But as far as what concerns its object—God and the act of his revelation itself—it is anything but natural,

because God is exalted over the essence of every creature; that is, he is super-natural.

The passage from Paul (Rom 1:20) cited by the Council frequently speaks in this context—from which it cannot be disengaged—of an act of revelation.⁷⁸ The assumption of a subjective a priori for this revelation of God, that could have no other objective content than pure created nature,⁷⁹ would be sheer Kantian transcendentalism: reason would then have the potential in itself to read more out of or into the object than actually lies within it.⁸⁰

Certainly it was not part of the intention of the Council to thematize this side of the problem. But the *Acta* speak nonetheless of an act of revelation by God.⁸¹ Catholic dogmatics recognizes this. It knows that the will of God to reveal himself, his divine essence, “his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:20) in creation is materially identical with the act of creation but is to be distinguished from its mere end result: created nature.

“To reveal” certainly means nothing other than to do it in created nature itself, which should be like an outer reflection of the hidden glory of God. But it must do so by opening up space for God’s divine nature and giving the creature a share in that life. If one inserts this thought into the christological bracket—that is, if one keeps in mind that the meaning and movement of God’s revelation in creation is his will finally to reveal himself in the Incarnation of Christ—then this first “natural” revelation (which, as it were, opens up the antechamber) will seem to be like a preparation, foundation and onset of God’s intimate revelation of his Word opening up the deepest regions of his being. And accordingly, the capacity inherent in the human being to touch God as his Alpha and Omega will seem to be the preparation, foundation and onset of a higher capacity given to him in grace also to grasp God through faith in his personal Word.

Because this first gift—which is completely free and “personal” in its origin as an *act*—is accessible in its final outcome only in created nature, God’s personal self-disclosure as Creator is neither “reified” nor even obscured. Indeed creation reveals the Creator “naturally” and “necessarily” inasmuch as it *is* nature. As something created it cannot help praising the Creator. But it does so by pointing in all its

aspects, values and deficiencies to God as the free “spiritual” Creator.

Because nature in its ontological structure “continually” points to the Creator, this reveals the “continuity” of the Creator’s will and thus also of God’s self-revelation. But this does not rob creation of the character of freedom and—as *creatio continua*—of ever-new actuality. And this holds true not only of creatures as objects of human knowledge but even more so for the created spirit as subject, which is capable of reflection on its own being as well as on those of other creatures.

The openness of the horizon of knowledge all the way to knowledge of the Creator—for this alone grounds spirit and knowledge—opens up to the created spirit a way through nature to the Creator, but without thereby in any way surrendering God to the willfulness of the creature. For it is God himself who keeps this path open for us in his revelation, inviting the creature in its nature to follow this way. Thus we may say that the “inferential” ascent of thought to the Creator is always borne by the Creator’s prior decision to reveal himself in this nature itself. Even the natural *cogito* (“I think”) has a *cogitor* (“I am being thought”) as its presupposition.

At this point we can speak of an *analogia fidei* provided we are especially careful in our formulation and rely on a more inclusive text from Vatican I. To be sure, we will not understand by this term what Barth means. The Council introduced the concept of faith in this way:

Because man depends entirely on God as his Creator and Lord and because created reason is wholly subordinate to uncreated Truth, we are obliged to render by faith a full submission of intellect and will to God when he makes a revelation.^{[82](#)}

The human spirit, therefore, is by nature already so utterly beholden and submissive to its Creator and Lord that we must already speak of its foundational act in the sphere of nature and even more in that of revelation. The human spirit can be nothing other than a kind of “faith”.

Even at this point, knowledge in its ultimate identity is no mere world-immanent and exclusively theoretical happening that could be disengaged from the commitment of the will and the whole person. Even here—that is, in the natural foundations of the created spirit—

the matter at hand can be nothing other than the total submission to the Creator and Lord that precedes everything else. (This does not in any way, of course, call into question the intellectual character of this act or the clear evidence it perceives.)

Once more: this foundational act of the human spirit need not ever be abstracted from the *de facto* supernatural world order or disengaged from the grace that has gone out from God as a consequence of his revelation of the Logos. But every time we use faith in its specific (supernatural, Christian) meaning, human reason is addressed and challenged to its very roots. But nothing unnatural is required of it. On the contrary, grace calls on reason to fulfill the most natural aspects of its identity.

Thus it becomes quite possible to see, first, that the most basic act of nature and the most basic act of grace operate in a harmony or analogy but, second, that a way from nature to grace has been opened up. All the way from a rooted acknowledgment of God by reason (undertaken with grace)⁸³ to the full supernatural and justifying faith in his word of revelation, there can be many levels, phases, foreshadowings and starting points. In this sense, we must maintain the priority of reason vis-à-vis faith.⁸⁴ And therefore we may say that the circle between revelation and faith is not closed in the way Barth means it but is an open one, offering us access to God.

2. Reason's Limitations: If in the remarks just made we had to stress the freedom and *actuating* supernatural character of God's self-revelation, then in this second point, where we must define the extent of the natural spontaneity of reason, we will need to stress the specific sphere [*Begrenztheit*] of this revelation in relation to its *terminus*: the created world.

It will be important for us to recall to our minds with special vigor at this point the ambiguity of the concept of nature and the impossibility of making an exact and exhaustive statement on its semantic range. Concrete nature, embedded in grace and, even much more so, caught in the bonds of sin, does not get us very far. There is nothing to say about the contents of a "pure nature". All that leaves us is the possibility of speaking *dialectically* about an equally dialectical "absolute nature", as Vatican I had in mind.

Such a statement will be, as dialectics implies, two-sided: In the text of the Constitution, the object that is attainable by natural reason is God, the principle and end of all things (Denz. 1785). And in the canon attached to it, that object is the one and true God, our Creator and Lord (Denz. 1806). The attribute of God in the canon can be found word for word, or virtually so, in the book of Wisdom (13:1ff.).

Therefore they have not been introduced into the canon to define what reason can know of God. . . . But one thing only is defined: that the *true* God can be known with certainty from the light of reason, that in this light we are capable of making a *true representation* of him. . . . What has *not* been defined as an article of faith is that natural reason suffices to know with full certainty: (1) the unity of God; (2) the true nature of God; (3) the mystery of creation in its true sense, that is: *ex nihilo*.⁸⁵

Therefore, the main content remains the *principium et finis* of the text: the revelation of God, or the sphere of the absolute in general, as the *boundary* of world-being, from which and toward which this world-being seems possible and real. We will have to admit that *Gottlieb Sohngen* is right, provided that henceforth God's revelation in creatures will be seen no longer only as origin but also as end:

God's revelation in nature is an act of communication, for he imparts a subsistent realm of being. Indeed this realm is in its deepest roots dependent on God, because God created and maintains it. Nonetheless the realm of nature stands and moves as such on its own or in its bestowed being and essence. In the natural knowledge of God from his effects, therefore, man is directed to himself, to his human nature and to the whole realm of nature and being in which he stands. . . . The metaphysical analogy of being. . . is therefore actually an analogy *of being* (in contrast to the revelation of God's Word, where the *operatio* is foreordained). It is, as it were, *the being of nature as it is spoken by man to God*.⁸⁶ Its greatness, however, also conceals its own great deficiency. We prefer to say: the Creator is reflected in the effects and works of nature the way an artist is in his handiwork.

That says too little and too much! Too little, because God created nature according to its own entire Being. And he sustains and moves it from within its most interior moments, although precisely in the sense that he set nature in its own being and activity and sustains it in the same way. A human artist, on the contrary, is always active vis-à-vis the Creator only as one who creates in imitation.

Yet the metaphor also says too much. For the human work of art remains within the realm of human nature and activity. Man shares himself here with his fellow human beings in the realm of being and action they all share. Therefore the human artist imparts himself in his work of art; in it he somehow gives form to his inner life. And the human receiver somehow has the ability subsequently to experience this human inner life.

Is that the way it is with the “divine” work of art that is nature? Precisely not. God’s revelation in nature is not a communication of himself. . . . He imparts to that nature, not his inner life, but, as it were, merely his external life. . . . According to the metaphysical concept of Thomas Aquinas, God is not the *subjectum* of metaphysics (as he is, however, of theology) but is only the *objectum* or *praedicatum* wherein we must understand the difference between subject and object as the ancients did. The *subjectum* of metaphysical statements is the *ens commune*. And because metaphysics as a science searches after the causes, so God will appear, in its eyes, as the cause of all that is.⁸⁷

If we glance back from this second finding to the first, then we will want to guard ourselves from understanding the analogy of faith as described above in the sense, for example, that man possesses from nature a “general” concept of God’s ability to reveal himself to which his revelation of the Word would arrive on the stage of history as a special—if quite remarkable—case. Thus we also do not want to claim that a *revelatio specialis* must be added to a *revelatio in genere* that must still be inserted into the laws known generally by the first revelation. If we take this to its logical conclusion, then clearly dogmatics would turn into a special case of apologetics.

It would be much more true to say that, if God’s revelation of himself in his effects and works proceeds from a supernatural will and act implicit in this revelation, and if spiritual nature is already bound to “the perfect submission to divine truth” that moves outward from this act, then this revelation in works, in its ultimate, decisive intention, is still the beginning and outbreak of God’s supernatural revelation in his Word in which that divine act now emerges into view. And then human nature is challenged to respond by personally submitting in faith and is able to do so with God’s grace. So Sohngen is right once more:

Apologetics cannot treat of the fact of revelation without at least touching on the concept of revelation from the outside and in general. Therefore, it will not try to construct this concept from the ideas of reason or by looking at essences. Rather, it will hold fast to the historically efficacious claim of Christianity to be divine revelation. It will seek to highlight the concept of revelation and the Church from the statements of the Old and New Testament books of revelation and from the Catholic Church’s statements about her identity, in order then to make revelation and Church evident in their external credibility. To that extent, apologetics must be called a theological science, even as fundamental theology. It is a science that is subordinate to authentic dogmatic theology, is directed to it and in the last analysis is meaningful only from dogmatic theology’s perspective.⁸⁸

This gives us a chance to throw new light on the famous passage from Romans that Vatican I cited in its Declaration. It is undeniable that in this context Paul is referring to, summoning and claiming man's natural faculty and in no way the purely supernatural faith. But, on the other hand, this context is even more unambiguously a more-than-natural one: in many respects it is supernatural. Indeed, the passage is about "the revelation of God's wrath"—the revelation of a *judgment* that is completely coordinated to supernatural grace. And this judgment as rendered says that the pagans indeed knew God but did not acknowledge him. The punishment that overtook them is the same—supernatural—damnation and abandonment that have also been visited upon the recalcitrant Jews. In fact, what is demanded here of the pagans is a supernatural recognition of the God who is revealing himself to them but that they have not given precisely because of the "wrath" of God.

The human beings and the cosmos that come into view here are the human beings and cosmos that were once raised into the light of grace but that now groan under the *mataiotes* (futility) of it all. But human beings have still become guilty and will always remain so because they do not want to perceive the revelation of God speaking to them through creation and its transcendence; nor do they want to submit their own reason to this revelation.

Therefore, in this act of faith that is demanded here, it is *also* a question of the natural activity of human reason. It is precisely human reason that is summoned not only to come to know God but to acknowledge him in its logical thinking. The guilt of the pagans therefore consists in this: that they do not place their natural faculties in the service of a believing submission to God but refuse the act of obedience that is an essential aspect of reason. Instead of this, they "absolutize" their natural understanding, its power and its results. And that is precisely why they put something created in the place reserved for God. And so they become fools *because* they want to be wise. And this is not only the necessary consequence of, but also the punishment for, their introducing worldly concepts and imaginings into their insight into God.

It might be of interest to know that the Fathers and even the Scholastics have interpreted this passage in this way and thereby

well knew that the rights of natural knowledge had to be linked with those of the supernatural and unique order of salvation. We will cite but a few:

[Gregory of Nazianzus:] The pagans are without excuse and even more contemptible than their idols, birds, four-legged beasts and creeping animals, because they prefer the worse to the better even though they have been endowed with a rational nature and are in possession of the grace of God.^{[89](#)}

[Basil:] The first knowledge for man is the knowledge of God. But reason can either hand itself over to the deceiving demons and thus fall into servitude to idols, or it can entrust itself to the help of the Holy Spirit and thereby know God.^{[90](#)}

[Chrysostom:] Although they knew God, they did not honor him. . . . And the reason? They focused everything on their own thinking. . . the way someone traveling on a moonless night takes the wrong path or in sailing on the sea not only does not reach his goal but soon perishes. In the same way, these pagans suffer the most wretched shipwreck, since they undertook the way to heaven but pointed the light away, trusting themselves to the darkness of their own conclusions of reason.^{[91](#)}

[Theodoret:] That they knew God they themselves attest, they indeed associate with this honorable Word; but they wish to have none of its worthy concepts. For they follow their demented reflections and willingly take on the darkness of unbelief.^{[92](#)}

[Theophylact:] They took themselves to be wise and became fools. For what [Paul] means is that in everything they set store by their reasoning. And by wanting to grasp the formless by putting it into form, what is bodiless into a body, they show how vain they are, for their thoughts and conclusions will never reach their goal. But [Paul] calls their heart foolish or unreasonable because it does not want to grasp everything in faith. And why do they fall prey to so deep an error that they set everything by their reasoning? Because they think they are wise.^{[93](#)}

[Oecumenius:] When he says that they willingly became blind, [Paul] also alleges the cause for this: namely, that they set everything by their reasoning instead of by faith.^{[94](#)}

That Clement of Alexandria equated the knowledge of the Logos in nature with the knowledge of the positive law is well known. Everyone who “does not come to the faith” by means of philosophy “is without excuse”.^{[95](#)} From Origen (even if the relevant passages have been painted over by Rufinus with a trinitarian brush) it clearly emerges that every act of worshipping God that is not meant for the God of revelation is godlessness.^{[96](#)} Further witnesses include:

[Ambrosiaster:] God namely reveals it to them; that is, he creates a work from which he can be known through faith.⁹⁷

[From the book *De vocatione omnium gentium*:] While some directed their intellect not only to the cultivation of the practical arts and to the teachings of the liberal arts but also to the probing into the highest good of all and “saw with the reason the invisible things of God by means of his visible things” but did not give God the honor due him and did not recognize him as the author of all their faculties but “thought of themselves as wise”—[that is, they boasted, not in God, but in themselves, as if they had come to insight into the truth based on their own research and logic]—they therefore became vain in their thoughts and lost what they had found under the light of God’s grace, blinded by their arrogance, lapsing back from the highest light to their own darkness.⁹⁸

Augustine summarized this tradition in an especially illuminating way when he said:

The wrath of God is revealed over the heathen “because they suppress the truth by their wickedness”. What truth? “Because what was known of God was revealed to them.” Through whose revelation? “For God revealed it to them.” Why did he reveal it to them? “That they might be without excuse.” If he revealed that they might be without excuse, why are they then guilty? “Because they knew God but did not acknowledge him as God but became vain in their imaginings.” Why did they become vain if not because they were arrogant? . . . Note finally what follows and how the whole thing coheres [*unde tota causa pendeat*]. “By thinking themselves to be wise they became fools.” Because they ascribe to themselves what God has given, God has taken away the gift. . . . The Lord says rightly: “You have hidden these things from the wise and clever”—whether that refers to those who probe the essence of the creature with much reflection and careful investigation but simply do not know the Creator; or whether it refers to those who indeed know God but do not honor and thank him as God and cannot see him as perfect and as the bringer of salvation, because they were arrogant.⁹⁹

As for Thomas, he naturally emphasizes the rational power of reason more strongly than the Fathers (who of course constantly refer to it too). But his presentation also remains embedded in quotations from Scripture: there is no break between the God whom the pagans know from nature and the God whom the Jews know from the Law. There is not even a distinction. So he ultimately resumes the patristic motif:

“Indeed they knew God but honored him not as God.” . . . They knew him as the cause of all goods, whence they owed him in everything all thanksgiving. But this they did not bring forth but ascribed his good things to their own wit and intellectual faculty. . . . “They became vain in their thoughts.” They did this to the extent that they put their trust [*fiduciam*], not in God, but in themselves and attributed his gifts to themselves

and not to God. . . . And thus “were their hearts made dark”, becoming thereby a “foolish heart”, that is, one robbed of the light of wisdom whereby man truly knows God. For just as whoever turns his physical eyes from the worldly sun will fall into physical darkness, so will whoever turns away from God, trusting in himself and not in God, be darkened spiritually; as it says in Proverbs (11:2), “Wherever there is humility”, through which, namely, man submits himself to God, “there is wisdom; but where there is pride, there is effrontery.” And in Matthew (11:25) it says, “This you have concealed from the wise”, that is, from those who purport to be so, “and revealed it to the simple”, that is, to the humble. . . . “They exchanged the glory” means the pagans’ sin of unbelief [*impietas*]. . . . Their guilt was that, insofar as it was in their power, they transferred the honor due God to another, according to the word of Jeremiah (2:11), “My people exchanged its glory for an idol.”. . . This glory is nothing other than the splendor of the divine nature, “for he lives in inaccessible light” (1 Tim 6:16), and so on.^{[100](#)}

The gist of this text clearly implies that it is not merely a question of an abstract God of the philosophers (as a mere “principle and end”) but much more exactly of the concrete God of the Bible, with whom alone mankind must relate, inside and outside the synagogue. The text is directly connected to Aquinas’ central thesis of the *unicus finis supernaturalis* and to the thoroughgoing and radically supernatural vision of God’s objective way and of man’s subjective way to this goal.^{[101](#)}

Now if these texts—which could easily be multiplied^{[102](#)}—obviously belong in the realm of the supernatural and of revelation, then it is just as clear that they all take into account a full activity of the rational faculties of man in his coming to know God. Paul’s text itself shows this most unambiguously. The invisible qualities of God are seen as “befitting reason”. The activity of nature is incorporated into this knowledge intact. Nature is what must perform the act of believing acknowledgment. The same holds for Wisdom 13:5ff. and Acts 17:22.

Whenever in such passages Scripture discusses a “natural” knowledge of God, it is referring to the knowledge of the true God in the medium of the cosmos. It is appealing to man’s natural cognitive faculty, and the guilt of unbelief is attributed to the abuse of these natural faculties. This can only be harmonized when we realize that our natural capacity for knowing God is incorporated as an inserted moment in the ultimate, supernaturally relevant knowledge. Accordingly, even the Creator’s natural and indirect revelation in the

world is not annulled [*aufgehoben*] in his revelation of grace but is fulfilled and surpassed in the indirectness of Christ's humanity. For his human nature is the total sacramental sign of grace.

This can only mean that even in unbelief and worship of idols man is continually dealing with the real God. He is the God who cannot be denied even when we try to do so. This is so because God is already formally implied in every creaturely act of thought because of our natural relationship to him as creature. And as the God of revelation, he has always already been the origin, goal and boundary of the concrete human person. Even when man creates idols, he is dealing with God, comes close to God and knows him—even while denying him.

In this sense, Przywara distinguishes, even in reference to Romans 1:21, the “*formal* aspect” in the concept of God in pagan philosophy from its (false, creaturely) content. In the formal dimension, the Catholic concept of God agrees with that of the pagans:[103](#)

This agreement is not incompatible with the sharpest divergence in content: the pagan world of idols as contrasted with the one but tri-personal God of the Catholic. . . . The basis for being able to separate the two is the distinction in Romans between “knowing” and “acknowledging”. But this distinction can arise because of man's freedom to make something from the created world into a god. But man does that precisely in the knowledge of what is meant by God. Atheism is an inexact concept. In the last analysis, there is only the either / or between God and idol—and thus between pagan and Catholic.[104](#)

3. *The Effects of Sin*: Thus our final question has already been partially answered in its main outlines: the question of to what extent natural knowledge of God remains and what value it has after sin. We will only be able to discuss this issue, as it were, dialectically, because the three moments that determine this question cannot simultaneously be brought to expression or into our field of vision. But also this is because these moments cause a certain interference, thereby making the image hazy and elusive. Once more, we are dealing with analogy in the concept of nature!

These three moments are: first, the moment of abstract, absolutely defined nature that even in sin requires an authentic and lasting knowledge of God. Secondly, there is the moment of the decision of

the will and of the whole person that already accompanies and determines every knowledge of depths in the natural and even more in the supernatural sphere. And, in the sinner, this decision, as a negative one, influences and muddies true knowledge even down to its very roots. And thirdly, there is the moment of supernatural grace (and perhaps even of God's revelation of his Word) that already has undergirded and enwrapped all natural knowledge of, and relation to, God. And this moment modifies even more so the properties of nature.

As far as what concerns the first moment, Gasser has stressed the fact that the Schema of Vatican I's Constitution on Faith declares that the continuing faculty (*posse*) in the sinner is a true capacity—that is, a physical and active ability. We have already heard the objections of the Council Fathers: "A faculty that is never realized concretely in any act ought rather to be called an *in* capacity; indeed this incapacity is not just moral but physical."¹⁰⁵ This conclusion should be denied. If the *natural absolute sumpta* really is the object of the statement, and not concrete nature, then the sentence is not only possible but necessary, "otherwise, honored Fathers, one would have to annihilate all the works of the Scholastics and the other theologians, each and every one of them."¹⁰⁶ Or, as another bishop pointed out, "One would have to remove every foundation from under the act of faith if one were to vote for the contrary statement (supported by the fideists and traditionalists)."¹⁰⁷

For if man does not have the capacity as man for contacting God, if he is not relating to the real God in each of his conditions, then there is neither responsibility in the true sense nor sin nor redemption. Otherwise man could by nature be an atheist and the act of faith could in itself be neither reasonable nor shown to be reasonable. That is why what is at stake in every *posse* is not merely something unreal but a genuine possibility, no matter how hindered it might be in the way it unfolds and takes shape.¹⁰⁸

Only when that is said can the second moment concerning concrete, fallen nature also be emphasized: along with the physical possibility there is the "moral impossibility".¹⁰⁹ The Schema of the Council cited a number of passages from Thomas that underline the

inaccessibility of reason and the contradictory paths taken by philosophers: “The natural investigation of reason does not suffice for the human race in knowing divine things, even those things that can be shown by reason.”¹¹⁰

Even in Catholic theology, this moral impossibility can go to such extremes as the statement by Pascal:

We know God only through Jesus Christ. Without this Mediator, every link with God is excluded. We know God through Christ. All those who have claimed that they know God and have proven his existence without Christ have furnished only very impotent proofs. . . . Outside of Christ we know neither what our life nor what our death is, what God is, even what we ourselves are. Without Scripture, whose object is none other than Jesus Christ, we know nothing and see in God’s nature and in our own nature only darkness and confusion.¹¹¹

The validity of such a statement rests on the fact that the darkening by original sin, and even more the self-enclosing of the spirit through actual sin, has *the same range* in the soul of the sinner as does God’s inherent openness in his knowledge. Or, in the words of Paul’s letter to the Romans: the refusal to acknowledge God extends as far as knowledge of him does. The false images of the idols that the sinner forms for himself cover up the very place that has been reserved in his spirit for the true God. The “divine penumbra” feeds off of God’s essence and his own claim on us.

This can only happen because men have from time immemorial been in touch with the sphere and the quality of the divine. Original sin, from which all actual sin stems, means a negative relationship to the one, indivisible God, who is both Creator as well as bestower of grace. Therefore man can in no case simultaneously stand in a supernaturally negative and in a naturally positive relation to God, as many theologians seem to assume when they think an *odium supernaturale Dei* can be harmonized with an *amor Dei naturalis super omnia*. The natural law demands that man adhere to that divine order that God himself has set before him and that is expressed in the *unicus finis supernaturalis*.

If the sinful pagan cannot *not* know God by nature, then at least his conscious image of God can in no case be a correct, error-free image, untouched by its rejection of God’s supernatural grace. Nonetheless, even this adulteration rests on an original openness to

what man *should have* known and what he cannot help still knowing in completing every act of knowledge. And so at the place where for Karl Barth faith stands as the a priori of all knowledge, even the knowledge possessed by the denier of God, there stands, according to Vatican I, these natural-supernatural contacts of the created spirit with the true God, equally Creator and Bestower of all grace.

In both cases, the sinner refuses what he *de facto* inclusively *knows* (in a real and physical *posse*) and what he *could have* known even expressly, discursively and logically—based on this inclusive knowledge if he had not resisted the knowledge. Vatican I has cleverly and reticently rejected in this passage the definition of how one forms proofs for God's existence: it can be known, but it cannot be demonstrated—*cognosci posse*, but not *demonstrari posse*. Nothing is said by this against the logical validity of conclusiveness of proofs for God's existence (of which, for example, the oath against Modernism will speak later). But there is probably something against the possibility of the sinner to free himself by logical means themselves from his rejection of God and to move to an inner harmony with God's deed and to everything that follows from that.^{[112](#)}

To assume the opposite would smack of Pelagianism. Even the well-known doctrine of St. Thomas (which used to be cited against the ontologists) points in the same direction. According to Thomas, God is the *primum notum* [the most striking feature of the universe] and indeed is so *per se* [in and of himself] but not *quoad nos* [as far as we are concerned].^{[113](#)} Therefore we need conclusive proof in order to reach a clear concept of God from the implicit knowledge we have of him.^{[114](#)} This too means that the *per se* points to the original intention of God at the creation of Adam, in which even the *quoad nos* was realized, whereas the veiling in creatures and the breakdown of procedures for proving God's existence (which are not convincing to sinners) has its origin in the fallenness of nature.

We have here an exact parallel (and indeed it is more than a parallel: it is the other side of the same reality) to the fact that, in the ethical sphere, acts of natural morality are possible to the sinner but that he is not only incapable of *keeping* the natural moral order as such but is also unable *to direct* the individual moral act in the direction of the concrete supernatural *goal*. He therefore remains, in

the Augustinian sense, “off target” (*peccatum*). And this is because a moral act in the *full* sense of the word, even the natural one, includes a *total* and free *decision* of man toward his *final* goal and salvation.

Thus the dialectic between the *certo* and the *firma certitudine* used in the Declaration of Vatican I is once more justified. And every attempt to cut through the knot by favoring one statement over the other is convicted of being insufficient. The material distinction of the two orders and their *de facto* unity based on the supernatural goal and the economy of salvation directed to that goal requires this two-sidedness. And those theologians who direct their whole thought to this two-sidedness—material distinction in *de facto* unity—may have reproduced the words of the Church’s Magisterium in the most perfect way.

The God with whom man relates in this world is *de facto* the God of wrath and the God of grace, just as man himself is always *de facto* the human being who has either turned away from God in sin or turned toward God in the light of grace and faith. This turn toward God can have various levels,¹¹⁵ it always occurs *praeveniente gratia* [with God’s prevenient grace],¹¹⁶ or, in the words of Vatican I: “For the most merciful Lord stirs up and helps with his grace those who are wandering astray, so that they may be able to come to a knowledge of the Truth.”¹¹⁷

In other words, it was not defined that there cannot be any acts of inchoative morality and knowledge of God “outside” of this turning toward God but that this prevenient grace certainly is not lacking to man even in a single moment of his life. Therefore, if he does not accept this grace, then he rejects it. Indifference to our final destiny is impossible. And thus, just as man’s turning toward God is borne along by grace, so too his turning away from God, in original or personal sin, is modified by a supernatural *modus*. As long as he remains in sin, man cannot know God the way he *should* know him. His knowledge remains in its decisive meaning a “miscarried knowledge” (*peccatum*) in spite of all its correct moments. For it occurs in the basic attitude of refusing to obey (*apistia*: infidelity).

And for this refusal to acknowledge God in spite of their knowing him, Paul promised to the pagans the same (thoroughly supernatural) punishment as he did to the Jews. And so all natural

acts of man as well as his whole being are *de facto* embedded either positively or negatively in the single concrete order of sin and redemption. “For ‘nature’ and ‘reason’ are only exalted and redeemed nature and reason in the concrete supernatural order. All other versions of nature and reason are lifeless abstractions.”¹¹⁸

This was the opinion of the Fathers when they attributed the pagans’ knowledge of God to the obscure knowing of the *logos spermatikos*, which is none other than the Word of the Father that appeared in the flesh, which itself was prepared for and announced by the economy of salvation. If the thought of the great Scholastics still remains theologically not completely satisfactory,¹¹⁹ its basic tendency is still clear: they wanted to hold fast to the unity gained by the Fathers of the concrete economy of salvation and the directedness of all single, natural moments to salvation.

So there is no “tension”, let alone a contradiction, between the statements of Vatican I and those of the Council of Orange, which so unmistakably stressed the unity of the order of grace: The Council of Orange: “It is with the gifts of the divine that we rightly know.”¹²⁰ And Vatican I: “For the most merciful Lord stirs up and helps with his grace those who are wandering astray, so that they may be able to come to a knowledge of the Truth.”¹²¹

If we maintain with Heinrich that: “Alongside our supernatural goal there is no second natural one. Rather the natural goal of the creature is contained in the supernatural goal as a lower moment and can only be attained in and with the same”,¹²² and if we agree with Diekamp that “the natural order has no self-subsistent meaning”,¹²³ then this must also hold true in the noetic order.

The whole order of reason is theologically embedded in the order of faith, just as the order of creation lies embedded in the order of grace (that is, the grace of our origin as well as of our redemption). To enter into a relationship of knowledge and will with the God of *this* creation means to be placed before the God of Jesus Christ and before no other.

Chapter 3

CHRISTOCENTRISM

The previous, somewhat thorny chapter on the concept of nature presented a *possible* Catholic interpretation of the relationship of nature and reason—which in our opinion is the best possible interpretation, taking account of all the factors involved. In any case, we can now turn to an easier task: showing that this interpretation is also a *real* one. Without any claim at completeness, we will cite a series of sufficiently important witnesses who will demonstrate that those views that Karl Barth has characterized as the most decisive of his *Church Dogmatics* are not at all specifically Protestant or Reformed but are views that today's Catholic authors (and not just a random sample of them, but the most important and representative) consider to be theirs too.

In this way we will also be shoring up the soundness of the argument advanced in the previous chapter. Moreover, this discussion will give us the chance to avoid that narrow and compulsive systematizing that can be felt at numerous places in Barth's work. This will then give his overarching conception a form that could be used by Catholic dogmatics. Thus, one cannot object that what the Catholic authors are doing in this respect is any more closely bound up with the categories of transcendental philosophy than is Karl Barth's theology. Even for Joseph Marechal, proceeding from Kant and the Idealists was never done for its own sake; rather he saw them as a welcome occasion for bringing to the insights of Scholasticism an order and a disposition that would make them all the more convincing to modern thought.

Corresponding to the themes as they proceed in Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, we will treat in order: (1) the theme of "Christ as the ground of creation" and then, in logical order, (2) the theme of history and event as the foundational constitution of being ("Nature and History"), and (3) the theme of nature in its orientation to the world of grace ("Nature and Grace"), and finally (4) the theme of Christ's

effects in the social order and in eschatology (“Judgment and Redemption”).

1. Christ the Ground of Creation

Formerly, theology used to make the question of “Christ the ground of creation” depend on the question of whether the underlying reason for the Incarnation of Christ was sin (as the Thomists said) or whether God would also have become man if Adam had not fallen (as the Scotists maintained). “Did God decide on the Incarnation in foreknowledge of sin, or did God allow sin under the presupposition of the Incarnation?”¹ It is already well known how circumspect Thomas himself was in taking up this issue: on the one hand, the divine will can be known in the supernatural order only from the revelation of Scripture, which seems to link the Incarnation with the entrance of sin into the world.² On the other hand, Thomas felt that the unity of the whole plan of creation was so great that Adam—although he had not foreseen his sin—nonetheless “possessed before his fall an explicit faith in the Incarnation of Christ”. And, “in his love for his wife”, Adam already “knew the great mystery” of Christ’s love for the Church.³ Indeed, in precisely *this* context, Thomas cites Acts 4:12: “No other name has been given under heaven by which we are to be saved.”

Actually Thomas and Scotus differ only in the fact that Thomas sees God’s one concrete plan for the world: God had always willed the Incarnation from all eternity, but he had also foreseen from eternity man’s sinful fall and thus willed the Incarnation as our redemption.⁴ So it is not surprising that Thomists (and not, for example, the Scotists, who expressly taught that the foundation of creation was in the Incarnation of Christ) came to this conclusion (based on Thomas’ second consideration): “Through his suffering and death, Christ earned for us existence [*Dasein*]. For our life is the result of God’s prior determination of us and consequently is the reward for the merit of Christ’s suffering and death.”⁵

Then Suarez came along to combine both opinions.⁶ But he did this less by having the Incarnation occur from two motives: an absolute one (the Scotist) and a relative one (the Thomist motive);

but by logically subordinating the relative motive to the absolute one, stressing the unity of the *de facto* historical world with God's plan for it, which is its very foundation. *Emile Mersch* formulates this distinction as follows:

God's decision to create was one stage of the unique decree that willed the Incarnation. The only begotten God-man, beloved of God, was willed and foreordained, in everything and through everything. And we, with the whole universe, have been chosen and blessed in him *ut sit in omnibus ipse primum tenens* [in order that as Head of the universe he might be all in all]. The Incarnation remains essentially a means of salvation against sin. Nothing indicates to us that it would still have taken place without sin, for without sin there would not have been the occasion for God to show so much mercy and thus for us to glorify his love. But, at the same time, the Incarnation was willed for its own sake, for a redemptive Incarnation is nothing else but the ultimate radicality of incarnation itself: the Incarnation itself is the act in which God surrenders himself entirely.⁷

The work of *Erich Przywara* also proceeds from this same perspective: beyond the Thomist-Scotist dichotomy, beyond, that is, any speculative theology of possibles. Przywara's point is to discover necessity within the *de facto* world order. In a small summary, which he has called a "brief encapsulation of the whole of my work",⁸ he reveals his christocentric starting point:

The path to God and the image of God are but shadowy intimations whose corresponding visible form is revealed only in the one who is God's only "interpretation". Indeed, he is God's pro-ceeding (*ex-egesis*), the one who makes God visible to us: Jesus Christ. According to his own eternal decree (Eph 1ff.), God is revealed nowhere else but in Christ, and Christ's essence is in the last analysis nothing other than the revelation of this God. So he himself has said: "Whoever sees me sees the Father." . . . Consequently, everything that might be a way to God or an image of God is only a dim reflection or a first intimation of what alone is revealed in Christ. All the traits in which God shines before the creature are themselves only drawn out and interpreted in Christ. All God's traits, insofar as they are features of the only true and one God, are aspects of the God who steps forth and interprets himself in Christ: the God who is only God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is no other God beside him, and thus all general traits of God are either the prior or subsequent radiance of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁹

We have already cited earlier passages from Przywara that point to the ultimately christological interpretation of the analogy of being. These passages should in no way be overlooked if we are to contrast Przywara with Barth.¹⁰ In his major work, *Deus semper major*, Przywara relentlessly reduces all aspects to a single focal

point: God in the crucified Christ in the crucified Church. He draws every direct statement about the relationship between God and man into his dialectic of intersecting cross-beams, where the “crossing” of a positive statement by a negative one imitates the true Cross (and as such is the only form of negative theology).¹¹ Then, in order to proceed from there to a true statement of faith, Przywara hovers between the highest concreteness of Ignatius’ “application of the senses” (which applies the senses to the divine truth that is manifest in the flesh) and the ultimate mystery beyond all sensation. For even this flesh has become risen “spirit”, and all contact with this mystery can only be a spiritual contact, which becomes spiritual by dying and rising to itself. Przywara proceeds consistently, judging all logic, and thus ontology too, by this christological, historical and actualist standard.

His flaming and expressionistic style finds its counterpart in the more detached and measured style of *Romano Guardini*, but they are both saying the same thing. Even in his *Essence of Christianity* (1929), Guardini was already taking up the theme of christocentrism, which was to become an essential part of his life’s work in his masterly book *Revelation* (1940) and in his New Testament exegesis. According to the earlier book, we cannot abstractly define the “essence” of Christianity, because the historical person of Jesus Christ is himself this essence from whom all general and abstract categories of the being of the world and of nature have their measure.¹²

Existing things refer back to Christ in their essence and reality and have their subsistence in him.¹³

When he became man, there entered into the world that life-giving essence in whom the world was creatively established from the very beginning. So the living Jesus Christ bears the universality of the Logos in himself. . . . The quintessence [*Inbegriff*] of the world’s meaning enters the stage of history in his nature [*in das, was aus ihm besteht*].¹⁴

It is not Christ who is in the world, but the world is in Christ. This category of “in”-existence is thus decisive for Guardini;¹⁵ the “immensity” of this reversal is at the very basis of his whole thought.¹⁶ From the grace of union with Christ, he explains the

concept of the grace given to us, and, from his nature, he explains the meaning of our nature:^{[17](#)}

“I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.” Christ does not announce truth, he is it. He does not merely say how things are but is able to draw people, things, finite existence itself, into himself: they find room in him. The world is “spaced” in Christ. . . . Everything finite is “essenced” in him. One could object that this is just a playing with words, speculative manipulation of concepts, a metaphysics fashioned in the manner of Plato or Plotinus. But such an objection will not scare us away, for Plato indeed did develop concepts which would later become available to Christians in their own time, enabling them to understand their Lord and, through their faith in this same Lord, to understand themselves as well. But more is being said than a philosopher of primal Forms could venture to say. Paul teaches that Christ is truly the matrix, the order, the form and the power that assume and transform the believer—and being as a whole. And we can actually experience this. What does the formation of Christian thinking, for example, consist in? First, man lives with his thoughts in the general world. He measures these thoughts by the experience of things and by the general rules of logic. After this, he judges what is and what can be. But as soon as he encounters Christ, he must make a decision: Will he judge Christ according to the perspective? At first he will try to do so but will soon notice that he is meeting up with something remarkable. He will sense a demand at work: to invert the relationship and take Christ as his starting point: no longer thinking *about* Christ but *from* him. Now the demand will be to place Christ no longer among the laws of immediate thinking and experiencing but to recognize him as the highest standard of what is real and possible. . . . What had previously been certain is now called into question. The image of the real is overthrown. Again and again the question recurs of whether Christ is truly so great that he can be the standard for everything; of whether the world really returns to him. . . . But to the extent that thought perseveres, it experiences that he really is the category that is the foundation to everything, the system of coordinates to thought, in which everything contains his truth. For now the figure of Christ has grown beyond all other standards. For him there is no measuring rod. He himself is the standard.^{[18](#)}

Michael Schmaus formulates the issue in almost the same way in his dogmatics. Also for him “the essence of Christianity is Jesus Christ”,^{[19](#)} the direct revealer of God, “the ultimate meaning of all that has happened in nature and in history”,^{[20](#)} because he is the very essence of the image of God after whose pattern Adam and creation have been formed.^{[21](#)} And so Schmaus overturns the categories in the same way as Przywara and Guardini did:

In fact, God has destined creation from the very beginning for the participants in his tri-personal blessedness. Creation is not meant merely to exist in the “outer chamber” of divine love. It does not matter whether the Son of God would have become man only to redeem a world that had fallen prey to sin, or whether he also would have become man in a world that had never known sin. For in the *de facto* order of

salvation, God has willed from all eternity to become man. And since the lower orders serve the higher orders in the world he has created, the Incarnation is the crowning of all God's works. It is the ultimate and most radiant Word that God has ever spoken to the world. All earlier words that the Father has spoken in the natural and supernatural revelations have been gathered up and transfigured in Christ, who is like the concluding chapter that explains all that went before. And indeed these prior words would have remained unspoken if this concluding Word were to have remained unspoken too. This means that God would not have decided to speak the preceding words if he had not also decided to speak the concluding Word. Thus all things, including ourselves, have being through and because of the one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 8:6). . . . We should note that Paul expressly speaks of our having "being" because of Christ, implying that nature is something given, is a gift. That we even exist at all is based on Christ, since we could only exist as people who are called in Christ to be saved and healed. He is the One from whom and toward whom the universe exists at all (Col 1:1f.). The world, accordingly, does not possess a completely autonomous order that is ultimately self-subsistent and self-sufficient. Its order is in fact taken up into that order whose ground is Christ.²²

According to Schmaus, the eternal plan of salvation is itself already a trinitarian plan that has for its object the revelation of the priority in Christ.²³ Only from this perspective can all the other problems in theology be solved:

One can only say that God allows evil because he foresaw that he could still free us later from our chains or, to speak more precisely, because he had determined from eternity on the Incarnation of the Logos. . . . It does not make much sense to mull over what God could have done or even would have to have done if he had not decided to redeem us. In fact that *is* what he has decided. And before that simple fact, all this talk of "what if" and "however" must be stunned into silence.²⁴

We can provisionally call the totality of the economy of salvation (or God's world plan) the coming of the Kingdom of God. But the quintessence of this Kingdom is Christ himself.²⁵ He is therefore the meaning of nature and of creation:

Because the foundation of the existence of the supernatural order is Christ, this means that creation from the very first moment of its existence is oriented to the expectation of being adopted by God, which has been promised to it in God's own first born. God's design of creation is christocentric. . . . The supernaturally exalted nature was *the first thing God willed* in his plan of creation; nature in itself was the second thing he willed. . . . God created the world for the sake of Christ, he did not create the human nature of Christ for the sake of the world. Because the risen and transfigured Christ is the final goal of all of God's action and is the image for the ultimate form of man and the world, the "new heaven and the new earth"—in whose midst reigns the transfigured Christ—are the first thing that God willed in his design for creation. . . . The present age, disfigured by death, with the world dying away, has

been planned and willed for the sake of the coming eon, which will bring the perfect form of God's dominion. Even before creating the world, God has foreordained us in Christ that we might be holy and spotless (Eph 1:4). God created nature, as it were, to have a place in which he could let his own life pour forth. . . . Nature was willed as the presupposition of the supernatural.²⁶

Christ is especially the "ground and measure of human existence",²⁷ so that what being human actually means can only be determined by him. And because he has not come to a self-subsisting nature as a second moment, as something "supernatural", Christ himself is therefore for the world and for man especially the "foundation and model of the unity of the natural and supernatural": the synthesis that already subsists in him between divine and human nature is the model for all syntheses that Christians have to bridge between the two orders. Christians do not need to reconcile Christ and the world to each another, or to mediate between Christ and the world: Christ himself is the single mediation and reconciliation.²⁸ As soon as we look on nature as something self-sufficient that offers its services to the supernatural, a great danger looms that it will have already gained the upper hand over the realm of grace:

This danger will seem so concrete that philosophy could carry greater weight than faith, dialectic would be superior to revelation, Aristotle would rank greater than Paul [so that Paul would be interpreted according to Aristotle and would be measured by him],. . . philosophy would rank higher than theology, profane history over church history, office over piety. The higher that nature itself is elevated, the more it can become a restriction on what is higher: the supernatural.²⁹

But the crucified Christ becomes the permanent judgment over nature by reminding the world that nature is nothing other than what has to die and rise in him for it to attain to the purpose of its existence. And

it becomes clear how the statement needs correction that says that grace does not destroy but fulfills nature. This statement holds true without qualification only of a pure nature that has submitted itself to God in unconditioned obedience, which has not existed since the first sin. . . . So all culture stands henceforth under the judgment and the blessing of the Cross of Christ.³⁰

Eucharius Berbuir says in his interpretation of the prologue to the Gospel of John that

through the Logos everything comes to be, so that everything pertaining to man can be accepted and assumed by the one man Jesus Christ in the mysterious unity with the Logos. . . . All being comes to be through the Logos, begotten in view of his own Incarnation. But that means that all being comes to be through the Logos because of the will of that Logos to become a human being. Everything has been created for the sake of the Incarnation. . . . The orientation of the whole being of the Logos toward the Incarnation is indeed the orientation of his being from all eternity to become the God-man in time. But this does not belong to the necessity of the eternal being of the Logos; . . . it comes from his absolute freedom. And thus Christ's being human is something that has come to be from all eternity *in* the Logos. . . . So too the Logos' orientation to the Incarnation as the preexistent God-man has come to be in the eternal Logos. And through this preexistent God-man and for his sake, God plans to create man and world. And, in this plan of creation, all being thus comes into existence as part of God's intention in creating [*Schöpfungsgedanke*].³¹

The notion of Christ as the ground of creation finds its logical culmination in the patristic and early Scholastic idea of the whole Christ as the central object of theology. *Emile Mersch* is a recent exponent of this point of view and has renewed this style of theology in the most penetrating way. Every science, he notes, strives for unity because it seeks knowledge. In theology, thinkers have often enough tried to *induce* a unity into it from the outside. Above all, Scholasticism "made use of the already available matrices of philosophy to unify dogma". Indeed philosophy on its own terms can take as its theme many of the objects of theology: God, man, his goal and fate, his duties and so on. Thus its schemata of unity seem to be most appropriate to theology, if the point is to move from the sphere of reason into that of faith. But:

these syntheses remain external to the content of revelation. They unite it on the level of history or of natural science or of ethics or philosophy, rather than placing that unity on its own level. . . . External to the content of revelation, this kind of unity can also only lead to an external understanding of the content of revelation.³²

The true inner unity of theology is none other than the whole Christ: Christ is the very essence of what has been revealed by the triune God through Christ's existence and his Word; but he is also the very expression of what has been established by God as the world's meaning. Thus Mersch can give us this lapidary aphorism: "Theology is truly theocentric only when it is christocentric."³³ He goes even farther and, resuming a theme of the Tübingen school, calls for a theology that unfolds the self-consciousness of Christ in the Holy

Spirit as it is displayed to his members in faith (1 Cor 2!). Of course this disclosure takes place only in and through the Church, Christ's Body and Bride, who administers his truth and unfolds it for his members. "Christians as such are members of Christ, they are only to be defined through Christ. But Christ can only be understood if he is taken and defined as the inner form of Christian doctrine."³⁴

Christian self-awareness, then, coincides with this inner form of Christian doctrine. As the unity of Christ, Christian doctrine unfolds in the Spirit of the Church and in the living relationship between head and members. Such a concept of theology gives methodological rigor to and fulfills the christocentrism developed by the authors cited earlier and, as Mersch shows, comes from the very best of the Catholic tradition.

2. Nature and History

The subject of this section can only be a further expansion and unfolding of what was said above. Its purpose, therefore, cannot be to focus on the issue of nature and history itself, to show philosophically that the nature of the world and of man is temporal and historical, that there is a tension and mutuality and, to some extent, an overlapping between nature and history. Our focus will be to try to understand that if the historical *factum* of God's Incarnation in Christ is the meaning and goal not only of worldly history but also of nature and creation as a whole, then the necessity of intraworldly history and nature rests on a decision that cannot be reduced to any sort of general norm.

Robert Grosche has drawn our attention to the fact that it is the radical, supernatural historicity of the Christ event that has made it a scandal to the human mind.³⁵ So radical is this historicity of Christ that it compels pagan thinkers, even non-Christian thinkers of modern times, to dissolve Christ, to reduce him to an unhistorical myth. But it is a scandal to Christian thinkers too, for it frequently provokes them into trying to undo the snag of this historicity. This was true not only of the "philosophy of the Middle Ages", but it is even true of the author of *The City of God* and of the mystics. And we meet it again today in the advocates of a piety of the Mysteries of

Christ. "It is remarkable how eager the Catholic Christian is to speak of general truths instead of concrete historical reality, of religion instead of Christianity, which then easily seems merely like one case of religion in general."³⁶

Now, of course, in Catholic theology there is also a consistent and continual attempt to take into account this historicity in all its breadth and depth.³⁷ This work is closely linked with that of many leading Protestant theologians, although neither group was influenced by the other in stressing this issue. Yet it is a legacy for both confessions. Even more importantly, however, it serves for both groups as a way of overcoming the historicism of the nineteenth century and the existentialism of the twentieth. Both movements provoked Christian thinkers to pose their questions from a truly theological perspective and to answer them using strictly theological means. And if today Pope Pius XII warns theologians of the distortions of these two movements,³⁸ that does not mean that any of the above-named theologians and philosophers need fall prey to this reckless extremism. On the contrary, they have tried to bring about a synthesis of both elements.

It was a misfortune that the Reformers wanted to build their theology on a philosophical nominalism. Indeed, even in the field of philosophy, the nominalistic reaction against Thomas Aquinas was a misfortune and an empty detour. Theology, as a true science of singulars that are nonetheless general and normative, needs a philosophy in which the essential and realistic aspects are effectively protected, as Thomas had done: the incarnate Logos is the norm and fulfillment of all authentic *logoi* in nature and history.

For that reason, theologians must not separate the immanent historicity of man from the transcendent historicity of God's revelation that has entered the stage of world history. It is not just that philosophy became cognizant of genuine immanent historicity in the light of transcendent historicity—for authentic philosophy of history only came about because of Christianity. But, more importantly, the immanent finality of history and of the life of the individual must henceforth be regarded and defined no longer independently from their transcendent finality. Individual human beings as well as mankind as a whole have but one supernatural

goal, which is both immanent and transcendent. “Natural” and supernatural temporality and historicity stand and fall together, unaffected by the fact that there is a certain relative independence to immanent history. In the last analysis, this is founded on the historicity of Christ, in whose two natures the analogy of divine and human history is united, thus tying the knot tight of the aboriginal historicity between God and the world.

This is so because Christ is a free divine person and thus is Lord and shaper of the event of revelation. He is Lord of his own human history in the world, and through this history he is Lord and norm of every one of the individual histories as well as of the collective history of the world. As *Schmaus* says:

Naturally there are in Christianity eternal, unchangeable and generally valid truths. But. . . they stand upon historical facts. The events reported in the Bible are not, say, catechetical or pedagogical costumes through which a loftier, eternal truth shines through. They are rather the ways in which God speaks to the human race and deals with us.³⁹

[Temporality belongs to revelation as] the animated mode of its consummation [*als der beseelte Modus ihres Vollzugs*].⁴⁰

But let us leave the last word with *Romano Guardini*:

The person of Jesus Christ in his historical uniqueness and eternal splendor is himself the category that determines the being, action and doctrine of Christianity. That is a paradox. Every realm of being contains certain foundational determinants that establish it in its unique character and set it off from the rest. . . . These presuppositions or categories are necessarily general and universal. But, in our case, it is different. Where elsewhere the general concept stands, here there appears a historical person. . . . Something similar holds true for ethical behavior. Even here there are ultimate norms of what is right and obligatory. These norms are, as norms, always of a universal nature. Precisely as such they can absorb each respective situation and find their concrete application in a specific action. But in Christian action there stands in place of the general norm the historical person of Christ. From this fact there emerge far-ranging problems. . . . And it seems as if theological thinking would never really be able to keep them in view. It seems as if theology must seek for its scientific credentials by doing its own work according to the schema of the historical or philosophical disciplines that are built on abstract categories, while setting the Christian character of the enterprise only in the specific qualities of the content or in the authoritative character of revelation.⁴¹

. . . Concerning the question of who God is, the Christian answer does not say: God is the highest entity [*Wesen*] or the ground of the world of the absolute Spirit, but: he is

the One who speaks from the existence of Christ. If you take Jesus, his person, his actions, his fate, as the expression of something, then God is the one who is being proclaimed. The living God is hidden in himself. Only in Christ is he revealed. Christ is God's epiphany. . . . The question of what one means by God can only be answered by saying that he is the Good One, the Holy One, wise and just, pure, strong and so forth. These are statements that are derived from general philosophical or religious presuppositions; correct and worth considering, but only when what is specific is presupposed: God means what Jesus means. [Through Jesus, man experiences what he too is for God.] What myths and philosophers have said about the divinity of man is finally unimportant, since they stand in the confusion of the immediate religious consciousness. Revelation, on the other hand, is, above all, truth. Nowhere are things seen so harshly and clearly as in its light. It says that man lives so much in God's view and under his judgment that God has taken upon himself in the Incarnation the human condition for the sake of this creature. God has, in accordance with his most inner will, considered it possible eternally to pour his divine being into the figure of a man. . . .

[On Jesus and ethics:] The content of Christian ethics is to fulfill the will of God; this will is revealed, however, first and most decisively, not from the persisting order of things, but from God's express assertions. He acts and calls upon man to join in this action. The one who actually answers back is Christ, the incarnate Son, who has come to fulfill the will of the Father. This is what he was during his earthly life and is so now, only in a different way, even more far-reaching. . . . What is demanded of Christians is that they join this action. . . . But the content of revelation results from what Christ is, from his stance, his action, his fate, his teachings and sayings. . . . To the extent that believers are joined to Christ, they see what God demands.⁴²

Of course, Guardini knew that God's will is also expressed in the worldly order and its laws:

The God of revelation is also the God of creation. . . . On the other hand, the orders of the world have been thrown into confusion by sin, and man stands in contradiction to God. Thus revelation overthrows the orders of the "world"—as we see in the Sermon on the Mount and the doctrine of the folly and scandal of the Cross.⁴³

From that point on, Christian action must proceed without the support of what the world considers reasonable; indeed, under certain circumstances it must defy it: by an immediate obedience to God and by daring to trust his promises. Guardini, who could show such empathy for the immediate religion of Holderlin, Rilke and all forms of the mythical, knew at the decisive point where the difference lay, as he shows in this passage of sober insight:

What Christ has brought is not at all "religious". . . . Indeed, one could even say that Christ *prevents* man from living from the fullness of the resources of his soul's religious originality and from the numinous fullness of the world. . . . He has come not only to redeem us from evil but also to free us from what seems good to us. He has

come not only to redeem us from godlessness but also from our own piety. He strips away the veil of the religious and is thus its “sign of contradiction”. No person and no people may say that Christ represents the clear expression of what they feel when in a religious mood. . . . To that spontaneous piety Jesus says first of all: No. Only then, when this No has been accepted in the obedience of faith, in “the loss of soul” to the revealing and judging God, does he speak within that No a Yes. He destroys every piety; then of course from this destruction he brings risen life. . . . Faith disenchanting religious immediacy. . . . Even the knowledge of God we get from the world comes to its genuine freedom and certainty only in the light of revelation. . . . In itself, speaking systematically, the knowledge of God we gain from our relationship to the world is prior to that gained from faith; but, *de facto*, we attain to a clear understanding of God’s natural revelation only when the supernatural and expressed revelation has taken place and is accepted.

Christ has not come to bring the infinite but rather the unconditional; not the ever new but what is decisive; not the inexhaustibly various but the one thing necessary. . . . Christ is not someone from a series of those famous figures in history through whom the religious experience of the human race finds an ever-new expression. He has loosed no new wave in the religious river of history. . . . His will, rather, drops down vertically, intersecting at only one point of tangency. . . . He is the stumbling-block of the freedom of the living God against every expression of religious immediacy. He is the judgment that the living and holy God renders upon everything human, and therefore—and primarily—on religion itself. In him dissolves the mist and fog of all that is religious, created and mythical.⁴⁴

One sees that Guardini clearly prefers to operate here with the category of the unique and particular. It dominates all of his work, often even as the title of sections and chapters. This category corresponds to the category of the “real” in Barth. It is an Augustinian category: after the philosophical and abstract investigation comes the lurch into the sphere of Christ, where everything is decided, where the “orders of creation” contain the impress of the Johannine term “world”. These orders have been stripped away and show that they are, in God’s judgment, failure and sin (*peccatum*), both in themselves and (absolutely considered) also in all nature’s *possible* accomplishments:⁴⁵

Taken on its own terms, religious experience would have to realize clearly that God is the creator and Lord of the world. And precisely by creating and maintaining this world would simultaneously God know its limits. Furthermore, religious experience would have to know on its own that the world is not infinite but finite and thus is circumscribed by nothingness. . . . But this realization never seems to come off well. It always seems to get muddled when left to its own devices. . . . Only when we accept from revelation that the world is directed by God and, when encountering his holiness, is utterly lost will this revealed limit also be clearly seen as a “natural” limit.⁴⁶

Like Karl Barth, Guardini wants to establish everything that is natural and self-subsistent on the foundation of the historical and actual—without denying or calling into question natural autonomy. Man is by nature a historical being, but he is such ultimately because God cultivates his supernatural history in him. Man is that being whom God created to encounter him in the event of revelation. And to be able to do this, God gave man an immanent historicity. *Schmaus* follows this same line of thinking when he says:

So in an ultimate sense we can also simply say what man is in himself when we consider what man is before God. His origin from God also determines his presence before God; his past in God determines his present and also decides what should become of him. . . . Revelation tells us what man is, it tells us by recounting the *history* of what God has done and is doing for us and with us to establish his reign in us.^{[47](#)}

Other authors, too, such as *F. X. Arnold*, could be cited:

Dogma always rests on the *drama* of revelation. The *Word* of revelation cannot be divided from the *deed* of revelation. . . . Revelation is essentially event, deed, history, and not merely speech, doctrine, word.^{[48](#)}

Laberthonnière during his time also gave powerful expression to this theme—even though his way of expressing himself led to misunderstanding. For him, history is itself the “system” in Christianity. In Christianity there can be no abstraction, as in Hellenic civilization, but only an interpretation that may not shed itself of the positive fact. And, in contrast to mere “theory”, interpretation is only possible from one’s own commitment, from being drawn into the event, so that, in Christianity, our solidarity and social bond with the rest of the human race are ineluctably given with the historical.

But where the absolute is deflected from the direction of the universal concept and from myth but is directed toward the historical, then this changes the very concept of act: God is no longer the pure act of Aristotle in contrast to the potentiality of the world of its history; God is act as power, deed, love, as what appears in the world and its history as absolute event. This event-dimension in God’s revelation is at the same time its aspect of being grace for us. And faith corresponds to this aspect as the foundational act of human reason that responds to revelation. Every philosophy that is not open to this

act remains hopelessly empty and lonely: by seeking to suffice unto itself, philosophy loses touch with the ground of being and disengages itself from its solidarity with its foundation in the most important event of all.⁴⁹

In his book *Action* (1893), *Maurice Blondel* had even earlier effected the same turn, the ultimate point of which was to place “nature” in the historical act, the event of being. In no way did he intend thereby to “immanentize” revelation (as if it could be construed, for example, merely by analyzing the internal act of consciousness). His purpose was to burst the bonds of the whole sphere of nature to reach that of revelation—which had already occurred in fact and which indeed was the very foundation of the whole sphere of nature in the first place. Indeed with this work we already find the closest relationship to what Barth would later do. Blondel’s thought always moves from the abstract to the concrete. And the *concretissimum* is that act in which the true person touches God in Christ and thus makes the act of decision, of surrender, of faith. From the event of God there also occurs the event whereby man is either finally opened to the fullness of being—being opened up in Christ—or he chooses to live in the emptiness of denial: that is, in hell.

Both thinkers might have been misunderstood because of the way they expressed themselves, and so it was easy for those who were not familiar with their intentions to draw from them the implication that they were confusing the necessity for a free revelation that is the foundation for everything with an intrawordly natural necessity, from which confusion came the charge of “immanentism”. In truth, they were looking in another direction: they wanted to be pioneers of the concrete and historical aspects of ontology. In no way were they looking in the direction of a philosophical nominalism or of a modern “vitalistic philosophy” in which the permanent essences are only the ephemeral configurations of an historical life that is continually metamorphosing. Their intent was entirely theological: they wanted to draw all intrawordly being and essence (whose self-sufficient validity they did not deny) to the concrete, personal and historical Logos.

But if later, as we have shown, Catholic philosophy also tried to come to terms with the event-character of intraworldly being as such, then this problematic interests us in this discussion only indirectly: that is, insofar as it stands in the shadow of a purely theological problematic and is shaped by it. For us, the issue is sketching a Catholic vision that can be juxtaposed with Karl Barth's (as we summarized it in the image of the hourglass), which for example Guardini captured in these words:

This is the most fundamental meaning of revelation: that God not only is but acts; not only watches over but actively participates; not only fulfills but comes to us. He is person, and he freely fulfills history from the pure initiative of his will and takes on our fate. . . . The world, which has proceeded into being, not by nature, but by deed, will find its end once more, not by nature, but rather through the deed.⁵⁰

The event-character of being does not exclude its status of being nature but rather includes it: as the condition of the possibility of being event. *Hermann Schell*, whose own thought is quite similar to that of the French thinkers we have been discussing, puts it this way:

The spirit is active, actual. But more than that, subjectivity is an overlapping and self-referential activity, internal to itself and to the other. It is an actuality with essential relativity, in a living relationship to the grasped object and the object's own relationship to the subject. Actuality includes substantiality; motion [*das Wirken*] includes reality; and subjectivity includes objective being within itself—but not the reverse.⁵¹

So for Schell, it is characteristic that he also sees with the increasing clarity of revelation a growing sharpness of decision between heaven and hell: only where the full light shines can the darkness appear in its full density—as its shadow.⁵²

So contemporary dogmatics is accustomed to understand God, the *actus purus*, also as *actio pura*, without thereby denying or neglecting his divine “nature”. “God’s Being is the reality of his deed, is absolute power of existence.”⁵³ As *Schmaus* says a few pages later,

God’s Being is an active, doing Being, purest efficacy, acting by being and being by acting. There is no realm in God that is not loftiest activity, constant deed. Doing is not wrung out of God’s supposedly more underlying Being. God’s *to-be* is the form in God

that is stamped in doing. And God's doing is the "movement" that expresses his Being. Being and doing completely coincide.⁵⁴

"God is living consummation"⁵⁵ so that his acting in the world is an "everlasting event",⁵⁶ and the encounter with him in the event of grace renders everything else mere physical preparation and propadeutic to this event:

The supernatural is not supposed to flow into man purely "naturally" but only if the created spirit opens itself up in free readiness for God, that is, only if our natural readiness for God is ratified by a free decision.⁵⁷

Grace, and its bestowal, is above all a new relationship to Christ and through him to the triune God. That is, it is a "personal relationship, not merely a material change of status".⁵⁸

This is ultimately linked with a revision of that beloved pair of concepts so dear to philosophy and theology: "physical" and "moral". As *Przywara* says:

It is false to equate the real with the physical and material and thus to equate the moral with what is merely thought. For the spiritual is, in the true sense of being, just as real as the physical and moral, indeed it is even more so, because it is not prone to dissolution. And so it coincides neither with what is thought (as something subjectively spiritual) nor with "truth in itself" (as what is objectively spiritual). Rather, both are the forms of its appearance as something *ontically* spiritual, which is active as spiritual Being in a subjective spiritual instance [*Geistigkeit*]. And this spiritual instance has objective character because only in the spirit is "essence" grasped.⁵⁹

3. Nature and Grace

In this third section we will be taking up once more the theme of the previous chapter ("The Concept of Nature in Catholic Theology"). This time we will show how much Catholic theology today affirms the concrete-historical focus just developed in Section 2, not just in Christology but also in the issue of nature and grace.

The great advantage of this starting point is that, both in philosophy as well as in theology, it sticks to the issue: the real world as it is. It does not get deflected into non-issues by weaving empty hypotheses about another possible world, which should only be posited speculatively in order to illuminate certain sides of the real

one. Only, *precisely for the sake of our starting point*, we will have to be careful not to make other, contrary statements about this hypothetical world different from what was usually said in Scholastic theology. The French theologians caught up in the crossfire of this discussion are all too prone to this temptation (as a consequence of the famous law of thesis / antithesis). Even the old Tübingen School never really freed itself from this danger, as the following text may show:

We admit that the assumption that God has created man in the state of pure nature, that is, equipped only with the capacity for reason and freedom, does not do justice to the ideal of the perfection in God's creation of man. And so far as we can see, God could have called man in no other way but in that perfection of being. But we dispute the implication that this perfection would have necessarily belonged to man as to his essence. This perfection is not to be understood as the product of God's creative act by which what is essential and necessary to one's nature is placed in every creature. No, this perfection is the result of the divine activity of grace, that is, it is a gift of supernatural grace added to nature.⁶⁰

Now just as von Kuhn, even while preserving the gratuity of grace, went too far in discussing the possibilities of the Creator, so too many of the statements of the group of theologians from Lyons have overstepped the mark insofar as they have kept the categorical statements about the limits to divine possibility. Pope Pius XII in his encyclical *Humani generis* refers us back to the limitations of thought here: "Others distort the gratuity of the supernatural order when they pretend that God cannot create intellectual beings without ordering and calling them to the beatific vision."⁶¹ If such statements about a *non posse* are inadmissible as a point of departure, then it is precisely this starting point that demands that we remain with the sentences of Aquinas about the open nature of man. At least they do not intend to weaken or undermine it with half measures. For the starting point of our thought will only want to deal with the *de facto* world as it now exists.⁶²

In this sense, *Romano Guardini* vividly depicts the paradox of man:

Seen in the fullness of its energy as Paul proclaimed it and Augustine unfolded it, grace means something that is, not added on to the nature of man for his perfection, but rather the form that man definitively is. Of course, this presupposes that we

understand by the term “man” what once again Paul and Augustine mean: not some being artificially let loose in a “pure nature”, but rather that human being whom God intends and of whom Scripture speaks.⁶³

The world does not show the characteristics of a pure nature but of a history brought to completion by God. Man does not have the character of an isolated subject, a reality closed in on himself. He is himself because God has called him and holds him to that call. The whole realm of created being [*Dasein*]: things, humans, work, all come from God’s grace. The distinction we make between nature and history takes place only within that all-encompassing history—free in its very beginnings—that God has brought into being. The distinction [*Unterscheidung*] of nature and grace with which our religious thought works has its place only within a more embracing *decision* [*Entscheidung*] of grace, from which the whole of existence proceeds and to which we owe the fact that there is even a world at all.⁶⁴

And in his work *Freiheit, Gnade, Schicksal* (1948), which as the preface says is dedicated to a renewed harmony between those elements that are still isolated and unharmonized in Augustine and Thomas, Guardini rests the analysis of grace entirely on this paradox. Distinct from all intraworldly “experiences of grace” stands “grace in the Christian sense”. Grace always has a twofold form, like the “universal” grace of the creation of the world out of nothing and the even more exalted personal turning of God to the human race that he created (the aspect of “exaltation” and of “participation in the divine nature” is introduced here of course much too hastily). Because he has been created out of grace, man is a historical being, designed and intended to encounter God. And this encounter that occurs in actual grace is the fulfillment of his truest essence, but it is a fulfillment that cannot be forced or compelled by any natural necessity. Guardini explains this paradox in the light of John 4:14 (“the water that I will give will be a spring welling up into eternal life”):

Here the grace of “eternal life” is expressed in the image of water that flows from God’s spring and stills man’s essential thirst, his longing for the particularity of the Being that God has intended for him and only God can give. But how is this water given? How is it drunk and made one’s own? Not in a way by which the holy hand of Christ holds out the vessel. One can also say—since images shift—that Christ does not call forth the flood of God’s grace from which the thirsty drink. Rather, the water that flows from the eternal source is given and springs up from within the thirsty ones themselves. It remains as a gift and can only be had as something given. It can only be received and is thus something that is ours, most personal to us, because it wells up in the most interior part of those who accept it. . . . “Christ lives in me”, but, when he does so, I reach what is most uniquely mine, that which the Creator intended for me. Grace is by definition that which we can never take for granted, and it is at the

same time what ultimately gives us fulfillment. It cannot be compelled by any human power, we have no right to demand it. Rather it is God's pure opening up to us in his sovereign divine freedom. But God encounters us in grace so that we might become in the encounter with him the being that God has always intended us to be. . . . Grace is not something superadded extraneously, the possession or deprivation of which would leave the intended identity of human existence unaffected. . . . On the other hand, however, grace is not a condition for the immediate essence of man without which he could not exist or have an identity, but proceeds from the pure freedom of God. These different strata of assertions do not constitute a contradiction but rather an antinomy: it is the principle by which God has established man's created being.⁶⁵

Daniel Feuling even goes so far as to venture to use the word "contradiction" to describe this paradox in human nature: "Of its very nature the essence of the created spirit is such that its knowledge of God consciously or unconsciously points beyond itself toward the fullness of God's being." But man recognizes at the same time that he cannot betake himself along the direction that his nature points to:

His life, lived from the powers of his nature, constantly remains unfulfilled. He knows that he is naturally unfulfilled and will remain so. . . . This deepest of all mysteries of the created spirit calls for decipherment. Why has God created a spirit that in its very essence can never find fulfillment from within itself?

Must we really be content merely to point out that humility is to be the last word we could say about the creature? Ought we not also be able to conclude with Feuling that

the created spirit would be a contradiction or indeed even a freak [*Misgebilde*] if its inability to find fulfillment were the last word, if even God himself were not capable of vouchsafing to man the fulfillment of his life and thus of his Being by exalting him to the immediate vision of the Godhead.⁶⁶

Oskar Bauhofer's entire theology of culture rests on the same presupposition: the paradox of the pure otherness of grace that comes from above and the imperfectability of the world and of culture here below when it is deprived of grace.⁶⁷ By his very nature as a spiritual constitution,

man is so created that he is ordered to a supraworldly, supernatural end. Man's nature as a person already establishes a real relation with the supernatural. Man is therefore by nature not locked up within the world of nature. It belongs to his ontic rectitude—to the *rectitudo hominis divinitus instituti* (S. Th. I, 94, 1)—that man has been *given* a supernatural goal. That does not mean that man can realize this "given" goal out of his own natural powers, for he remains someone who has been *directed* to

this supernatural goal precisely in his nature and essence. This supernatural goal belongs to the full metaphysical definition of man, that is, to the determination of his natural essence.⁶⁸

Given their bluntness, these statements might seem dubious if they were not supported by the whole tradition of the Fathers and by any number of texts from Thomas. But they are the basis for Bauhofer's reflections on the status of nature, which concretely exists in one of two states: shut up within itself or reconciled with God in Christ, dying and rising with him. This is the basis for the great either/or in Bauhofer's last book: the human race has but one choice before it—whether it chooses myth or faith, the hopeless cycle of fate or the definitive redemption in Christ.⁶⁹ Both alternatives

stand under a more general presupposition that has its place right at the border between history and the supratemporal, between time and eternity. This is not a logical premise, for it can in no way be anticipated: it is an act, an event, . . . but as event it belongs to history and yet is at the same time the axis on which all of human history eternally revolves.⁷⁰

Josef Pieper complements all of this by keeping to the noetic side of the issue:

All real philosophizing necessarily oversteps the boundary of "pure philosophy" to make statements the import of which are not the result of the human effort to know but come to us as something to be accepted. And indeed the basic impulse to pursue a philosophy that gets to the roots of things goes beyond the border that divides philosophy from theology, faith and revelation. Thus a philosophy that would insist on remaining a "pure philosophy" would be untrue to itself and would cease being philosophy.

If the thinker does not want to make this transition but calls a "halt" to the direction in which he is already headed, without justification from the object of his thought, or if he has already suppressed the question in his very initial method, then he is not a philosopher "in the sense of Plato and Aristotle and the great Western tradition". This holds all the more when interpreting history: the origin and goal of history are either revealed or they are not known at all, although man as thinker must necessarily ask about both. More exactly:

When someone encounters theology in his ongoing search and curiosity about questions of history and its meaning, he is thereby confronted with theological

statements about man's salvation, whereas the question of ontology, for example, does not have to grasp what theology is about but only touches on theology tangentially, as it were—although even here, if it presses the issue far enough, philosophy will need to repair to theology.⁷¹

Theology is always ahead of philosophy, not simply in the temporal sense but in their inner relational origins. . . . In the sphere of theology, God puts us in touch with a wisdom that he himself possesses. While this wisdom is independent of experience, it is the constant spur to intraworldly thought, from which the loving and searching movement of the philosophical quest in the world of experience again and again receives its catalyst and direction.⁷²

In the spirit of patristic thought, *Eucharius Berhuir* has clarified this issue with a powerful, almost passionately argued thesis that begins with the fact that “pure nature” was a theological construct developed out of controversy to help meet a particular situation but has now taken on a life of its own in the consciousness of recent Catholicism, with all the seeming power of reality itself. Its real weakness shows up, however, at just the place where it was supposed to be an effective help: in discussions with nonbelievers, and especially with the atheistic anthropology of Marxism!

In fact two quite dissimilar variables are juxtaposed, so that no true conversation is possible: Marxism offers a perversion of reality, while the theologians of pure nature offer an abstraction of it. Marxism says a firm No to the real meaning and purpose of man, while we bracket it in order for the moment to make it understood in some neutral no man's land. But, “if Christians suggest to Marxists that they should consider the totality of the anthropological dimension in all its unique fullness, we cannot trust that they, the Christians, will trust *their own* suggestion.”⁷³ So it is hardly suprising that nothing comes from the exchange.

Actually, the truth of the exchange lies for both sides on a different level: that of witnessing, a witness to a total, historical and concretely imagined picture of man, and the greater truth is decided in this theatre of martyrs. For the Christian, any other approach would mean the denial of the true and total contemplation that underlies all action. It would be to try to squint into that place that cannot be anticipated by us, where contemplation and controversy, not our theories, must decide. Berbuir resists any “bracketing” of human nature, with its natural laws and rights, from its concrete, historical

situations. Certainly the Church, “if she speaks to all mankind *urbi et orbi*, need not expressly formulate and define her message in purely Christian terms” (but even that is questionable!); she must “behave like a controversialist to make herself understood at all. This consciousness is, however, not meant to predominate at all times, nor can it even be recognized in the representatives of a doctrine of natural law and natural rights and pure nature outright. This means working with a concept of human nature that seems to divide the ontic reality of nature from grace, so that it bears more semi-Pelagian or even Pelagian traits than Christian ones.”⁷⁴ Berbuir’s whole intent is to base himself on the dialectic of the Church’s statements about nature and grace in order to portray a concrete nature entirely embedded in the grace of the historical order of Christ. For Berbuir, nature has its most perfect image in Christ, for God’s whole revelation is concentrated in him.

The theological anthropology of *Michael Schmaus* stands or falls with this same approach. The essence of man is his directedness to the God of grace:

Man as he actually existed in history, as God willed him, as he was designed by God’s eternal loving forethought, was always someone who lived in supernatural exaltation. So we can say that elevation to supernatural status was natural to the first human beings.⁷⁵

It is thus merely a preliminary definition of being to say that man is a reasoning animal. A more exhaustive definition would also have to contain our ongoing relatedness to God. In this sense we can say that man is a praying animal.⁷⁶

Man is that creature to whom God willed to give his grace and who must therefore live before God in obedience, love and gratitude:

Man exists, not in himself, but for God. By directing himself in free decision and responsibility to God, he acts according to his ontic constitution, he acts in the way appropriate to his essence and thus comes to fulfill and perfect his being. Only when God draws him into his own triune life does man find his own deepest being; his ontic determination is a copy of God’s tri-personal life. Thus man comes to discover himself in the divine Thou when God imparts himself to him supernaturally. This communication of God’s happens in and through Christ. The relationship to Christ is therefore contained in the relationship of the creature to God. . . . The whole of the rest of creation is meant to exist for the sake of the Incarnation of Christ. Thus the whole of creation comes to its essential fulfillment only through him.⁷⁷

But this fulfillment is precisely no natural consequence that could be “read off” of the “demands” and expectations of man himself:

No creature can get beyond the boundaries of this earth on its own. There is no available transition from the natural to the supernatural forms of existence. . . . If there is no path to the supernatural from nature, there is however a way to nature from God’s own inner life: that is, the way of God’s gracious condescension to us.⁷⁸

Relying on de Lubac here, Schmaus juxtaposes both prongs of this mutually reinforcing dialectic of grace: the positions of the Fathers versus that of the Scholastics. He realizes that when pursued to its extremes, this dialectic “can lead to an erasing of the boundaries”; and the modern prong that gives to nature an almost complete autonomy, to the point that it sets before us a *finis naturalis ultimus*. But the danger of this second meaning, according to Schmaus, is “incomparably greater” than that of the first. We must keep asserting the paradox:

Even if nature bears in itself no embryonic beginning of its supernatural form of existence,. . . it is still created and ordered by God from the beginning for a supernatural way of being. . . . And it can find its fulfillment only in and before the divine Thou. In other words, as a consequence of God’s own arrangement, because of the aboriginal decision of the Lord of creation and out of the abysses of his divine love, nature comes to the fulfillment of its essence only in a supernatural way. . . . Nature cannot come to its fulfillment in the antechambers of God’s love and glory but only in the inner chamber of his trinitarian divine life.⁷⁹

If nature fails to reach this goal, then it has lost every thing—indeed everything for which it was created. This loss is so total that it is the very condition of. . . hell. There is no *tertium quid* here. Man, who rules over the natural order, is the most exposed being of all, not hidden at all—because he is hidden in God. “So, provisional uncertainty and ultimate assurance in the bosom of God grow and increase together in the same relationship.”⁸⁰ Man is neighbor to nothingness, to death and to destruction so that he might have no other refuge but in God.⁸¹ As this kind of being, who has been distinguished with the nature that the incarnate God who became man assumed, is the midpoint in the world. It is characteristic that Schmaus calls the Neoplatonic and Scholastic attempt to define creation as something layered, moving along a Great Chain of Being

from matter to spirit as, from the theological point of view, “a failure”. God has definitively revealed himself, not in pure spirit, but in human nature. And “ultimately the dignity of a creature is determined by its link with Christ.”⁸²

Through Christ, the spirit can be embodied and the body gets a whole new significance: Schmaus is moving here in the same direction as Barth.⁸³ Man’s most inner reality remains that he has been opened up to God’s grace; man is, as it were, an incarnate petitionary prayer. But he is such, not by definition, but through Christ and in union with him, the Head of the human race, the one who truly lives in constant prayer. Our very being becomes a prayer because we are in God the Son, that is, the one who receives everything from the Father:

He is eternally before the Father as the receptive one, living constantly in readiness and joy, letting himself be given by the Father, . . . always hearkening and receiving. . . . Since he knows himself eternally as the bestowal of the Father, his stance of petition, readiness and need is at the same time essentially transposed into gratitude. There he stands as the intercessor before God by the very fact that he is begotten of God. And the very fact that his whole being is a gift of God means that he stands before God as intercessor.⁸⁴

At this point it is clear how the model of the creature, of man himself, can proceed from the grace of union.

In connection with this whole view, we have only left to show how even natural reason in the concrete supernatural order must correspondingly possess a *de facto* link with supernatural faith (or a spirit of surrender borne by grace), without reason thereby losing in any way its own natural autonomy. This is not because of reason’s weakness, as the fideists and traditionalists held, but because of the *de facto* unity of the world order, as Ripalda held. All the authors whom we have been citing agree with Ripalda here (with minor variations) that all acts that are directed to man’s supernatural goal are borne up by grace and embedded in the divinely willed order shaping our destiny. Even here Barth’s line of thought is matched.

If we ask whether there ever would have been for mankind a condition entirely deprived of grace, then Schmaus admits that our answer would have to be No. For him,

even God's malediction is overshadowed by his promise to send a Redeemer. God's wrath alights on man to save and sanctify him. The world, to whose original plan the Incarnation of the Son of God belongs, possesses a site, a holy center, from which a universal blessing flowed, Calvary: and so we know that the world was never totally surrendered to sin. The human race has never lived in the condition of pure sin or known how heavy such a burden really can be. Our Father in heaven enveloped even this sinful world with his love, for he saw that it would be the site where his Son would live and die.^{[85](#)}

What particularly holds true for the baptized also holds true in an extended sense for everyone who has been redeemed by him:

The bond to Christ is indestructible. No matter how much a person might struggle to break free of Christ, he will always remain bonded to Christ, even if he chooses the path of hell.^{[86](#)}

Because of the presence of Christ in human nature, no human being can plumb every corner of his self: "Even in his stubborn and resolute No to God, there can lie underneath it, no matter how faintly and obscurely, a Yes to God's love and holiness. It is not in God's nature to extinguish the flickering wick."^{[87](#)}

Of course in Catholic circles it has been the philosophers of religion more than the theologians who have wrestled with the noetic side of the problem: alongside Josef Pieper we should also name thinkers like Dietrich von Hildebrand, Bernhard Ronsenmöller, August Brunner and Peter Wust as well as Gabriel Marcel. Earlier still, there is Max Scheler, but before him there is the whole tradition of those who have been influenced by the theology of Augustine and Bonaventure, from which Guardini also came. But they all insist that they are being strictly philosophical in their method when they describe the personal attitude at the base of reason as "the venture of truth", as "piety", "basic trust" (Wust), as "faith and hope" (Marcel) and as "awe" and "obedience" (Rosenmöller). But they all nonetheless consciously proceed, objectively and subjectively, within the sphere of the concretely existing human nature, that is, as it is situated in grace.

We cannot possibly fail to see that their philosophy lives from that theological a priori that has also animated the thought of Barth and Guardini. Wust, who resists secularizing the supernatural concept of faith in his analysis of man's most basic decision, indeed quotes in

the same breath Augustine's *amor meum pondus meum*⁸⁸ and, in reference to John 3:8, speaks of truth being a gift.⁸⁹

Can we now really maintain in all seriousness that there must be, as *principium et finis mundi*, all these intimate and tender personal relationships that have been cited here in relation merely to a pure Absolute? It is all too evident, it virtually leaps to the eye, that these thinkers are in fact proceeding from the historical, nay, Christian experience—from man as he has been created in the actual world as an answer to God's creative and redemptive Word of grace, a word that is by definition a dialogic Word.

These thinkers also have the advantage of working from this a priori, not as theologians, but as philosophers or phenomenologists of religion; this means that they approach that a priori—or better yet, that basic existential attitude of the concrete spirit—in a more well-rounded way than Barth does, who designates this attitude all too vaguely as “faith”. To be sure, he does not equate this kind of faith with the explicit faith in revelation but at most says that it finds the fullness of its identity in explicit faith. This proto-faith is simply the realization that our thinking (*cogito*) is grounded in our being thought (*cogitor*). In the concrete supernatural order, this coming to be, this springing up out of nothing, happens in Christ.

Christ is the presupposition of creation and as such is the point of origin for the creature too—a necessary and tautological, analytical truth. This is what these philosophers of religion have grasped. There can be no question here of any irrationalism or relativism, and this view entails no danger that reason will be swallowed up in faith. The priority of reason over faith and thus the truth of the preambles of the faith remain intact, for the order of creation indeed does precede the order of redemption. The first Adam *is* first, and the second Adam *is* second. But on a deeper level this true and lasting priority is grounded in another priority: the first Adam has been mysteriously grounded in and has been created in the first place for the sake of the second Adam. And he cannot deny the traces in himself of this bond between them. Thus Schmaus can also say, in his own way, what Barth had said:

Because of his absolute power, God's being is the surest safeguard of our own being-there. We know and feel the threat of nothingness and tremble before failure and the abyss of emptiness. Being created means being constrained by nothingness. But created being is at the same time a participation in divine being. It is grounded in God's being and bespeaks a relationship to him. And so the person who *believes* in God experiences security in God more than the threat of nothingness. *In the mighty and inviolable fortress of God's reality, we find the ultimate assurance of our own reality.* . . . We are certain that there is a fulfillment of our being because God is himself all fullness.⁹⁰

As a conclusion to this section as well as to the two previous ones, we can give the last word to *Josef Bernhart*, who in his small work *Chaos und Dämonie*⁹¹ has reached a view of the world order that is so close to that of Barth that they almost completely coincide. To be sure, the tones used by these theologians are quite different. Barth is exuberantly optimistic, while Bernhart is often almost morose, filled with a sense of *Weltschmerz*. But, more to the point, Bernhart constructs his picture of man and of what most characterizes human nature on that “daimon” of free will that Barth will so savagely disparage. Yet it is precisely Bernhart's presentation that calls into question Barth's tone, which veritably thrums with a hymnic certainty of eventual victory.

Bernhart first notes that the pathos of the implosion of the modern world, the revolution of its self-image, the burgeoning apostasy, the struggle of the old Logos philosophy against recent existentialism—all this is a sign that we must once more confront reason and revelation, so that, freed from an “indolent syncretism between nature and grace”,⁹² even from an evasive and thus otiose apologetics, we may see things as they are, straight in the eye. What this means is that we encounter human nature *as it really* is—in all its demonic ambiguity (both ontologically and consciously), unable to decide in its very roots between good and evil, God and Satan. The world, too, is demonically undecided in its very essence between God and nothingness. For it is the material and the force-field of the decisions of human nature, and it responds as a world to that ambiguity.

But man and nature did not become this only because of the “Fall”; rather, it is part of their *essence* to be this way. The possibility of sinning (the *posse peccare*) belongs from the very beginning to the

nature of the first two humans in paradise, raised as they were by grace.⁹³ And it is this human essence—hidden in the lap of grace yet fully exposed [to possibility]—that emerged unchanged after the Fall. It is odd and piquant that Bernhart, thinking entirely from the *concrete* essence of man (his statements could in no way be confused with run-of-the-mill textbook theology), here takes up just this very concept of pure nature. In fact for him this concept yields an “illusion-free image of man ‘in himself’ of what he, abstracted from grace, can be”.⁹⁴ And precisely this image is that of concrete humanity that “is not essentially different from pure nature if we abstract from the guilt of original sin”.⁹⁵

Bernhart is well aware of the dialectic in the concept of nature,⁹⁶ but he takes fallen nature as his controlling image of nature in general, that is, of pure nature. He is quite insistent on the substantial identity of nature in all its states, a traditional emphasis in Catholic theology. The concept of nature for him is no “residual concept” coming from reflection on the gratuity of grace.⁹⁷ For him, it is rather something we can find by looking into the depths of what history in all its concreteness throws up at us. So it is easy to see how he belongs in the whole realistic tradition, which among the Church Fathers extends from Irenaeus to Gregory of Nyssa.⁹⁸

This nature has been pulled out of chaos and bears the birthmarks of its origin. Therefore, when it is locked in upon itself and turned to its own narcissistic gaze, it has been handed over in fact to chaos, to its “infernal charms”, as if to a higher power.⁹⁹ Bernhart in no way wishes to equate this moment of chaos with that of evil.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, the decision for evil, sin, is really a “work of separation from chaos”, albeit a perverse decision, a work initiated by man, which only God’s counterwork, redemption, can come to rectify, by bringing about true separation from chaos.

But precisely because man as part of nature is so much beholden to chaos—and here we finally reach Bernhart’s affinity to Barth—can we say that creation hearkens back to an earlier, deeper point:

Freedom and its frailties betoken our need for God’s mercy and aid. We can plead for this mercy but not compel it; ask for it but not demand it—for God and his grace are sovereign. For *God’s* freedom toward man can be no less than ours toward him. And

we have the capacity to defy God. So, uncertain of our position, we wait in hope, clinging to God our savior.^{[101](#)}

This dispatches Baius. But this does not have the consequences Baius feared: man only clings all the more desperately to God his savior. And Christ, the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world,^{[102](#)} has been this Savior from all eternity, and he has clarified and explained creation and the possibility of chaos:

Atonement, Christ's work of reconciliation, is, as it were, the a priori of the created world, the sign under which all else is explained. Luther's "imputed" righteousness becomes in Christ revealed, historical reality. Everything is created in view of him.^{[103](#)}

There is in the history of speculative theology a view of the work of redemption that understands the suffering of the world with a far greater religious depth than was ever true of the juridical theology that predominated for so long. It provides us with the great, awesome thought that man was first created in the image of the divine Logos, the Word, who is himself very man and who bears within himself the burden of the human race for all eternity. This Logos, the Word of God, the very thought of man in God's mind, has made, as the incarnate Christ Jesus, the cause of created man his own. Thereby he has fulfilled the office of savior and healer. This office has been his from all eternity because God has always had in mind the human creature. And Christ fulfills this office by becoming human himself. Humanity needs him for its physician, its healer—even (and already) according to its very *nature*. And this is because humanity is exposed not only to the evils of creation but also to the dangers of its own high dignity, that is, to the freedom of its spiritual will. . . . And because from all eternity a healer of the world has always been there to match the suffering of the world, indeed because he was such—so says St. Irenaeus—before creation ever was, then there must have been created a being who required this healer so that the healer would not ministrate over a void: Cum enim praeexisterit salvans, oportebat et quod salveretur fieri, ut non vacuum sit salvans.^{[104](#)}

Although man is completely subject to the powers of chaos, corresponding to that subjection, man also has an inner point that raises him above the floundering and storms of his being—indeed, it is the point from which he can even recognize his desperate straits in the first place:^{[105](#)} “Something in our selves already feels at home and is able to survey the drama of the chaos and daimonism below.”^{[106](#)} “Amidst all the fissures outside and inside me, there is still something superior to these fault lines, something hidden and mysterious, that I am as little able to see directly as I am able to see my own eye.”^{[107](#)}

Karl Barth too was of the opinion that human nature was good in itself because God separated creation from chaos. Thus it was *not* chaotic. But it was nonetheless made completely subject to chaos and to its *greater* power so that it could alone hope for its saving from God's certain grace. Barth's refusal to speak in this context of a *Dämonie* of creaturely freedom and to posit another *true* freedom different from the one exercised within grace and prayer sounds quite edifying but also quite Protestant. Once more it rests on another refusal to call man's creaturely situation and his human responsibilities by their right name. But even Barth speaks of creaturely freedom and knows of the responsibility involved when man rejects God and turns toward (the more powerful!) chaos.

So the differences between Barth and Bernhart remain a matter of nuances: it hardly matters if we say with Barth that God has expelled chaos when he created the world but still allows it to threaten creation from the outside, or if we say with Bernhart that God has put man in a situation rife with chaos.

As far as the question of nature and grace is concerned, we have shed some light on the question that Barth's theology has posed to Catholic dogmatics: we should be content to live in the real world as we actually experience it. We know nature only as it is in reality, and our only experience of grace is its undeservedness as it meets us in the real world. It is not our office to set ourselves up as the measure and judge of what is possible and what is not. Only God knows what is possible *in ordine existentiae* (that is, as long as there are no direct contradictions within this order).¹⁰⁸ We fall into the trap of rationalism whenever we want to know something definitively. This way is not open to us just because we do not see any contradiction in terms.

When we experience the freedom of grace, we can always say that God did not *have* to grant it. But even this judgment, which is a human judgment, must submit itself to the judgment of obedience. And this judgment considers things from God's perspective and revelation—in which the one thing necessary is also the freest gift of all.

4. Judgment and Redemption

Barth is right: whenever we touch on the mystery of Christ's priority over creation, and thus over sin, we approach that ineffable eschatological mystery whose brilliance is so strong that we would blind our vision if we looked at it directly. We are forced to shut our eyes, and our mouth too, for there is simply too much light and grace to absorb here. And yet we must not forbear to speak about whatever is amenable to being expressed. As long as we realize we are in something like Plato's cave, where everything is illumined by a light in back of us that we cannot see, we may speak about what we do see. But we will go awry if it begins to seem like we are relying no longer on this light but on one of our own making. And we will go even farther astray if we try to turn around and stare directly at the light.

Of course, we cannot set up any kind of universally valid norm for theological pronouncements on this question. Even the revelation in Scripture itself displays a wide range of expressions that are dialectical and indirect. But, as we already said, whoever tries to select from the statements of Scripture—or worse, declares that one moment is irreconcilable with another—has also made his choice, that is, has excluded one whole aspect of this issue. Materially speaking, that is the very definition of a heretic: one who makes arbitrary, stunted choices. He has excluded from the treasury of faith the full series of statements by the simple ukase that declares: "Impossible!"—whereas he should insure that everything in the treasury of faith be illumined by *the* light that the Word of God wishes to shine on it.

By the same token, we are not allowed direct or systematic statements. Barth himself was fully aware of this, but he has nonetheless gone a bit too far into the light, and so his statements are all too prone to being taken systematically. The Catholic thinkers whom we have been citing, all of whom think from the a priori of Christ, not seldom find themselves forced toward similar eschatological perspectives. With many of them we may hold out this principle: if we do not keep in mind their invisible, unspoken and yet everywhere mysteriously operative point of departure, then we will distort the import of the rest of what they have to say. But other theologians do not so much think *from* this starting point as seek to

move *toward* it. The recourse of many of these authors to pre-Augustinian patristics and, even more, the recent stress on the social aspect in our supernatural life (meaning that our solidarity in destiny is stronger in Christ than the fate we share in Adam) go out of their way to throw the greatest possible light on Paul's line "I speak of a great mystery." These writers interpret the Synoptic eschatological passages from this background and see the Johannine theology of judgment as the strongest expression of and proof for the unavoidable presence of the divine fire in the world.

All the theologians who think this way are well aware that they have come up against something that is ultimate and therefore scarcely amenable to being expressed. It is a mystery that is misunderstood as soon as contrary statements are set off against one other, which only has the effect of cancelling each other out. In other words, it cannot be treated as a "secret doctrine" in contrast to the other statements that hold true for the "simple" and the more "obtuse". For this is a mystery that must stand as a "holy and public mystery" in the principles and presuppositions of the totality of the Church's proclamation. It cannot be held in our minds in any other way than in faith, hope and love. The idea of being able to see and know is absolutely excluded. Faith, hope and love are something *more* than human knowledge—more than this, and yet less than the vision to be vouchsafed to us hereafter.

So one can indeed say: at the lower limits of a witness' statements is an *ethos*, while at the upper limits there would be a *system*. If one chooses to build a system, then one will either fall into the zone of metaphysics or gnosis (this is Barth's danger) or will sink back *beneath* the required ethos (this is the danger of ordinary dogmatics). Everything keeps fluctuating between two possibilities.

Here is an example of "ethos", drawn from *Romano Guardini's* commentary on the passage from Romans 8:31, "If God is for us, who can be against us?":

Is that true? Has grace taken away the evil you have done so that the Foe may no longer work his mischief? Can grace so utterly overcome the worst in you that you can no longer rebel against God? And it is not just our vivid memory that asks this question but also the fear of the heart, the melancholia that has no specific cause: How do you know that God is for you? An evil question and woe to them who yield to it! So Paul does not permit the question but counters all possible uneasiness with the

great Yes of faith: It is so! . . . Our defender is here, Jesus Christ, who has revealed that love of God with his whole being: he is the one who died, rose and is enthroned in glory. . . . Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ! Nothing from without and nothing from within, nothing that belongs to the world and nothing that belongs to darkness.[109](#)

The Christian should do away with everything that has the character of the obscure and enslaving: all feelings of fear, of dread, of fixation; the secret longing for the dark, the destructive, the unnatural, for what is evil. Nothing has the right to terrify the Christian—and ultimately nothing even has the power to do so. Just as Christ was victorious, so too he won the victory over fear. Fear in modern times is not only dreadful, but in a perverse sense it is also unnecessary.[110](#)

The figures that are juxtaposed to one another [in the book of Revelation] are not of equal rank, for example the radiant Christ and an equally original, dark and evil Antichrist, any more than the devil is of equal rank as a counterpower to God. Whoever says so blasphemes; of course at most he is only being foolish. God has no power contrary to himself. There is nothing that could resist God, and the same holds for Christ, the Son of God.[111](#)

Christ is not only judge but also redeemer. As judge he is redeemer. The judgment is not the revenge of an insulted Son of God, his personal triumph over his enemies. . . . The judgment remains pure justice. But it is a justice that does not stand in isolation to itself but is fused with Christ's love and care. Judgment finishes and completes the work of redemption.[112](#)

As an example of the upper boundaries, the approximation to a systematization, we may cite *Erich Przywara*:

The mystery of salvation, that is, its ultimate fulfillment in the course of salvation history from creation to exaltation, from original sin to redemption, [is] in fact first in the counsels of God, since God "has chosen us from before the foundation of the world, adopting us as his children".[113](#)

For ultimately the priority of the mystery of Christ over the mystery of the Antichrist is the real inner meaning of all things.[114](#)

So the whole meaning of existence stands under the all-encompassing motto of Romans 11:32 and of the term *admirabile commercium* (which Przywara stresses almost with the vehemence of Luther): Christ has descended into hell that we might be led out of the damnation that is the fate of us all and into heaven. Everything converges on the mystery of Holy Saturday, where Good Friday and Easter Sunday meet:

Even the glory of the Resurrection happens in the hidden protection of darkness itself and is the light wherein the very extremes of this darkness shine and are made manifest. This is an inexorable consequence of the “curse” that the God-man himself became (Gal 3:13): drinking the full dregs of sin, death and hell (Rom 5:12-21). This most extreme of extremities, hell, is experienced by the blessed soul: “*die selige Seek abstieg zur Hölle*”. Since the darkness of God’s own godforsakeness (Mt 27:45-46) seems to be sealed in the darkness of death and hell, it was the blessed soul—that is, the soul living in the blessed vision of the unveiled God—that descended into hell, the place where the Godhead is hidden in the curse of the loss of God.^{[115](#)}

Everything stands in service of this dialectic, and we should not be surprised that we meet once more in Przywara the threefold *paradosis* [handing over, or betrayal] of Christ: by the Father, by Judas and by the Church that we saw Barth also describe.^{[116](#)} So too we find in both these men the lasting relevance of the biblical texts on adultery, from the Old Testament texts describing Jerusalem as a prostitute applied to the great Scarlet Whore of Babylon in the book of Revelation as one prong of the dialectic, to the Church of the New Testament as the other prong. And the contemplation on hell by a person praying the Spiritual Exercises becomes in Christ “an ascension to heaven by a descent into hell”.^{[117](#)} And to cite him once more:

[On the one hand, there is] the absolute recognition of the logical justice that I have felt: not as if any human being at random [and that includes me] is competent to assert that in fact there exists someone who has been damned [again, including me], for the free decision of God has the last word. But according to strictly logical justice I must recognize what I have felt in myself as being quite appropriate, both for the world and for me who lives in the world. . . . [On the other hand], it is precisely against this background that the conclusion stands out so starkly: the greater counterweight of mercy outweighing all logical justice (James 2:13), even to the point of contradicting strict justice. . . . For when “Christ became our curse for us” (Gal 3:13), “God has bound all men over to disobedience that he might have mercy on them all” (Rom 11:32).^{[118](#)}

The dilemma represented by these positions shows that all our attempts to give ample room to the mystery of revelation are feeble gropings to express the inexpressible. Everyone who has ever looked at this mystery knows how difficult it is to find the right way to express things. We seem caught between a dialectic that renounces unity and one that wants to reduce everything to unity. One can try to project into the Scotist picture of Christ a dualistic eschatology;^{[119](#)}

but one can also read the opposite for that same Scotist perspective.^{[120](#)}

But it is not necessary to discuss these different forms of expression here in detail. It is enough if this alone is clear: the problem exists in Catholicism in the same way as it does for Karl Barth, since of course both find the same veiled language of revelation in Scripture. And both have to try to reconcile the statements about the dire consequences of the Last Judgment with those that promise universal salvation.

In this regard we must not pass over the most remarkable figure of sanctity in modern-day Catholicism, *Thérèse of Lisieux*, who saw it as her special mission to interpret and make known the fact that God's righteousness is not in conflict with his love but is to be seen to *be* love. In her longing for the Last Judgment, she hearkened to the line in I John that says that love drives out fear. She lived out this verse, not as an exception to the rule, but sensing that she was a real trailblazer for all "little souls" (and thus for all souls).

These sketches of a Catholic christocentrism have shown that this is in no way what makes Protestantism distinctive. We have cited the most prominent Catholic thinkers to prove this point. They are the leading pioneers of a Catholic renewal. To suspect them of being "outsiders" to mainstream Catholicism would be, as Gottlieb Sohngen said at the beginning of this book, as untrue as it would be unjust. The measure [German: *Mass*] of Catholicism is not the majority opinion or being part of the masses [*Masse*], any more than it is in the Protestant camp. Barth's opinion is one opinion among many, perhaps a well-grounded one. The opinion of the Catholic theologians we have cited is also but one opinion among many and as it seems to us, well grounded too. For it is the opinion that basically goes back to the opinion of the Fathers and of the theology of high Scholasticism.

It is also not in conflict with the formula of the analogy of being, because the analogy of being, according to Przywara, is nothing other than the provisional and abstract expression for this ultimate truth.^{[121](#)}

On the other hand, the quotations we have set forth here have at least gone to show that one can be as radically christocentric as Barth is without having to go down his “dead end”. Everywhere we have left some room for fresh air, some room to breathe: one of the presuppositions of the Incarnation is that there must be a true priority of nature and reason! The Incarnation demands that there be a relatively solid content of meaning that cannot be totally robbed of its substance when we provisionally abstract from our supernatural goal.

The first act of reason is not faith, otherwise faith would not be possible. For the sake of grace and revelation and faith, we must insist on a certain distance here. And once more, out of respect for human nature, human freedom and human decisions (a respect that God himself shows), the eschato-logical climax must remain an open question. The necessity of God’s freely given love can never in any respect be turned into a necessity of the process of nature itself. We are not playing in a game where there is an Absolute factor arrayed against a Relative factor, and the Absolute factor has won from the start. God takes us so seriously that he has lowered and subjected himself to the weakness and powerlessness of human nature in order to become a partner and player befitting man.

And so there are many more transitions and nuances here than seem to be the case in Barth: transitions between faith and unbelief, the movement of nature toward faith (under the influence of grace), progress and setbacks, countless forms of resistance but also of true *appropriation* and *cooperation*. These two concepts show up at the periphery of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* particularly in volume 7, and they will help clarify what still remains at issue between Barth and Catholicism.

Chapter 4

GRACE AND SIN

When we come to the problem of appropriating grace, we encounter the more extensive problem of the ontology of grace and the correlative doctrine of sin. In the view of Catholic theology, we must first proceed from the most universal reflections on the structure of Catholic thought and then on to the relation of thought to being and event before we can take up the narrower problem of the content of the concept of nature and its relation to the sphere of grace.

Indeed, we have seen that a full determination of the content of the concept of grace presupposes God's self-revelation: it cannot simply be read off of the merely formal relation between the two spheres. This determination of the content, however, has yet to be achieved. We must pursue this issue, however, because only by means of it can the ultimate context of Catholic doctrine be understood.

According to Catholic doctrine, grace is that self-disclosure and self-communication of God in which God no longer possesses his own divine inner life for himself but now bestows it upon the world and thereby gives the creature a share in it. Now because God is both absolute spirit and absolute Being, this sharing in God's life must also be both something conscious and ontically real: or what amounts to the same thing, it can only be understood as simultaneously involving both an event aspect as well as an ontological aspect.

If it were merely something conscious and cognitive—that is, if God were known in his self-revelation only as a truth about himself that the creature would have to accept and to believe—then even though we might think we had been enriched by this knowledge, the gain would prove to be entirely illusory. For really all we would have gained is a view of a world to which we were otherwise forbidden entry. But this kind of merely cognitive revelation of a divine world is inherently contradictory and impossible, because God's truth is one with his Being (this is expressed in the statement that God *is* love).

In other words, God cannot communicate his truth without at the same time giving us access to his Being.

This makes evident once more the inherent connection between our second pair of concepts: event and Being, a pair that is just as correlative as the first. In other words, God's revelation can only be an event if something actually takes place. And that means once more a genuine ontological transformation, a genuine imparting of divine Being and a genuine sharing of the creature in God's Being that affects the creature's own being as well as the creature's awareness of the world of divine Being. In fact, if nothing actual occurs between God and man that can be expressed ontologically, then in fact what happens is. . . nothing at all. Then all talk of event and happening must be restricted to the quite separate spheres of activity: God is in his heaven, and man wanders here alone on his poor earth.

If this were the case, then the only transformation we could hope for would be one merely of empty hope (*in spe*) and not a real one (*in re*). We would be dealing only with an exclusively eschatological transformation, with a justification that is merely forensic and imputed, one that applies only to the cognitive order of *declared* value without ever affecting the essence and being of the creature in its inherent worth.

Paradoxically enough, when we look more closely at the matter, Catholic dogmatics is at its most penetrating at precisely the moment when its ontological categories seem most to obscure the event-character of grace. For Catholic dogmatics not only presupposes the event-character of grace, it alone is able to cast light on it. If human beings are not "true partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), indeed if they are not ontically incorporated into Christ as members and parts of his *body*, then in fact the event of God's revelation does not truly touch them.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer already realized this in 1931 in his penetrating study *Akt und Sein*, which tried to unify a theology of actualism with a theology of being-in-Christ, that is, an ontology of the Church. Karl Barth cannot simply close himself off to this insight if he wants to take seriously his shift to the analogy of faith. Barth first started out by trying to set absolute store by act and event, which inevitably led

him to theopanism, that is, to the dialectical disintegration of the creature's own inherent being.

To cross over the threshold into the divine world would then entail the destruction and immolation of the world of the creature. But since the creature still in fact continues to exist, this whole transition can only be posited as occurring eschatologically, in a future that must necessarily remain in the future if there is still supposed to be a creaturely realm of being.

So we must abandon this whole schema as inadequate to the data of Christian revelation if we want to preserve the analogy between God and creature from every attempt to collapse them in a proto- or eschato-logical identity. It is crucial that we trust in that event that lets the creature—without loss of identity—partake of what is most unique to God. All of this implies that Barth's radical eschatological thought must be discarded as outmoded and inappropriate to his basic intentions.

And why can something that is going to happen to the creature in the age to come also not take place, in some hidden way, here and now? If we invoke analogy to understand how the creature will not be destroyed in the future upon entering the divine world, why cannot the creature gain access to God in the present too? And if this access is real, why should the real and ontic sanctification of the creature through grace be postponed for the future aeon alone and only be treated as merely a forensic sanctity here and now in the face of all the statements of revelation? Why this restriction to the cognitive side of things alone?

Catholic dogmatics has taken the consequences of these difficulties seriously: if the *being* of the creature is something that has been willed, founded and created by God, then it is so because God has willed to enter into a real history with it. And history means encounter, mutual influence and exchange of what is proper to each partner. If it is to be a real history made up of real events, then we cannot avoid the real ontological elements in this exchange: there is a real participation and a lasting ontic effect (*qualitas inhaerens*). What is more, within the absolute predicates and always as expression of the real event, there is room for differing degrees,

means, circumstances, for more and less, for drawing closer and moving farther away, for growth and diminution.

Moreover, because we are dealing with God's revelation and thus with his entire initiative in this exchange, we must grant an unconditioned priority to the ontological over the cognitive. It is much more important that God has in fact taken hold of us than our awareness of this fact. Of course, this is a priority of a logical, not necessarily a temporal, order. But we ought not to work from the example of the unconscious infant as our standard, which is actually exceptional.¹ For it is not simply a question of the priority of the objective *opus operatum* of a sacrament over the subjective *opus operands* of the believer. The real issue is the priority of God's activity in man overall: God's activity first touches man's being and transforms it by giving it a share in the divine nature so that it can then affect his consciousness and summon him to faith.

This does not prejudice what happens in the temporal order within the real process of justification, since the Catholic distinction between actual grace and habitual grace remains secondary to that more basic law. There is only *one* grace and *one* essence of grace, even though it may take countless ways and forms in bestowing itself on man and claiming him. No one should know this better than Barth, who scorned any hint of "synergism" and mocked every attempt to put man's response to God on the same level as God and his Word.

Barth expressly refuted these eschatological exaggerations in his first period. If the theology of the Reformation overstressed the pretemporal reality of God (as their doctrine of predestination indicates), the theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries stressed too one-sidedly the supratemporal reality of God (as their doctrine of eternity-in-the-moment shows). And then its theology at the onset of the twentieth century fell too much into emphasizing the post-temporal reality of God.² As Barth describes the situation obtaining then:

It was part of the internal and external situation of those years that the divine and judging No against the whole present time—but also against all future possible and attempted developments of piety and culture—had to be simply proclaimed and heard more clearly than the gracious Yes that we meant to hear coming from the end—the

real end—of all things. This we wanted to express, but the matter could only be expressed in the contradictory *form* in which it was first broached, because of the psychic earthquake that shook Europe at the outbreak of the Great World War [I]. It was tumultuously greeted by some as the expression of the spirit of the times; and by others, who were less open to this spirit, it was with equal vehemence rejected as a “postwar epiphenomenon”. This impression was, furthermore, not that far off but could be corrected in time. Much more dangerous was the *content* itself: that we, precisely by proceeding more logically and purely than our predecessors, were nonetheless in the process of systematically bringing God’s eternity to the least common denominator of post-temporality. . . . We had not yet encountered the concept of eternity in its full biblical range. [And after citing his commentary on Romans—at Romans 13:11f., which says, significantly, “Understand the present time. The hour has come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed”—he goes on to say:] It is clear that I did say there things that can and have to be said at the periphery if [this passage] is to be correctly understood. But it is also clear that with all this art and eloquence I missed the distinctive feature of the passage, the teleology that it ascribes to time as it moves toward a real end. And above all it is clear and astonishing that, in my exposition, the one thing that continues to hold the field as something tangible is the one-sided supratemporal understanding of God I had set out to combat. At this point the objection could be made (and was, by friend and critic alike) that, while I had radically disturbed the optimism of the liberal Protestant conception of time, in itself it had really been confirmed by the extreme form it had been given by me. It was at this point that Paul Tillich, with his “Kairos” philosophy, and later Rudolf Bultmann, with his reduction of the New Testament anthropology to the terms of an existentialist philosophy, believed that they could welcome me as one of themselves. . . . It was not easy to put right these not undeserved misunderstandings and guide theology out of the suspicion under which it had fallen of being only a “theology of crisis”. It could not actually be the theology of crisis for more than a moment. And that it could be it only for a moment showed that the basic, eschatological application on which it rested was too strong and arbitrary, like all reactions [3, 711-19].

We recall that in the *Church Dogmatics* (2, 181f.) Barth had earlier tried to reconcile the Christology of Luther with extra-Calvinistic developments. In the same tractate, he energetically invoked the help of the concept of Being, rejecting the spiritualistic “horror of physical nature” (*physis*). But this is a horror in which actualists and eschatologists—if they mean to be truly radical—must also partake. We recall Barth’s attempts to describe the history that is God’s Word in the world not simply as a “proto-history” (as actualism and eschatologism might assume) but as a genuine, even intraworldly history. It does not suffice to emphasize in a vague sort of way the historicity of revelation in order to overcome this misunderstanding. This historicity must be expressly understood and explained as analogy. History possesses its own natural course and meaning.

God's actual revelation enters into this history, and it announces its own transhistoricality and becomes the judge and measure of all worldly history only by becoming a real part of that worldly history.

Corresponding to this, but on a more formal level, is the theological doctrine of time and its analogue. Indeed, one can begin this treatment of time the way Barth does by rejecting its purely philosophical essential features, because actual concrete time that we experience is for him subjected to sin. But if God has established a new kind of time for the world in Christ, if he has really entered into our time with his genuine "eternal time", then this must mean that this divine presence in the world is

also human and therefore temporal presence. Thus it is a segment of what we call "historical time" or world history. It is not transcendent to time; the divine presence does not merely intersect human history at only one point of tangency but penetrates time. No: it assumes time. No: it creates time for itself [2, 55].

This sentence is true provided we insist that the two final Noes are not meant to abolish the first formula but to complete it. Barth is clearly reaching to encompass these two realities, which here stand apart, the better to make himself understood:

Just as human existence in general becomes something new and different by virtue of the Son of God assuming it, just as human flesh cannot repeat Adam's sin by virtue of the eternal Word becoming flesh, so too time becomes a different and new time by virtue of becoming the time of Jesus Christ, even though it still belongs to our lost time [2, 57].

The New Testament's determinations of time point out that "by virtue of its content precisely as time, the extraordinary time of Jesus Christ should also be characterized in, with and under a definite calendrical and proto-time" (2, 57). It is "the fullness of time", because this time has been "assumed" into God with Christ's assumption of a human nature:

*The Word spoken from eternity lifts the time addressed by this Word into its own eternity as now *its own* time (without thereby being dissolved by time into something temporal). The Word gives time a share in the self-sufficient Being of God. [It is] an unequalled and peerless perfection, the very model of the future, and so something genuinely present [ibid.].*

And now the world's time, our problematic and alienating time, gains a share in this time of Christ, becoming "simultaneous" to it (2, 61). In this "transition" (2, 62) our time becomes truly past (*ta archata parelthen*), and the time of Christ, with its dimensions of expectation, fulfillment and remembrance (all moments of eschatological expectation), becomes our real time.

In this way, the "analogy of time" is properly circumscribed in these ever-looming dual aspects: that God's time *becomes* our time and that, even in doing so, our time, without ceasing to be temporal or our time, gains a share in God's time. If we take the first aspect (the *non destruit*) with full seriousness, then we can also draw out the consequences of the second aspect (the *extollit*) in all their ramifications.

The analogy of time, which describes God's real descent into our time in Christ and the consequent elevation of our time into God's, is the crucial expression of the fact that the two forms of time do not intersect tangentially but meet in exchange and mutual influence. Thus something ontically real happens when by his grace God communicates his own self to us and to the world. But as soon as this does happen (and the movement of descent and ascent where this analogy is founded *is* the radical expression of this event!), the relative factor (that is, the creature) plays its own codetermining role in the process. God's gracious self-communication means at the same time that man's being and actions, with all their relativity and provisionality, are relevant for God in this history.

It is at this point that we encounter the whole problem of the sinner and his justification through grace. Nowhere else are confessional differences as sharp today as they were at the time of the Reformation and the Council of Trent than here. Luther's *simul justus et peccator* (man's simultaneous status as sinner and saved) was a very ambiguous formula. It can express the most extreme contrast with the Catholic view; but it can also, as Robert Grosche has shown, be interpreted more leniently, according to Catholic lights.³

In general, we can say that the formula was appropriate for what Luther was trying to express. On the one hand, he was considering the state of *homo viator*, where man is but merely on the way to God

and is not yet fully justified before him; on the contrary, man is still involved in real history and must daily die to the old man and put on the new. On the other hand, Luther was stressing the fact that man's justification is from beginning to end something bestowed upon him as a gift from above, which he can never appropriate as "his own".

This formula only becomes unacceptable to Catholic dogmatics when the first aspect of justification is distorted by an exaggerated eschatologism and ascribes justification to man only as a hope and not also as a present reality and when the second aspect is contorted by a legalistic nominalism, so that justification never can become a real, intrinsic part of man. At this point, the formula either becomes an outright contradiction in terms: the sinner is justified as sinner and insofar as he is a sinner; or it is regarded as a meaningless estimation of the sinner that has no bearing on the true situation: the sinner, who is in himself nothing but a sinner, is nonetheless regarded by God as justified because of Christ's merits.

Karl Barth has repeatedly asserted that these two possible readings are not relevant to the issue. For him, the formula, rightly understood, is meant to point out the real occurrence, the genuine history, of God with the sinner:

Luther's *simul justus et peccator* cannot and should not, in Luther's sense, be taken to mean that the totality with which we are righteous and sinners involves an equal and equally serious determination of our existence. It is not a justification and demand to see ourselves as righteous and sinners in the same sense. It is not just as legitimate for us to sin as to practice our righteousness. . . . The two things that are "simultaneous" are our past and our future. Our sin has been, and our righteousness comes. God affirms our righteousness as he negates our sin. This contemporaneity never means in any sense that we belong to both spheres in the same way. It is in this relationship of past sin and future righteousness alone that the two spheres are contemporary, and not with the vibrating balance of scales or in an endless dialectic. We stand between the two, between yesterday and tomorrow, that which lies behind and that which lies before us, what is above and what is below. But these are not like two partners with the same rights and powers and competence. We are certainly placed between them. But, first of all and above all, Jesus Christ stands between them. It is in this way and in him that we are in this position. But in him the equilibrium between them has been upset and ended. He is the way from the one to the other, and the way is irreversible. He is the turning. If we try to hold any other view of the relationship between the two and to make them equal, we will have to forget and abandon him, whatever our pretext may be, even if it is on the grounds of the greatest verisimilitude [3, 707].

The *simul* therefore means “not a balancing but rather the abolition of balancing” (3, 706).

Semper peccatores, semper justi: this refers to the forgiveness of sins, to the fact that the two predicates do not mutually exclude each other, nor still less are they dialectically balanced, but that God weights this balance with the preponderance of grace, giving weight to the second over the first [4, 846].

Even in the interpretation of the corresponding paragraphs of the Heidelberg Confession, Barth speaks no differently.⁴ But, in spite of this, it is not vain to question whether, by hearkening back to the doctrine of time and the aeons, this interpretation—which avoids contradiction in favor of process and event—really suffices for making the process of event credible. Too much in Barth gives the impression that nothing much really *happens* in his theology of event and history, because everything has already happened in eternity: for example, there is Barth’s wariness, or, at best, an overly delicate application of ontic categories, in his treatment of grace and justification. Then there is his ascription of the effects of the sacraments to the cognitive order alone, since he rejects the Catholic and Lutheran doctrine that the sacraments effect and cause real change. And finally he transposes both forms of time (or aeons) into a pretemporal eternity, where sin is ever-past and justification ever-future, and rejects all talk of growth, progress—even of a possible lapse and loss of grace and of faith. In short, Barth rejects all discussion of anything in the realm of the relative and temporal that would make for a real and vibrant history of man with his redeeming Lord and God.

If this is true, if in the eternity of Jesus Christ sin is always something already put in the past, then we must wonder how sin and unbelief can ever become an active presence in present time. Are they not just ghostly phantasms without any real substance to them? If so, is the Cross not then (in which sin and sinner are rejected) in reality God’s own monologue with himself, a monologue of love? Does not the Cross then become only “God’s own suffering”,⁵ in which his “wrath” poured out on the world is but “his love, whose ardor is so strong that it takes on the aspect of wrath”?⁶

Let us now try to give to the Lutheran formula *simul Justus et peccator* a truly Catholic interpretation, a sense that combines a truly christocentric point of view with a truly temporal history. To do this we must distinguish various layers of this whole question and carefully separate them from one another. For in the multiple layers of this question lay the true mysteries of Christian existence, which are no less mysterious than God himself (since we are dealing with God's effects in man). This issue will in fact transcend every definitive human concept, for we are approaching the very ineffability of God.

Faced with these mysterious depths, Luther's formula seems oversimplified and flat. True, it points in the direction of the mystery, but it really does not provide a genuine grasp of the matter, which was, after all, Luther's intention.

1. A first, quite general point, as Barth describes it, insists that our temporal existence in faith is a movement toward a goal, or, as St. Paul says, a race (1 Cor 9:24). According to this image, we are called to spurn the past and turn toward what is coming (Phil 3:13) by dying each day to the outer man and being renewed inwardly day by day (2 Cor 4:16) and by an ever-renewed act of repentance (Heb 3:7f). But our final redemption is eschatological, *in spe*; and so vis-à-vis this final state, we dwell in this world of sin as sinners among other sinners who quite rightly pray out each day: *mea maxima culpa*.

Nonetheless, while admitting all this, the Catholic must sharpen these paradoxes of Luther and Barth by going beyond them. For they are indissolubly linked in this eschatological perspective with other statements of Scripture that are equally important: the Christian has already been freed from past sin in this very aeon and partakes of God's life in grace and thus is freed from the pressure to sin further.

The *in spe* of the first perspective does not abolish the *in re* of the second. However much these statements in Scripture seem to clash with one another (as in the way Paul keeps moving from the indicative to the imperative and in radical statements in John), the Catholic will not want to weaken either set of statements in favor of the other. But nor will he seek to solve the dilemma by simply leaving

it at the level of a dialectical contradiction, thus despairing of a solution. Rather, a Catholic will consider the noncontradiction of really *being* justified as the limit-concept when our thoughts consider only the dimension of *becoming* justified. And this is because of the ontological meaning of grace as a real participation in God's nature already in this life.

2. The righteousness of the Christian is something granted on the basis of the merits of Christ. It comes to him as pure grace from outside and in no way as something he has earned. Before any act of cooperation in this process of justification, prior, that is, to all acts of personal assent of man to grace, lies this absolutely unilateral and unmerited gift of God's grace, who loved us while we were still sinners. All our subsequent acts of reception, all appropriation and cooperation, all attempts to ensure that this grace bears fruit in our lives, neither abolishes nor supersedes this gracious character of our new life.

But yet again, the Catholic will insist that the "forensic" character of grace and justification be correlated with the other sense of justification (a side that the Reformers of course did not totally neglect but still slighted too much): that is, as the beginning of a process of real sanctification—real, because it gives a real partaking in the merits of Christ and in the divine life opened up by him. Note that this is a real *par-taking* and not just a passive reception of one's allotment. One must actively allow God to act in us that we may become coworkers, not only reflecting but actively radiating the real light given to us. The gift of grace should become such an intimate part of ourselves that we can bring forth its fruit as if it were our own.

3. But this only deepens the paradox, plunging us farther into the mysterious depths of God's dealings with us. The more deeply the believer tries to live his faith, the more will he be conscious of how grace is transforming his inner reality. Grace (or more concretely: Jesus Christ, our Advocate before the Father) accomplishes this for him. This happens because Jesus understands the believer's paltry and broken (nay, often enough his perverted) human works in the

light of grace and love, interpreting them in this love and presenting them to the Father in this light.

Here the noetic side of divine grace can be seen alongside the ontic side, complementing, not abolishing, it. This tension pervades both relationships: that between the sinner (or the person who is always capable of sinning) and the grace of Christ; and the more general and broader relationship between creature as such and God, between the relative and the absolute.

Already even in this most abstract relationship there exists the necessity for a “translation” of the creature’s relative and temporal deeds and expressions if they are to have validity and durability within the region of the absolute and eternal God. Even Adam needed grace to be the partner of God that God wanted him to be. Even then he could not have ascribed any of his good works to his own power; even in the primal state of innocence he would have experienced—in all innocence and freedom—the abyss that separates the servant from the Lord.

Now in the order of sin, man’s awareness of this abyss is even sharper: this consciousness is so acute that he draws back in shame when he encounters graciousness: “Lord, depart from me. I am a sinful man!” And the more worthy a person becomes to share in the gracious works of the Lord, the more evident it becomes how unworthy he is (all the saints say so!), all the more sober becomes his humility, all the more realistic his view of himself. This leads to the next point.

4. Only one who has been justified by grace really has a feel for what the Bible calls “the world”. The world is not individual, personal sin that can be easily delineated and isolated apart from context. The world, rather, is that totality over which sin *reigns*, even when it is “not taken into account” (Rom 5:13). It is the realm of “cravings” and “lusts” (1 Jn 1:16). It is the root and soil from which sin breaks out, not simply as a merely passive potency but as the normal fruit of a constantly active potency, ever ready to spring into action. It is like a “womb” ever conceiving, ever giving birth (see James 1:14-15: “We are tempted when, by our own evil desire, we are dragged away and

enticed. Then, once desire is conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death”).

Now the dividing line between actual sin and this active potency is a real one, to be sure. But just as real are the various connections and transitions between them. As long as the roots of sin in man are not eradicated—and for the vast majority of human beings this only occurs at death—new sins will continue to break forth, blossoming with ingenious fecundity. Not only this, but even the “good” that we do is tainted over and over again with the world’s malignant influence. What good deed of ours is so worthy that it does not have an ignoble motive lurking in its background somewhere?

The project of untangling this dense web cannot happen in this present life on a purely psychological level alone. Between this world and the intangible world of faith lies an intermediate zone, in which purely psychological factors are themselves transcended; while faith, without ceasing to be faith, can be incarnated in experiences. This is the zone that can be variously termed a “spiritual sense” (or, as Ignatius says, *sentimento espiritual*), an “instinct for the Holy Spirit” (Przywara)⁷ or a faculty for “discerning spirits”. Here is where faith is on a journey, seeking to understand (*fides quaerens intellectum [et sensum]*).

This is the region where we concretely encounter what the biblical term *world* means: primarily that spotlighted zone where it becomes so evident how radically disordered man really is. Just as the well-tuned microscope can pick up impurities in a clear drop of water that would be simply unimaginable to the naked eye, so too the spiritual person discovers how polluted, murky and impure the spiritual atmosphere is that he is inhaling with every fiber of his being. This is an experience that can often drive the saints, according to their own witness, to a kind of despair about themselves. They want to separate themselves totally from the “monstrous corpse” they are, so that only God’s own life might live within them.

Once more, however, this paradoxical experience is only possible in all its purity in a Catholic context and under Catholic presuppositions. That is, we must first admit the possibility of an authentic, inner and ontic sanctification, in whose light and efficacy we can finally glimpse the essence and real identity of “the world”.

5. The paradox deepens even more when we feel that it is getting increasingly difficult for us to distinguish between “my” sin and “your” sin—which is paradoxical because this occurs precisely as we gain more theological experience with the resistance of the world. Here we confront the mystery of man’s solidarity in sin. Every personal sin is also a community sin: both in the sense of impairing the community but also being caused, to some extent, by the community’s sin. Far from circumscribing sin, it makes it weightier, putting new burdens of responsibility on the sinner. And since the effects of evil committed and good deeds left undone increase and multiply relentlessly, our debt is not paid off when our personal guilt is forgiven.

Writers like Dostoyevsky and Claudel, in common with the saints, knew in all its depths this social side of guilt. And the Catholic paradox is far superior here to Protestant interpretations, for it insists that the just man, to the extent that he shares an active portion in the holiness of the Redeemer, also receives a more active portion in the task of bearing a guilt not his own, thereby sharing in the very work of redemption. This finally reaches the point where he can no longer distinguish whether he is suffering for his own sins or that of others.

For Christ himself, when he was hanging on the Cross, no longer wished to make this distinction either. He endured God’s malediction against sin, suffering vicariously for us all. He had no wish to be the “exception” but rather the “rule”—for all. And, because of Christ, the sinner who wants to share in these sufferings can no longer make this distinction either. The true follower of Christ joins Christ in that darkness that is all the more bitter because he knows that he can never suffer alongside of Christ. No, this suffering highlights how deeply bound he is in solidarity with all his fellow sinners, who are jointly responsible for the Cross of Christ.

6. The realities painted here find their full embodiment in the experience of *temptation*. Temptation mercilessly reveals the yawning chasm between Being and Ought, between what is and what should be. We see the depths of this fissure from an insight into God’s justice and judgment. However harsh this view, it is a true one,

even though it but hides the transfiguring vision of grace and transforming love.

When we undergo temptation, we are exposed not only to a yawning and persistent abyss and to our incapacity to measure up. Worse, we feel how hopelessly distorted are our good works. Every single feature of human life is lost before God if grace is lacking—a grace that the sinner cannot count on and to which he has no right whatever. No one who has really found himself trapped in the coils of temptation has ever been able to save even one of his works from the fire of divine judgment. No one in such a situation would ever even dream of laying claim to any reward.

In temptation we come to see, not an empty and speculative possibility, but a very real one: we realize that God *could* very well have dealt with us out of pure justice. This is no mirage or delusion, no hollow, Romantic pose of despair, but a real insight into the doom that *would have been* if God had not. . . . In temptation, we come to appreciate how much of a dead-end sin really is. The sinner might do what he will, choose according to his wishes; he might say Yes, say No, saying nothing at all. No matter. Whatever he does will be a contortion if grace (which he cannot count on!) does not come to transform *everything* in him from the very roots. And even though it has been given especially to the saints to stare most intently at this naked truth, something of this insight lies within every Christian conscience. Anyone who truly loves God will taste of this chastisement. It is just that the saints are given to see without veils what the rest of us would just as soon not care to know.

7. What is described here as Christian “experience”, however, also has its objective counterpart in dogmatics: the redemption of the world coincides and occurs at precisely the moment when sin reaches its unsurpassable acme: in the death of God on Golgotha, where every sinner is an active and contemporary participant. Where human beings and the human race are at their sinful worst, there they are objectively redeemed and made righteous. The whole experience just described is but the echo in the personal sphere of what in the objective realm is the law of redemption: God’s grace

takes the form of a judgment on sinners, who are embodied *in toto* by their representative on the Cross.

It is *Christ on the Cross* who is *simul justus et peccator*; he is the sinless one who was made sin for our sake (2 Cor 5:21) and who was turned into a curse (Gal 3:13) so that we might be redeemed from sin and its curse. The Son of God did not become man solely to represent and to be the definitive analogy between God and the creature in general terms. His mission was more concrete than that: he took on the form of the concrete analogy between the God of wrath and grace and between the creature both condemned and redeemed. On the Cross, we see what sin is, and at Easter we can find out all that grace can do. Only God can show us this:

Because he himself was God, [Christ] could submit to God's own harshness, . . . and only God's mercy was strong enough not to perish from this suffering [3, 450].

Only this event can truly illumine what the Old and New Testaments mean by temptation, suffering and death. But this is the only place where we can also truly understand what grace means, what extraordinary powers it has: to plunge into the flames of wrath to be consumed by the even more powerful flames of love, and to invert and completely transform the night, to change the cross of death and sin into the abyss of the love of God. In other words, we cannot find the ultimate solution to the paradox of being *simul justus et peccator* in ourselves; we must look to Christ for it.

Of course, that does not mean that the *forma Christi* is ours in any immediate way. We are the sinners, while he is the Just One. In being “made sin” for us, he has not ceased being the Just One; while we, in being made just, have in a true sense ceased being sinners. In taking on the “form of sin”, Christ did more than merely assume a punishment meant for us. He went much farther and bore in its full depths—while being assaulted to the limit by temptation and suffering for us—all that divides God from man and person from person. All that corrodes our relationships, all that isolates and shames us, all that wells up within us, tempting us to sin, the very contradiction between sin and God—all this Jesus has overcome, but only in this relentless and unsparing exposure to all that divides

us from God.⁸ And so Jesus is the final and decisive form of the *simul justus et peccator*.

Indeed, when we are assaulted by temptation, it happens in this final form. And so once more we encounter the priority of redemption. Not in the sense that sin is only possible because there must be sin to have redemption and redemption comes first. But it does mean that all *de facto* sin is circumscribed by the completely free and innocent form of Christ's redemption. We remain separated from this form by the distance of sin from God, for we are true sinners. And, as such, we really do conduct our lives in complete contradiction to God. But God's decree is mightier than the sinner's. *Ubi abundavit peccatum, superabundavit gratia*: where sin abounded, grace did abound the more. So here too, the last word is christic.

To summarize, God's grace is a participation in his inner divine life. As such it raises the creature above and beyond any claims or longings it might possess. This participation is neither purely forensic nor purely eschatological, rather it is real, internal and present. It is an event that effects a transformation of the very being of the creature.

Because of this character of grace (to be an event of transformation), it leaves room for all real events and phases that make up man's way to God: conversion, progress, backsliding, cooperation and obstacles. Redemption is not effected "in one lump", so to speak, as if all the petty details of daily life were ultimately meaningless (since in this view they have been relegated to a dead past under the gaze of eternity). Redemption comes to us respecting our incarnate lives in time, leaving room for us to continue to change as we follow in the footsteps of the incarnate Lord. The steps we take in this discipleship have their own inherent meaning and weight. God takes our decisions seriously, working them into his plans by his holy providence.

PART IV

PROSPECTS FOR RAPPROCHEMENT

Chapter 1

A LOOK BACK

In this work we have become acquainted with Karl Barth's theology of nature and grace. But we have also juxtaposed that theology with a Catholic and christocentric perspective on this same issue. In doing so, we have observed a gradual and undeniable rapprochement from both sides taking place. This dual movement has not produced full agreement, nor should it be expected to. Barth and the group of Catholic thinkers who have been drawn into a dialogue with him hold many different opinions. But if we look at their deeper agreements while ignoring merely terminological differences, we will realize that these differences are certainly no greater (in fact they are less) than those, for example, between Barth and Brunner or the differences among Catholic thinkers about how, for example, Vatican I should be interpreted, or Christology or ecclesiology.

That is all this book has set out to do. We can now answer the question posed at the end of the Introduction about whether the issues discussed here are really points that justify splitting the Church (the so-called *articula stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*). Do they really have the strength to carry on their shoulders the weight of the splits in the Church? (I am referring here exclusively to the issues of God the Creator, Sanctifier and Redeemer, that is, the tracts on *de Deo creante, elevante, et redimente*, and not to the more intractable issues of the Church and her sacraments.)

All we have determined is that the fundamental views of Barth in these earlier tracts do not *of themselves* necessitate a split in the Church when he comes to the second set of issues. To be sure, this does not predetermine the outcome of the later tracts: there still might well be grounds based on the essence of the Church and of her sacraments, as established in Scripture and tradition, that under certain circumstances could, or indeed must, lead to such a split. The Reformation invoked such standards to a great extent to justify its position. Our only intention has been to undermine those reasons that are cited in tracts on God and Christ and have been so often

cited as necessarily leading to a shattering of the unity of the Church.

Perhaps such results seem rather nugatory. But we have in fact cut through the Gordian knot that Karl Barth first tied, for *he* is the one who has logically bound his whole theology of the Church and the sacraments to the first tracts, building his ecclesiology on his doctrine of God and Christ. All the basic decisions occur early on, and he himself insists that he wants his theology to be understood “systematically”, that is, as a unity: the crucial statements of the first part are themselves the outline for the later tracts.

Now the Reformation proceeded from the opposite end. The great Reformers started with the abuses in the Church and in the praxis of sacramental economy. Only then did they work their way back to a *theology* of Church and sacrament; and then, and only then, did they transform their treatment of the more ultimate issues of God, creation and redemption in view of their previously worked-out ecclesiologies.

Now Barth, who is a theologian and not a reformer, can afford to move more logically, from the prior to the latter issues. But, ironically, the path he chose proved to be insufficient for making the split seem justified. To work his way out of this impasse and to make his procedure seem more logical as a work in the traditions of the Reformers, Barth was forced to ground Catholicism on the systematic concept of the analogy of being. But his version of this concept was extremely simplistic—in fact, it was downright fraudulent. So his first task was to set up a straw man, an opponent who would serve as such a lucrative target for so serious a bombardment.

In this book we have dismantled this illusory battlefield. It is not formulas that are battling one another (*analogia fidei* against *analogia ends*) but two ways of understanding the one revelation of God, each taking the measure of the other. And if we simply have to substitute formulas for the kind of hard work set before us, then we can sum up the issue using this formula: (1) Barth’s way of understanding God’s revelation in Christ includes the analogy of being within the analogy of faith; and (2) the way the Catholic authors we have been citing understand the christocentricity of

God's plan for the world allows the analogy of being to gain its density and concreteness only within the wider analogy of faith (understood in the widest possible sense).

In the christocentric theology of these authors, we are simultaneously permitted to unite and harmonize the inalienable demands of the Church as promulgated above all by Vatican I with the essential insights of Karl Barth without artificial or forced syncretism. And what are these demands from the Church?

The Church requires first of all that we recognize an authentic *ordo* of nature and reason that is relatively independent of the *ordo* of grace. Secondly, the Church calls on us to recognize an authentic, though relative, priority of the former over the latter. This requirement has been completely upheld by those Catholic thinkers who see grace as the ground and goal of creation. One can very much maintain at one and the same time that the why and wherefore of nature are grace and yet that nature does have a real priority over grace. One can maintain that the wherefore of reason is faith (or, more exactly, the beatific vision of God, of which faith is but the veiled beginning) and, at the same time, that reason has its own structure and legitimacy.

Nature and grace have a meaning; and grace and faith are the ultimate meaning of this meaning. The first Adam had a determinate nature, but the second Adam is the ground and goal of this nature. In this respect, what Catholic theology calls the preambles of the faith (*praeambula fidei*) and names as "apologetics" is quite possible. Within the ultimate priority of grace and faith to nature and reason there is the relative priority of the latter to the former, an openness or *potentia oboedientialis*. This openness and potency make it an appropriate activity of our nature, *when* the order of grace is opened up, to explore not only the inner meaning and content of revelation (*fides quaerens intellectum*) but also to comprehend the meaning of nature and reason that grace and faith have given to nature (*intellectus quaerens fidem*).

That this movement from reason to faith is possible only within the disclosed order of grace and revelation does not contradict what we have just said. For, as we have shown, the absolute priority of grace implies the opposite: that reason has been created for faith, and so it

can only find its ultimate meaning in faith, which itself never occurs except by means of grace. Furthermore, reason is only reason through faith and can only know about God, revelation and *itself* through grace.

The order of grace and the process of justification are an order that is particularly open, dynamic and progressive. This *ordo* creates space for a process, as Trent has declared (Denz. 798). It is a process that takes place inside the realm of grace,¹ which does nothing to prejudice the fact that man is not justified through any merit of his own but by faith (Denz. 801).

It is not possible to simplify matters further than this. At this point all we can do is refer to our twofold perspective: the absolute priority of grace and revelation and the relative priority of nature and its faculties. Nor could Barth go farther than his own formula of an outer ground and an inner ground. A doctrine of the analogy of being that is concrete (that is, christologically understood)—this is Catholic theology's way of taking this twofold (but unequal) grounding seriously.

Which of Karl Barth's insights ought to be given serious consideration by Catholic theology? We can answer: those that involve the foundations for a christocentrism, for the historicity of nature and the created character of worldly truth. Whoever affirms the first point, the basic christo-centricity, as the cited Catholic authors have done, will also have to affirm the other two points. The natural order, for all its own laws and persisting condition, ultimately rests on the summit of this freest of all events, the Incarnation, and the history that flows from it: that between God and man.

This history is, in its very center as well as at every other point, the *concretissimum*, concreteness personified. To distance ourselves from this concreteness through abstraction is impossible, indeed sinful. However much there is room for legitimate abstraction and the formation of universal concepts, these remain merely relative to that most concrete reality of all, from which we cannot distance ourselves.

On the other hand, this *concretissimum* is also the fullest and richest of realities, which is why it is so inexhaustibly rich in interpretative value. As event it is not mute or a-logical but is the

source of all the meaning in existence and nature, justifying and fulfilling them. And within the various interpretations of this event (best circumscribed by the category of contemplation), we find room for the use of universal concepts, categories, properties and finally of Being itself.

Such a procedure—which Barth himself was forced to see as entirely legitimate and which could hardly be otherwise if we are to have any theological reflection at all—is the opposite of trying to force the revelatory truth of Jesus Christ and of the salvation history that leads up to him into philosophical categories that would drain history of its most characteristic properties. For this runs the danger of reading off the basic laws of revelation from a schema that would be valid for any possible world.

Here we come to Barth's third and final point: the creaturely character of intraworldly truth. This is something that Catholic philosophy and theology only too rarely set over against the qualities of God's eternal truth. As with finite created Being, intraworldly truth is also finite and changeable and in *this* sense is not absolute, as Thomas Aquinas expressly says.² This is why Thomas likewise rejected Platonism, for Platonism unconsciously equates the validity of intraworldly universals with God's eternal ideas. This Platonism is all too prone to the critique made by Gottlieb Söhngen, who speaks of this assumption as a dangerous countermelody [*Kontrafaktur*] that blocks out the truth of revelation, or more scathingly as "a monkey that apes theology's claim to be a *scientia Dei et beatorum*, mocking our status as children of God".³ The reason for this polemic rests on the way Christian Platonism claims for itself an ability to anticipate God's eternal validities based on its own timeless and general abstractions. This confuses and equates the light of natural reason with the irradiating power of a supernatural and heavenly light.

In earlier centuries, when philosophy and theology were not so aware of their separate spheres of competence and when this pagan and Platonic counterpoint was felt to be more immediately translatable into the Christian understanding of eternity, such a Christian Platonism might be condoned. But today, when we have begun to demarcate more exactly the boundaries of created nature and reason, we must—parallel to this process—recognize the

worldly limits of all human models, all conceptual systems, all world views.

Joseph Maréchal and Erich Przywara both provide examples for this insight. They recognize the relativity and finitude of our conceptual schemes, but in doing so they also avoid any taint of modern relativism and skepticism, for they judge these schemes by God's own concrete dealings with history. Their work is in truth nothing more than a serious and fully developed appropriation of the analogy-of-being doctrine, which itself includes as a moment within it a doctrine of the analogy of truth (as well as of the other transcendentals).

If we take this analogy seriously, in the way they have done, there is little danger that the "preambles of faith" will grow into an immense categorial system that would predetermine revelation, forcing it to find *its* place in this scheme, as Barth so feared. But then, on the Catholic side, we will come to an increasing appreciation for Barth's insistence that he is not trying to promote skepticism but to sharpen our sense of the vast distance between divine Absolute and creaturely Relative.

Chapter 2

THE CHURCH

The remaining differences of opinion are not ones that justify a split in the Church. Of course, we are not claiming that our investigations have set aside all reasons for a split between Protestants and Catholics in general, or between Barthian and Catholic theology in particular. As we said earlier, there could well be important reasons in ecclesiology for still justifying in Barth's eyes and in that of his followers this division: for example, an infallible Magisterium, the number and praxis of the sacraments, the veneration of the saints and especially of the Mother of the Lord. Certainly profound differences of opinion still exist here. But these differences can no longer be justified on the basis of positions developed in treating creation and covenant.

On the one hand, we must say: Barth's understanding of actualism in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* justifies an ecclesiology that stresses the event-character of history. But that no longer entails rejecting every continuity for the sake of this event. The real event for the later Barth is the Incarnation. No longer is it simply the naked Word of God vertically descending from its atemporal heaven.

Thus, when ecclesiology becomes a function of Christology (as it does in the *Church Dogmatics*), and if Christology includes within itself all the elements of the created order (nature, continuity, the human condition), then we will have to admit that Barth's earlier ecclesiology from 1920 to 1930 is now outmoded. His fear that with the introduction of any worldly category whatever, every form of worldliness and modernism would erupt in theology and the Church is unfounded. One can of course abuse these concepts, but not necessarily. Barth should now construct a consistent ecclesiology that contains and reflects the results of his christocentric theological anthropology.

But, on the other hand, we should also say: the distinctive doctrines of the Catholic Church (the so-called Catholic "plus") do

not stand in any necessary connection to a particular interpretation of the analogy of being, at least as Karl Barth usually presupposes this as being distinctively Catholic. These distinctive doctrines do not have their meaning and justification on the grounds of some philosophy, still less from a synthesis of a particular philosophy with Christian theology. Instead, they flow from the Church's inherent reality as a supernatural community. That is, they come from revelation exclusively.

The attempt by Karl Barth and his disciples to bind the distinctively Catholic doctrines with (a philosophical) doctrine of *analogia entis* at any price has failed—unless one understands by analogy of being the union of divine and creaturely natures that was brought about once and for all in Christ or God's refusal to suppress human nature in communicating his divine nature or the ability of human nature to serve the divine. This service is a genuine service, but it is always, in the Church, a service commanded, borne, enabled and executed by divine grace. It is not a service in which the creature can perform by activating and developing powers on its own.

Whether we are discussing church structures (for instance, an infallible Magisterium or the objective grace "contained" in the sacraments) or the Christian's "cooperation" with grace (for instance, "merits", "holiness" and especially the doctrines on Mary's own holiness), we are really talking about God's free use of man and human realities in Christ. And God is free enough even to use the human condition and the natural world or to endow an analogous form of himself in one of his created natures.

What the Protestant considers to be human overreaching in the Catholic Church is for her the sign of the most extreme condescension of divine grace, which is at the same time, then, the very high point of grace's power. And here the Catholic would do well to bear in mind that what at first sight seems like a case of grace elevating nature is really due to grace descending into nature: it is grace itself that assumes hierarchical and institutional forms in the Church in order the better to lay hold of man, who is of course a being bound by nature, structure and law. But it is also grace itself that takes shape in the most personal aspects of a believer's life through the charismatic mission of a vocation in order to transform

the unique talents and traits of the individual into what grace alone can envisage.

When accounting for the “measure of grace” (Rom 12:3), nature can never become the measure of grace. For every claim of nature is short-circuited by the Cross of Christ. It is only from the Cross, the death of Christ, that the seed of nature can come to fruition in grace. There is no such thing as a direct, unbroken, undialectical fruitfulness in nature that would have immediate bearing on the realm of grace. But when grafted onto the vine that dies in order to give life, the grape of nature brings forth fruit a hundredfold.

This image of the vine and its branches could help in dispelling the final differences that divide Catholic and Protestant concepts of the Church. For it expresses two things: grace, like the vine, is the exclusive principle of fruitfulness, but nature, like the branches, can bring forth much fruit when united to the vine. While the Catholic stresses this latter point, the Protestant will stress the exclusive source of life. But the parable categorically expresses both at the same time: “You shall bear much fruit.” But, “without me, you can do nothing.”

Catholic theology has always tried to do justice to both aspects, although to be sure it has too often understood the aspect of cooperation under the forensic, and not directly biblical, concept of “merit”. Because this term “merit” conjures up the idea of a claim of the creature upon the Creator, Protestant theology has shunned it. But one can make the fact of authentic creaturely cooperation with grace less abrasive and yet no less urgent through the Lord’s preferred image: the branch of the vine bearing fruit. The principle of fruitfulness is the vine, not the grape, and yet who could conceive of a grapevine without grapes? The vine gives to the grape the capacity for bearing fruit. And, through the grace of incarnation, Christ gives to his brothers and sisters the capacity for being of service to God’s Kingdom in their very natures. The Head, who contains the fullness of the Godhead in himself, conveys to his body the ability to bring the fullness of the Head—and no other!—to full display. But in unfolding and bringing to fruition this fullness, the body serves with all its natural organs, although even here, the body and its organs are already a work and a result of the fullness of the grace of the Head.

But to speak of being a body necessarily means interconnectedness, continuity, nature and even unconsciousness. A body simply cannot consist of isolated moments of actuality. The Church as the Body of Christ has always owed her generation to the vertical event of the grace of Incarnation. This grounds her mission as the Body of Christ, a mission to lead her members into the event of faith and encounter with her divine Head. Because of this, the Church is embedded between event as origin and event as goal. But as a Body, she must endure between these two events, and endure both in her supernatural as well as in her natural aspects.

The same with the human body: it too is subordinate to the spirit that shapes it into a spirit-body, using it to pursue a spiritual goal and a spiritual communication. For the natural (understood in contrast to the spiritual) is a function of the spirit and moves along a path from spiritual to spiritual. But even so, this bodily reality is, as such, no mere occluded, fallen or alienated spirit. It remains as a body, so much so that it assumes an everlasting status in the resurrection of the body.

Of course, this does not mean that the Body of the Church, insofar as she is an objective institution mediating the personal love of Head and members, has been promised to endure as such for all eternity. But she will last as such to the end of time. After time comes to an end, this form of mediation will be overtaken. And because the members, who make up the Body of the Church, will be transformed by the resurrection into spiritual bodies, the Church will also be able to become the Bride of the Lamb, but only by God's condescending grace. And then the physicality and natural side of grace will no longer have to be conformed to the frailty of these mortal vessels. That it does so now, however, is itself grace: the grace of the Cross and even more the grace of the Eucharist pouring itself into all of the nothingness of our lost natures.

Protestantism hesitates to acknowledge this disappearance of grace in nature. Would not the life of heaven harden in the foolishness of such a total immersion? It prefers to see the Church on earth according to the image of the heavenly, eschatological Jerusalem to come. But we must allow grace this foolishness of naturalizing itself. This is indeed the very pinnacle of grace: revealing

its sheer gratuity in this ultimate moment of alienation—in the cry of forsakenness on the Cross, when Christ gave up his Spirit to the Father and the world. For it is this Spirit, poured out from a dead body, that is renewing the face of the earth.

AFTERWORD*

To bring out, much later, a new edition of a book that had to appear at just the right moment in history, if it were going to have an impact on that history, is not without a certain danger. What this book wanted to achieve—to draw criticism of Barth out of a one-sided intra-Protestant circle and into the breadth of a conversation where all branches of Christianity could participate—it has achieved.

But since that moment a great deal has changed. This is obviously true in Catholic circles, where some of the most impressive discussions about Barth are being pursued, as the works of Bouillard and Kung show. But Protestantism, too, has been deeply affected by the changed landscape of our times since this book first appeared in 1951. We have only to think of the energy invested in dealing with the storms over the “historical Jesus” and (once more) “de-mythologization”. This prevents theology from attaining that peace of heart that is the presupposition for any progress in dogmatics.

And so a second edition that was meant to have the same historical impact as the first would have to be completely revised. For one thing, it would have to pick up the discussion where Bouillard and Kung have advanced it. But another and even more daunting challenge for a revised edition would be to encompass the later volumes of Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, which since the appearance of the first edition of this book have swollen to include one volume on ethics and four on Christology.

Such a revision, however, would move the center of gravity of the first edition from that of fundamental theology and theological epistemology to the field of dogmatics in the strict sense. And yet one may legitimately wonder: Would this shift of emphasis really be helpful in a critical, yet ecumenical, dialogue? Is it not really the case that all the lovely things that Barth has said in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, especially about Jesus Christ as Priest, King and Prophet, can be understood, and for the most part affirmed, by

Catholicism while the decisions that Barth took in the first half of the *Dogmatics* are still the very points at issue? Thus a second and substantially reworked edition would not have made the book more “relevant”. At best, relevance would have been achieved by reconnoitering the battlefield between Barth and Bultmann’s school. But, aside from the fact that Heinrich Ott has already undertaken to say what is needed in this regard, any attempt to do so here would have completely transformed this book.

So all that is left to be done is to bring out, unaltered, a new printing of the first edition with a short reflection on the years that divide us from 1951.

Since that time, Karl Barth is the one who has changed the least of all: though his dogmatic work has grown in fullness and depth, it is still a work that has astonishingly kept to the course it originally set for itself. The principle of christocentricity, already hidden in his commentary on Romans but openly professed in his transition to the *Church Dogmatics*, continues to shape and determine everything in the later volumes. This continuity is particularly notable in Barth’s consistent stress on God’s salvific *activity* in the world through the man Jesus Christ, which is something that, insofar as it is, is *event*.

What does Barth mean by this event-character of salvation, and how does he describe it? For Barth, salvation entails a simultaneous movement of communication: there is first the Lord’s descent to us to take on the form of a slave (IV/1), and then there is the slave’s elevation to join the Lord (IV/2).¹ This simultaneity entails both Christ’s descent into suffering, the expression of his “priesthood”, which bore everything on our behalf, and our coelevation to the freedom of God, in which we gain a share in Christ’s gracious “Kingship”.

Clearly, this is no static Christology in the manner of ancient Catholic and Orthodox thought, with its stress on the “essence” of Christ, the relationship of the two natures, the union of his knowledge and will, the nature of his holiness and so forth. Barth’s whole purpose is to fashion a dynamic and functional Christology (his influence on Oscar Cullmann, who has also produced a Christology along the same lines, is evident).

For Barth, only this event of simultaneous descent and ascent can “bear witness” to Christ as Prophet and Teacher, because he is the eventful witness of God. And therefore only a correspondingly dynamic Christology can generate this same witnessing power (IV/3).

Everything else converges on this event. This is the focus of his whole doctrine of creation (to which Barth devoted the four volumes of part III): it explains his cosmology, his anthropology, his doctrine of election and providence, his ethics (III/1-4)—all converge on this event treated in part IV. For creation is the external reason for the Covenant, while the Covenant has its center in Christ’s reconciliation of the world. And if Barth should later write another four volumes on eschatology, it too can only converge, as it were, back upon this center.

This accounts for the extraordinary absorptive power of the *Church Dogmatics*. It is why Barth can afford more and more to subsume the material of the world into his dogmatics. One also notices how he can draw on more and more perspectives from those earlier dogmas whose methodological standpoint he resolutely rejects (for example, the doctrine of man’s sanctification), provided only that everything is judged on and directed to this central event. Thus we read in III/4 Barth’s penetrating casuistry of married, social and political life.

But no one is deceived by this into thinking he has in any way given up his basic polemical position: namely, his rejection of every form of philosophy that claims to possess a reflexive understanding of the existence of the human spirit as a whole.

Accordingly, I cannot retract, but rather affirm once more without reservation or mitigation, the objections I raised against Barth in the first edition. In the book, I encapsulated my objections to Barth’s whole approach by using the catchword *Engführung* [narrowing; constriction].² To summarize my objection once more, I have criticized Barth because to me his rejection of a philosophical reflection concomitant to theology is self-destructive: to reject philosophy because it works only with material drawn from within this world (and thus is only “positivistic”) means that all the truths about man and the world have to be derived from the Christology that

presupposes them. But while this sounds like it preserves the integrity of a dynamic Christology, it has the ironic effect of forcing us, at the very place where we must discuss a historical *event* between God and man, to construct a *doctrine* of God, man and the world from the ground up.

This unavoidably introduces “philosophical materials”, but Barth is forced to do this without making clear the decisive nexus between the *verbum Dei* and the *verbum hominis*. God speaks; but does man really respond with his own word? Barth’s own example of the “reflector lights” on an automobile that reflect light back to a motorist, but only when the car in back is shining its own headlights, clearly shows that, for Barth, the creature indeed responds but not really with its own light and word.

It is no longer worthwhile to come back once more to the battle over the analogy of being. In one programmatic page, as a prelude to his Christology, Barth himself has buried this war hatchet. We cite the following passage:

Salvation is something more than being. Salvation is fulfillment; indeed it is the highest, most definitive and irrevocable fulfillment of being. Salvation is not proper to created being as such but to its future and perfected state. . . . Salvation, fulfillment, perfected being, does not refer to what created being possesses in itself. Salvation is a way to being that *participates* in *God’s* being, from which it comes and to which it is destined. It does not refer to a deification of being. Nonetheless, in a secondary sense (in its distance from God), fulfilled being is an *eternal* being hidden in God.

Since salvation is not proper to created being as such, it can only *come to it*; and indeed because it is a sharing in God’s own being, it can only *come from God*. This coming of salvation is God’s *grace*. . . . God gives to [the creature] what can only be *given* and only be given by *God*. And he gives it *truly*: “Come, take what is mine: the highest and most unexpected gift of all: it is to be your own!”³

What more could a Scholastic theologian ask for? On the other hand, it must be evident to any Protestant not closed off to the most elementary of insights that the saving event between God and the world is ontic in character; indeed it is the most ontic reality of all. The juxtaposition of “act” and “being” as dialectical opposites is

absurd, especially when we encounter the Aristotelian and Thomistic definition of real be-*ing* as *energeia* and *actus*.

Similarly, the attempt to set up an opposition between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith no longer has any meaning either, unless we reserve the analogy of faith for the way man is seized by the self-revealing God in contrast to the human act of self-reflection, which realizes that the “world” is not “God” but rather points to an Other (however empty and negative that Other as cipher might appear) that is its principle and end. This terminology still remains imperfect and misleading, however, because even the answer of faith that God brings about with his grace is an aspect of *being*. Of course this is—to use the drastic terminology of Catholic theology—an “infused” Being poured down from above.

It goes without saying the word “analogy” itself has in both these instances only an analogous sense. This sense is justified, however, by the act of creation in which God has set and defined the human spirit-object. It is therefore arbitrary to restrict the term “analogy of being” merely to the relation determined by creation and set it in exclusive opposition to the highest relationship of being: the analogy of grace or of faith. What should it mean when Wolfhart Pannenberg says:

“Barth’s intention to stress the aspect of encounter in God’s revelation in Jesus Christ can only be understood if the concept of analogy breaks down, to which, however, the systematic structure of Barth’s dogmatics remains fused. Theological thinking must also be determined, even in its structure, by the situation in which God’s revelation places man.”⁴

But this objection will not bear scrutiny. Pannenberg’s thesis can be accepted only if we first unmask and reject the implication (as my book tried to do) that we can move from an analogy of being to an analogy of faith only by false pretenses. It is, however, an indispensable concept and can be incorporated into a philosophy that finds its legitimacy in this analogy.

One could raise philological objections against the thesis that the mention of analogy of faith (*analogia tes pisteos*) in Romans 12:6 forms a suitable basis for the use that Barth makes of this issue (I/1, 252) and which I adopted from him to further the dialogue. Erich Przywara, however, has come to our assistance here. For it is he,

above all, who has rightly set forth the place of this concept in the intraecclesial relationship between the charisms lived out inside the Church and the one objective faith of the Church to which they all are bound.⁵ But in this way he has left the way open for a more extended theological use of the concept. Many passages of Scripture justify this usage, among which Gottlieb Sohngen, for example, has with special clarity emphasized Ephesians 3:14-19:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This passage speaks of all paternity drawing its name from God's fatherhood, but in this context the reference is to believers, in whom "Christ dwells through faith".⁶

I would enjoin the reader not to confuse concepts that can easily be reduced to theological slogans with real problems. Look at the controversy itself. And that is? Barth's refusal to ascribe any theological relevance whatever to a philosophical knowledge of God. If what is known of God, according to Romans 1:18f. is "visible" (*phaneron*), then the question for Barth is whether "this image has in fact been understood. Are the eyes to see, which are necessary, really there? It all depends on the import of the original image" (KD III/3, 58).

Everything reduces itself to this key question: Is Barth's challenge justified, or does the analogy of grace not possess in its inner presupposition an analogous (and by no means identical!) analogy in the order of creation and even in the order of sin? Without the latter analogy as its external ground, can the analogy of faith become fully effective?

I must stress once more the purely *analogous* relationship between the analogy of being and the analogy of faith. Only when this is kept in mind can the reader understand the chapter on "Nature and Grace". For there is a dialectic hidden in the very concept of nature (something missed unfortunately by all the critics) and in the

notion of man's natural desire for the beatific vision. The attacks by P. Gutwenger in this regard do not seem to me to have found the center of gravity in my discussion.⁷ And if my answer made use of a somewhat different language than that found in the book itself, that was only to choose a more accessible way of communicating. But it changed nothing substantive in what was said.⁸

In his new book on Blondel, however, Henri Bouillard has provided us with a masterly treatment of this kind of [analogous] analogy.⁹ And Gustav Siewerth evokes the same analogy (formulated here as between the *theion* of the philosophers and the living God of Abraham and Jesus) in his recent work on the fate of Western metaphysics—a work that by the way does not shy from criticizing Barth.¹⁰

The present book, I am happy to report, was received by many Protestant brethren with great love and was given by them the most careful consideration and criticism. Above all I would like to mention the already cited article by Prof. Pannenberg, together with an article by Walter Kreck, which could not have been more masterly and delicately handled.¹¹ And finally there is the clear and direct essay by the young American scholar Grover Foley.¹²

Inside the terms set by Christian theology, these critics could not be more penetrating and serious, even when dealing with the most subtle issues of the formal dialectic between theology and philosophy. But then suddenly and abruptly, such understanding and dialogue break off when the issue is one of a genuine inner realization of the philosophical act on its own terms. At this point, it is as if an iron curtain descends between us. In each case, the philosophical act is delimited from outside and above, all because of the a priori principle that it “cannot be” because it “ought not to be”.

These critics are theological experts and speak as theologians, who have not incorporated, however, the philosopher in themselves but, as it were, next to or opposite themselves. But philosophy cannot speak to us from outside our own thinking. Thus whoever wants to maintain the incompatibility of the two kinds of reflection must establish, or at least try to, that that incompatibility arises from within these acts.

Of course it would be unfair to accuse Protestants of no longer trying to think in an authentically philosophical manner when Catholic theology itself has also so often looked on the available philosophical systems as a kind of “intrawordly” and “handy” toolbox of useful concepts. This is scarcely different from the way Turks even today dismantle old Christian basilicas in Asia Minor to use as precut stones for their own houses. This has gone on from the very beginning of theology, when the early apologetes and then the great Alexandrines developed a theory of the *spolatio Aegytorum*.

One should not deceive oneself about the consequences of this attitude. This dethroning of philosophy, the queen of the sciences, forcing her to become the mere handmaid (*ancilla*) of theology, rapidly devolved into the terrible situation we find today. For when there is no longer any real philosophy, then the whole hierarchy of values and the science of them necessarily collapse. It means that there are no absolute truths and values any longer. If the will is enslaved, then Barth is being completely logical when he declares that the intellect is a slave too. It means that there are now only intrawordly materials that can only be measured by that intrawordly being, man. In other words, we are left, internal to our world relationship, with only positivism. And no theology in the world, no matter how exalted, can save us in the slightest from such a plight. Theologians in both confessions must see how responsible they have been for this situation!

It would not be proper in this preface to limit the discussion to my own contribution without at least mentioning the important works of Henri Bouillard and Hans Küng.¹³ Grover Foley’s insightful article has brilliantly clarified the mutual relationship between our three books. Bouillard has gone much farther than I into the specific contours of Barth’s thought, even introducing elements from the theology of Rudolf Bultmann. But, in the final and most decisive positions, he and I know that we agree on the basic issues of fundamental theology.

Hans Küng speaks, not as a fundamental, but as a dogmatic theologian. His focus is justification, which I only touched on in passing. His basic approach has been supported by Karl Rahner and

coincides with Barth's own. Its great virtue is that it profiles even more emphatically the requisite christocentrism that I specified as the essential locus for ecumenical dialogue. Küng has moreover also tried to breathe new life into the old, hardened debate between the Reformation and Trent.

One can only hope that Küng's initiatives will be developed further, that bridges to fundamental theology and philosophy will be built and that the whole history of theology will be revitalized by these new questions now being raised. We must not allow the conversation now in progress to freeze over again.

In conclusion, it might be helpful briefly to characterize the books I have written since the first edition of this work appeared, to discuss their relationship to this book and to mention, however briefly, the influence it had on them. In this way, the reader can determine how far and how close I still am to the position adopted there. This seems especially advisable because Barth himself has followed my later journey with some concern, even wagging an admonitory finger at my later positions. He seemed especially concerned about my treatment of Thérèse de Lisieux, Elizabeth of Dijon and Reinhold Schneider (later he could add Bernanos), which he thought interpreted them as part of a series of "possible and partially even already realized *representations* of the history of Jesus Christ".¹⁴ It might have seemed that way in 1953, but since then the plan outlined in the foreword to my *Theological Aesthetics* should have assured him in this regard.

I can say, however, that this new edition of the book as well as all the positions adopted in it remain as valid for me as ever, and so it is not at all difficult to explain what I have said in later books in terms of this work:

My efforts to interpret the Church Fathers¹⁵ are congruent, point for point, with those decisions I made in my contribution to the *Barth Festschrift* of 1956.¹⁶ Similarly, the book on Elizabeth of Dijon (1952) among other things compares the correspondences between her doctrine and Barth's on predestination, showing how her view is a Catholic version of his.

The monographs on Therese and Bernanos (1954) explicitly tried to transpose the Schleiermacherian reduction of “pure Christian subjectivity” into an ecclesial *analogia fidei* of charismatic service. This was why the book on Therese bore the subtitle “The Story of a Mission” and not what might be expected: “Story of a Soul”. And the work of Bernanos did not end with his life or achievement but concluded with an existential doctrine of the sacraments. The same dynamic pervaded my commentary on Thomas Aquinas’ doctrine of Church charisms, where the stress was on what is decisive in *ecclesial* mysticism and charismata, both materially and historically.¹⁷

I had called Barth’s theology “beautiful” and found in it a welcome home for the dimension of contemplation (so much in contrast to most of the Protestant and Catholic theology of our time): “Blessed are you whose eyes and ears are open to the aesthetic side of existence!”¹⁸ To which I added: especially the aesthetic side of God’s revelation in Christ. Stress on the event-character of revelation does not mean we have to go blind: How otherwise is the encounter with the beautiful and the glorious to take place but through sight?

The demand for such formlessness and sightlessness in contemporary Protestantism—which among other things has made Barth’s own genius and accomplishment increasingly misunderstood—is disastrous for Christianity in the world, and I am fully convinced that I was, in my own way, a “Barthian” when I wrote *Prayer* (1955). And I am just as Barthian in the work of theological aesthetics I have recently begun. Indeed one should be aware of this before one levels the accusation that placing aesthetics first and only then following it with a “theological dramatics” represents a betrayal of the Christian cause. The third, dogmatic volume of the *Aesthetics* (volumes 6 and 7 in the English version), where I plan above all to discuss the issue of justification, will illuminate Barth’s contribution (and that of the Reformation) from a new and until now little noticed side.

As far as any “further development” in the sense of unfolding a concentrated moment, we can speak first of the theology of the Church in *Sponsa Verbi* (1961), where I consciously left many doors open for an ecumenical dialogue, as in the chapters on the

ecclesiological significance of Mariology, the compatibility of a holy and sinful Church, the concept of Church office and canon law, and so on.

Secondly, there is the issue of bringing out all the implications of the analogy of being in the analogy of faith. For that, I wrote in *Verbum Cam* (1960) the essays “Implications of the Word” and “God Speaks as Man”. As in the monograph on Maximus the Confessor, the great anti-monothelite and anti-monoenergite, it was incumbent upon me to create a hearing, unpolemically and transcending all confessional discussions, for the major insights of the Antiochene theologians, which were to be cut off hastily in the first councils of the Church (dominated as they were by the Alexandrines) and which today have forged a new path for themselves in the whole question of the “historical Jesus”.

Barth’s Christology, in spite of all the lovely things he has to say about the descent of God’s Son, is basically a Christology in the manner of Cyril of Alexandria. And of course (even if because of a misunderstanding) behind Cyril stands the figure of Apollinarius. No wonder then that historical justice calls for further elaboration!

Thirdly, more development was required in a simultaneous effort to fashion a theology of history. Not just in the sense of the christocentric sketch in the short *Theology of History* (new edition, 1959), which in many ways was stuck in the more narrow Barthian perspective [*Schauweise*] but in explicit reflection on the world and its history, as the third volume of theological essays, soon to appear, will show.¹⁹ Reflection on this issue means moving toward a Christendom fundamentally open to the world, a Christianity whose razed ramparts no longer keep it from being the fruitful-because-dying grain of wheat buried in a world that continues to behave in an ever more demonic and anti-Christian manner.

Hans Urs von Balthasar
Basel, Christmas 1961

APPENDIX

Except for quotations over a page in length, all translations of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* have been made directly from the German, along with the original pagination of the German edition. To keep the English text from getting cluttered with too many numbers, the corresponding number in the English translation is not cited in the body of the text. Many Barth scholars, however, will wish to consult the original citation in the *Church Dogmatics* to see the context of these quotations, but will in all likelihood have only the English edition before them.

What follows, then, is a Table of Equivalence so that the reader interested in following up a Barth passage cited by Balthasar can find its location in the English edition. At the far right (in parentheses) is the page number in the German edition *using Balthasar's system of numbering the volumes*. Immediately to its left is the page number for the English edition, together with its chapter title and section heading for easy consulting.

Volume I.1

The Doctrine of the Word of God

(The English pagination for this first volume follows that for the revised translation by G. W. Bromiley [copyright 1975]. This differs considerably from the translation by G. T. Thomson [copyright 1936], which should not be used in any case.)

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Translator's Preface

¹ *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1971). [Back to text.](#)

Foreword

¹ Some of the more important of these are: Karl Adam, "Theologie der Krisis", *Hochland* (1926); Erik Peterson, *Was ist Theologie?* (1927); Oskar Bauhofer, "Dialektik oder Theologie?", *Catholica* (1933); Georg Feuerer, "Der Kirchenbegriff der dialektischen Theologie" (1933); Erich Przywara (in many articles, most of which will be cited later in this work); Robert Grosche, Ludwig Lambinet and above all Gottlieb Sohngen, all three of whom have published important articles in the journal *Catholica*. There are also some important dissertations, among which are included: Hermann Volk, *Die Kreaturauffassung bei Karl Barth* (Würzburg, 1938); J. Ries, *Die natürlkhe Gotteserkenntnis in der Theologie der Krisis* (Bonn, 1939); J. Fehr, *Das Offenbarungsproblem in dialektischer und thomistischer Theologie* (Fribourg, 1939), as well as Fehr's earlier *Zweierlei Offenbarung* (Div. Thom., 1936) and *Offenbarung als Wort Gottes bei Karl Barth und Thomas von Aquin* (Div. Thom., 1937). [Back to text.](#)

² *Karl Barth en het theologische Kenprobleem* (1946). [Back to text.](#)

³ Within the *Church Dogmatics* itself, the first two volumes form the prolegomena, which in many respects are preliminary sketches of the final position that Barth eventually adopted in volume 3, that is, after 1940: precisely the moment when dialogue in Germany was broken off. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ I am thinking especially of *Apokalypse der deutschen Seele* III (1939), 316-91; a book review in *Stimmen derZeit* 134 (1938): 200-201; a larger manuscript from which two fragments were published in *Divus Thomas*: “Analogie und Dialektik” and “Analogie und Nature, zur Klarung der theologischen Prinzipienlehre Karl Barths” 22 (1944): 171-216; 23 (1945): 3-56; and “Deux notes sur Karl Barth”, *Revue de science religieuse* 25:92-111. Finally, there are the reviews of ten lectures on “Karl Barth and Catholicism” at the “Verein für christliche Kultur” in the *Basler Nachrichten* (November 1948 to January 1949). [Back to text.](#)

Part I

Chapter 1: A House Divided

¹ KD 1, 101. [Back to text.](#)

² KD 1, 31. [Back to text.](#)

³ TK 286. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ TE 27, 6-7. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ TE 27, 9. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ G 167. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ TE 27, 9-10. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ C 168. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ TE 27, 12. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ TE 27, 14. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ Sec “Die Möglichkeit einer Bekenntnisunion”, *Evangelische Theologie* 1 (1935); and “Die Kirche und die Kirchen”, TE 27, 14ff.; “Wünschbarkeit und Möglichkeit eines allgemeinen reformierten Glaubensbekenntnisses”, TK 76ff.; and KD 3, 693-740. [Back to text.](#)

¹² *Evang. Theol.* I (1935), 15. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ TE 27, 8. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ Balthasar is referring to the address that Barth made in 1948 to the Amsterdam Assembly when the World Council of Churches was established, published as “The Church: The Living Congregation of

the Living Lord Jesus Christ”, in Karl Barth, *God Here and Now*, trans. Paul van Buren (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 61-85 (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ TK 96ff. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ Held at a meeting of intellectuals in Münster who belonged to the *Zentrumspartei*. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ See also “Der römische Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche” (1928); see TK 285ff, 329ff. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ TK 286. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ TK 27, 24. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ W 123. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ TE 27, 24. [Back to text.](#)

²² TE 27, 23. [Back to text.](#)

²³ KD 1, 30. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ C 128. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ TK 339. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ TK 349. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ We are initiating this dialogue even though a certain impression is taking hold that says it might be late, too late for such conversation. When Barth addressed the Catholics in Münster, few people in the Catholic camp reacted, except for Erich Przywara and, after some while, the editorial staff of *Catholica*, above all Grosche, Sühngen, Bauhofer and Lambinet. Today, twenty years later, the situation is now strangely reversed: while the victorious march of Barthian theology in the Protestant churches seems to have peaked to some extent and more and more voices in Protestantism are loudly rejecting his theology, interest in Barth among Catholics, especially in France, is increasing. Even more, we see a fundamental understanding for the general outlines of this theology, whose full development has not yet even been worked out.

But over against these developments, Barth has taken seriously for the first time, in Amsterdam, the efforts to achieve a Protestant union, while at the same time, again in Amsterdam, he was treating the Catholics in an uncustomarily brusque way (see “Die Unordnung der Welt und Gottes Heilsplan” [1948], 13 and 14). And when people

from the Catholic side complained of his “sardonic laugh” in this regard, he went farther and stressed the brusqueness of his attitude: “You know as well as I do [he wrote the aggrieved correspondent] that your church must necessarily stand apart from the Assembly at Amsterdam. The Catholic Church cannot sit down at table with other ‘churches’ in order to seek counsel on the same footing, with the same humility and openness, about the issue of unity in Jesus Christ. She cannot admit that the question of reunion has not already been answered, and indeed quite simply, by virtue of her very existence. . . . Both these positions demand too much of us: that we take seriously your unconditional claim to superiority and that we should long for your presence at the meeting. . . . At Amsterdam we sought after the Kingdom and work of God. But you would have us understand by such a focus that we were trying to convert your church to the kingdom and work of Father J. of man” (letter to Father J. Daniélou).

Perhaps such words—to which even Protestants took deep exception—mean something like a complete break-off of communication. But they will not prevent the Catholic from still asking for a dialogue, all the more so when one supposedly cannot hear any answer coming back. One should still try to further the conversation all the more when the *cause* no longer seems to be something personally desired by the other party. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 2: Ecumenical Dialogue

¹ *Tagebüchcr*, ed. Haecker, II, [Back to text.](#)

² W 100. [Back to text.](#)

³ Sec M.J. Congar’s crucial and masterly book *Chrétiens désunis* (1937) and Joseph Lortz’ *Die Reformation als religiöses Anliegen heute* (1948), which is written with such a deep concern for the Church. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ “Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose solemn duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in the hearts of men, *cannot afford to ignore or neglect these opinions*, which are more or less devious. Rather they must understand them well, first because diseases are not properly treated unless they are first

diagnosed, then, too, because false theories sometimes contain a certain amount of truth, and finally because the mind is thereby spurred on to examine and weigh certain philosophical or theological doctrines more attentively” (Pius X, *Humani generis*, 9; von Balthasar’s emphasis). [Back to text.](#)

⁵ The name of Michel Baius (1513-89) will crop up throughout this book, especially in Part III. A Flemish theologian who attended the Council of Trent under the auspices of the Sorbonne and the protection of the King of Spain, Baius’ theology has often been regarded as a forerunner of Jansenism. The main principles of his teaching were (1) that in the Garden of Eden, innocence was not a supernatural gift of God but the necessary complement of human nature itself; (2) that original sin is not merely a privation of grace but habitual concupiscence transmitted by heredity; and (3) that the sole purpose of redemption is to recover that original innocence and help us to lead moral lives of charity (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁶ *Crétiens désunis* (1937), 34-36. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ “Römischen Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche”, TK 329ff. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ Ibid., 331. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ Ibid., 333-34. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ Ibid., 336. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ “Each source of divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth that they can really never be exhausted. Hence it is the study of the sacred sources that brings to theology ever-new youth, whereas speculation that neglects to delve deeper into the sacred deposit proves barren, as we know from experience” (Pius XII, *Humani generis*, no. 21). [Back to text.](#)

¹² Barth himself did not shy away from accusing himself of the same smugness he leveled at us; of his *Letter to the Romans* he said, not without a certain irony: “One should not claim to have understood the gospel too well, otherwise suddenly one finds one does not understand it at all. And one should not want to be right vis-à-vis one’s interlocutor too much, otherwise suddenly one finds oneself in the wrong” (KD 3, 716). [Back to text.](#)

¹³ KD 7, 278-321. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ TE 14, 41. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ TK 351. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ Congar, *Chrétiens désunis*, 355-57. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ Yves Congar has tried to explain this in his “Sainteté et péché dans L’Eglise”, *La Vie intellectuelle* (November 1947), 6-40. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ See the works already cited as well as: Joseph Lortz, *Wie kam es zur Reformation?* (Einsiedeln, 1950); Karl Rahner, *Kirche der Sünder: Kleine Texte zur Theologie und Seelsorge*, 7 (Vienna, 1948); Damasus Winzen, “Büßende Kirche”, *Catholica* 1/2 (1932): 108-12; and Jean Daniélou, “Rahab: Figure de L’Eglise”, *Irenikon* 22 (1949): 26-45. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ “Je disois: la religion catholique détruira la religion protestante, et ensuite les catholiques deviendront protestants.” *Cahiers* (ed. Grasset) 1, 470. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ TK 363. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 3: Dialogue with Karl Barth

¹ KD 1, xi. [Back to text.](#)

² W 100. [Back to text.](#)

³ KD 1, x. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ See Barth’s own evaluation in his lecture “Die Neuorientierung der protestantischen Theologie in den letzten dreißig Jahren”, *Kirchenblatt für die reformierte Schweiz* 96 (1940): 98-101. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ This does not mean that he has not kept true to its basic intention and is even now becoming more faithful to it. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ KD 3, 140-41. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ TS 1, 4f. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ TE 47, 18f. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ KD 3, 140. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ TS 5, 7. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ See especially Cornelius van Til, *The New Modernism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1947). [Back to text.](#)

¹² KD 1, 375-76. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ TE 27, 6f. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ R. Grosche in the first article of *Catholica*, cited earlier, has accurately listed the numerous points in Barth coincides that with Catholic views, and he sees them as the most reliable basis for a dialogue. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ Such as Erik Peterson, Oskar Bauhofer, Georg Feuerer, Hermann Volk as well as the earlier efforts of Robert Grosche, Gottlieb Söhngen, Erich Przywara and P. Malevez. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ C 6. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ ZdZ 2 (1923): 31. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ KD 5, 465. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ TS 6,33-34. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ KD 7, 337-38. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ KD 4, 508-63. [Back to text.](#)

²² KD 5, 418-76. [Back to text.](#)

²³ KD 3,362-764. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ KD 7, section 49. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 4: Barth's Standpoint

¹ KD 1, 33f. [Back to text.](#)

² TK 339. [Back to text.](#)

³ ZdZ, issue 8 (1924): 62. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ TK 206. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ TK 212f. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ TS 6. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ TK 1ff. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ TK 20. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ W 201. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ Ibid., 182. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ ZdZ 3 (1925): 234. [Back to text.](#)

¹² W 184,187, 190. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ TK 338. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ Ibid., 339. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ Ibid., 343. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ Ibid., 345. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ Ibid., 346. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ Ibid., 348. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ Ibid., 336; see also 1 D 391-93. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ “The predicament. . . in which our Evangelical Church now finds itself” is that the very authority that we “presuppose—not without a certain pained humor—in our Confessions as binding [*als bekanntes concretissimum*]” does not exist as such: “that authority which is superior in principle to the arbitrary will of the individual and which can address the exigencies of the present moment. Catholic theology has a great advantage here (which is also its disadvantage): for Catholics, this authority is exercised by the Church’s Magisterium in its concrete embodiment in the Pope. Whereas we must make do with an appeal to the necessity of a ‘Kairos’ (to speak with Tillich here); we must resort to recognizing definitions of the moment that never get set down on paper and yet are taken to be binding for all theological work. But by the very nature of the case, we cannot distinguish such definitions from the indispensable light given immediately to the individual writer by the Word and Spirit of God” (TK 309).

In fact, whom would Barth have to obey but this “Kairos”? But what kind of authority could he set up based on this? A “theological authority” (TK 331), a “most stringent authority” (TS 5,32), “the actual, original, primal and exemplary authority as reflex of God’s authority” (KD 2, 654); “the *potestas ecclesiastica*, the power of binding and loosing, next to which all other powers pale into insignificance” (TK 300). So Barth assures us. But by no means does this entail a “juridically binding” or “infallible” authority (TK 312)! And certainly no authority to which I would attribute a more than human “respect” (KD 2, 638, 665): but then we can no longer demand a “theological” or “stringent” or “real” or “original” obedience! It is an authority that, seen in the light of day, reduces itself to the point that I, who hear the Word of God directly also hear it “*at the same time* also indirectly”, that is, as a member of the ecclesial

community (KD 2, 657). Thus I am to act democratically in the form of a “dialogue” “in a community of believers who listen and accept” (659). This automatically excludes any talk of the Church’s *de facto* and *de jure* power to bind and loose with its echo in heaven, and thus of the power of the Church to bind and loose the conscience too. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ ZdZ 8 (1924): 56. [Back to text.](#)

²² Ibid., 63. [Back to text.](#)

²³ See for example, TK 126; PT 382ff. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ “Die dogmatischen Prinzipienlehre bei Wilhelm Herrmann”, TK 240ff. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ *Deutsche Christen*: The Protestants who during the Hitler regime tried to bring about a synthesis between nazism and Christianity. It was their professed purpose to “complete” Luther’s Reformation, and under this rubric they gained a large majority in church elections in July 1933. “Their more extreme adherents wished to eliminate the Old Testament, St. Paul (the ‘Rabbi’) and the doctrines of St. Augustine (with their ‘Jewish’ sense of sin). Finding their Holy Land, not in Palestine, but in Germany, they held that the law of God was embodied in Hitler” (under “German-Christians”, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross [New York: Oxford University Press], 560) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ ZdZ 8 (1924): 62. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ TE 7, 6. [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ TE 1, 23. [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ See Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* (Munich: Kosel & Pustet, 1932; reprint, Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962). The first edition carried the subtitle *Metaphysik: I. Prinzip*. Also the eighth paragraph bears the heading “Analogia entis als Prinzip” (149-54). [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 5: The Catholic Standpoint

¹ *Catholica* 4/1 (1935): 39. [Back to text.](#)

² Robert Grosche in his programatic article for the opening issue of *Catholica* 1/1 (1932): [Back to text.](#)

14.

³ KD 1, 296; see also, 293: “Nothing we have produced can be compared either with the achievements of the Middle Ages or with the dogmatics of the post-Reformation era or still less with the dogmatic theology of Thomas or of the Reformers, whom we claim to know so well.” [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Ibid., 296. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ Ibid., 78. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ Ernst Wolf, “Der Mensch und die Kirche im katholischen Denken”, *ZdZ* 11 (1933): 34-57. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ Gottlieb Söhngen, *Catholica* 4/3 (1935): 100-101. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 7: The Formal Principle of the Controversy

¹ TK 287. [Back to text.](#)

² The image comes from Barth: KD 3, 141. [Back to text.](#)

³ KD 1, viii-ix. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Which we can spot repeatedly through his use of the formula, “Everything else is resolvable if only. . .”—and after that, we can be sure, he raises a formal issue. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ KD 2, 690-720. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ KD 1, 252. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ TK 194; 294-95. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ TK 295-96. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ KD 3, 656-57. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ KD 3, 661. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ KD 5, 576. [Back to text.](#)

¹² KD 1, 70. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ KD 1, 100. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ KD 1, 272. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ KD 2, 639. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ KD 1, 285. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ KD 1, 40. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ KD 1, 69:41. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ KD 1, 252. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ KD 6, 330. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ R 459f. [Back to text.](#)

²² G 166. [Back to text.](#)

²³ G 167. [Back to text.](#)

Part II

Chapter 1: On Interpreting Barth

¹ KD 2, 55-56; 3, 715. [Back to text.](#)

² This alone can explain why a Catholic can come to agreement with Barth in so many of the specific doctrines of the *Church Dogmatics* but so often must reject the methodology of the *Prolegomena*. If we do not want to assume that Barth is “driving” at any other point in the material parts of the *Church Dogmatics* than he did in the *Prolegomena*—for example, what sin and its effects imply about the possibility of God-talk in theology—then we also have to assume thereby that the content of the *Dogmatics* has quietly and without fanfare moved a step beyond the problematic of the *Prolegomena*. In other words, it must be interpreted, corrected, if you will, by the later volumes. But along with that, we must say that many questions that in the *Prolegomena* are treated as justifying a split in the Church (for example, the issue of the relation of faith to natural theology) do not have such an import in the working out of the dogmatics as they initially promised to have (and this is true in spite of the occasional demurrals one later hears). The problem of natural theology also is completely peripheral in Catholic theology: it scarcely even touches on the main dogmatic tractates. [Back to text.](#)

³ C 159. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ “Rechenschaft”, *Evangelische Theologie* (1949): 271-72. We should also add that when Barth came to write a foreword in 1928 to the second edition of his 1917 collection of sermons (with those of Eduard Thurneysen) called *Suchet Gott, so werdet ihr leben*, he told his readers that “in every single case the only people who will

understand my earlier writings are those who interpret them in light of the later ones" (4). [Back to text.](#)

⁵ W 40. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 2: The Dialectical Period

¹ 1R 216. All subsequent references in this section to the first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* will be given in parentheses in the text itself. [Back to text.](#)

² German: *Zustand*. [Back to text.](#)

³ On the basis of these remarks, we should not be surprised that people have continually looked on Barth as a mystic *malgre lui*. See E. Peterson, "Zur Theorie der Mystik", *Zeitschrift für systematischen Theologie* (1924): 146-66; Heinzlmann, *Glaube und Mystik* (1927); H. W. Schmidt, *Zeit und Ewigkeit* (1927); Albrecht Oepke, *Karl Barth und die Mystik* (1928; this book especially stresses Barth's anti-ecclesiastical, extra-biblical theopanism and builds a bridge from Barth to the Asian religions); Rudolf Otto, *Westöstliche Mystik* (1926; where there is a good discussion of the inevitable interplay between dialectics and mysticism); J.-L. Leuba, in *Verbum Caro* (1947): 231?.; Erich Przywara, in *Ring der Gegenwart* I, 48ff. We should also recall in this context how inspired Graf Keyserling was by Barth. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ 2 R vii. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ All numbers cited in the body of the text in this section refer to the second edition of *The Epistle to the Romans*. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ Heinzlmann, "Das Prinzip der Dialektik in der Theologie Karl Barths", *Neue kirchliche Zeitung* (1924); H. W. Schmidt, *Zeit und Ewigkeit* (1927); Friedrich Traub, "Zum Begriff der dialektischen Theologie", *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (1929): 388-89; W. Koepp, *Die gegenwärtige Geisteslage und die dialektische Theologie* (Tübingen, 1930), 70ff.; H. Volk, *Die Kreaturauffassung bei Karl Barth* (1938), 240-90. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* (1932), 67. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ "Das Bekannte ist, eben als Bekanntes, das Nicht-Erkannte." More literally: the cognized is, as such, the non-recognized (trans,

note). [Back to text.](#)

⁹ Hos anthropos, en homoiomati anthropon (Phil 2:7). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ Phainomenos kruptetai, kruptomenos phainetai [to be hidden in the appearing, to appear as the hidden one] (Gregory of Nazianzus). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ Karl Barth, Zdz 8 (1930): 378. [Back to text.](#)

¹² Ibid., 378-85. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ W 103. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ W 100; R 126. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ W 171-72. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ KD 1, 454. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ W 41, 151, 173. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ TE 19, 12. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ Zdz 3 (1925): 135. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ KD 1, 20. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ KD 3, 518. [Back to text.](#)

²² TE 19, 41. [Back to text.](#)

²³ A 76f., 103f., and especially 150f. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ See KD 3, 390f. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ TK 321. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ TK 319. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ KD 3, 322. [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ KD 3, 479. [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ 1 D 456-57. [Back to text.](#)

³⁰ KD 1, 459. [Back to text.](#)

³¹ TK 320. [Back to text.](#)

³² KD 1, 460. [Back to text.](#)

³³ See KD 3, 416, 525, 554, among numerous other passages. [Back to text.](#)

³⁴ KD 1, 141. [Back to text.](#)

³⁵ KD 1, 462. [Back to text.](#)

³⁶ W 135, 151; TK 327. [Back to text.](#)

³⁷ KD 1, 114. [Back to text.](#)

- ³⁸ TS 5, 20. [Back to text.](#)
³⁹ R 243. [Back to text.](#)
⁴⁰ R 128. [Back to text.](#)
⁴¹ W 99. [Back to text.](#)
⁴² W 172. [Back to text.](#)
⁴³ W 171. [Back to text.](#)
⁴⁴ W 174. [Back to text.](#)
⁴⁵ 2 R 487f. [Back to text.](#)
⁴⁶ R 273. [Back to text.](#)
⁴⁷ R 272-73. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 3: The Conversion to Analogy

¹ *Prolegomena zur Christlichen Dogmatik: Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes* (Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1928). Citations within the body of the text in this section will be to this volume. It is the first volume of a projected multi-volumed work that Barth began once he realized the inadequacy of the dialectical method (as outlined in the previous chapter). However, as will be explained in this section, Barth saw that the starting point of the *Prolegomena* was also defective. So he scrapped the project and began anew with the *Church Dogmatics*. This work is untranslated and will be referred to throughout this book as *Prolegomena*. Readers of the German original of Balthasar's book should be alerted that he will also refer to the *Prolegomena* as *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*, which could possibly be translated as *Christian Dogmatics in Outline*. There is, however, an English translation of a Barth book that bears that title, but it is of another work (*Dogmatik im Grundriß*) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

² According to which the humanity of Christ is not simply coextensive with the properties of his divinity. [Back to text.](#)

³ Published as *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner*, *Theologische Existenz heute*, 14 (1934), translated into English with Brunner's reply as *Natural Theology* (1946). [Back to text.](#)

⁴ *Fides quaerens intellectum* (Zurich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1931), translated as *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum* (London:

SCM Press, 1960). [Back to text.](#)

⁵ Karl Barth, “Parergon”, *Evangelische Theologie* (1948): 272. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ “Die Kirche und die Kultur” (1926), in TK 364-91; “Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie”, ZdZ (1929): 309-48. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ “Schleiermacher”, TK 188, PT 386. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ “Kultur”, 386; numbers given in parentheses in this paragraph will all be from this essay. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ Barth even uses the term *logos spermatikos*! [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ This corresponds to the essay on culture. On both issues, one should recall Barth’s basic methodological thesis: “Man would never go searching for himself if he had not already been found by God” (TK 370). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ “Das Problem der Ethik in der Gegenwart” (1922; W 125-55); “Das Halten der Gebote” (1927; ZdZ 5 [1927]: 206-27); “Rechtfertigung und Heiligung” (1927; ZdZ 5 [1927]: 281-309); “Das erste Gebot als theologisches Axiom” (1933; ZdZ 11 [1933]: 297-314). All references in the body of the text will be to these essays, respectively. [Back to text.](#)

¹² Ph 123. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ “Kirche and Theologie” (1926; TK 302-28), which was written against Perterson’s “What Is Theology?” (1925); “Der Begriff der Kirche” (1927; TK 285-301); and “Der römische Katholizismus als Frage an die protestantische Kirche” (1928, TK 329-63). Citations from these articles will be given in the body of the text. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ ZdZ 9 (1931): 89-122. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ R 324. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ Feuerer 21. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ 1 D 71. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ TS 5, 32. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ 1 D 123. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ All these statements may be found in “Die Not der evangelischen Kirche”, ZdZ 9 (1931): 96-97. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ KD 2, 177. [Back to text.](#)

²² KD 2,177. [Back to text.](#)

- ²³ KD 2, 177-78. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁴ KD 2, 236. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁵ KD 1, 201. Numbers in parentheses in this section will refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁶ W 44, 66. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁷ C 33. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁸ C 33-34. [Back to text.](#)
- ²⁹ G 52,57, 63. [Back to text.](#)
- ³⁰ G 69. [Back to text.](#)
- ³¹ TS 5,16. [Back to text.](#)
- ³² G 178. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 4: The Centrality of Analogy

¹ KD 1, 172. Numbers in parentheses in this chapter will refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

² The reader should note that the first two volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* are also called “Prolegomena”. To avoid confusion with the volume Barth later repudiated, only the earlier volume Barth scrapped will be italicized (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

³ *Humanität*: the semantic range of this word includes both the notion of treating others humanely and of “humanitarianism”, provided that by this term we mean a generalized beneficence toward the human race; whereas *agape* refers to a disinterested love of one’s fellows, *Humanität* extends to the whole human race without limits. Although “humanitarianism” conjures up images of (mere) philanthropy in English, I have used this term throughout for *Humanität* in this section, except here at its first appearance (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Of course, this must be interpreted only in the sense of appropriation, not of essential participation (see 1, 415) (author’s note). [Back to text.](#)

⁵ W 66. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ W 62-63. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ On which see Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth's Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (Berlin, New York, Amsterdam: Mouton Publishers, 1984) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁸ (Balthasar's insertions.) [Back to text.](#)

⁹ The reader should recall that these numbers refer to the table at the beginning of the book, not to Barth's enumeration. Thus the volume 7 = III/3 of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ J.-L. Leuba, "Le Problème de l'Église chez Karl Barth" (*Verbum Caro* 1/1 [1947]: 4-24). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ *Fides quaerens intellectum* (Zurich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1931); English trans.: *Anselm: Fides quaerens intellectum* (London: SCM Press, 1960). [Back to text.](#)

¹² *Nein! Antwort am Emil Brunner* (Theologische Existenz heute, 9, 1934); English trans.: *Natural Theology*. And "Die Souveränität des Wortes Gottes und die Entscheidung des Glaubens" (TS 5). [Back to text.](#)

¹³ As late eighteenth, early nineteenth century theologian whose views on the incapacity of reason attaining God on its own were condemned by Rome in 1834 (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ TS 5,16. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ TS 12-14. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ A 149. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ A 116. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ A 138. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ A 145. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ A 146. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ A 179. [Back to text.](#)

²² A 131-32. [Back to text.](#)

²³ A 186f. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ A 187. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ A 188. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ A 190. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ A 191. [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ A 157. [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ Descartes, *Meditations*, V, 10. [Back to text.](#)

³⁰ Ibid., 14. [Back to text.](#)

³¹ Ibid., 18. [Back to text.](#)

³² ZdZ (1927): 206. [Back to text.](#)

³³ A 131. [Back to text.](#)

³⁴ *Vernehmen* and *Wahrnehmung* are both usually interchangeable terms that mean perception—in the widest sense of the mind’s realization, what is true “out there”. But Barth is clearly using the former as the more overarching term for realizing what is the case, while *Wahrnehmung* refers to perception more narrowly (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

³⁵ R 143. [Back to text.](#)

³⁶ R 209. [Back to text.](#)

³⁷ TE 12,19. [Back to text.](#)

³⁸ R 142. [Back to text.](#)

³⁹ R 232. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁰ A 41f. [Back to text.](#)

⁴¹ A 43. [Back to text.](#)

⁴² A 42. [Back to text.](#)

⁴³ A 45. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁴ A 44-45. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁵ A 45. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁶ Ibid. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁷ cf. A 55. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁸ A 42. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁹ A 55. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁰ ZdZ (1929): 336-37. [Back to text.](#)

⁵¹ See KD, 1, 40; 1, 175; 1, 180; 1, 459-60; 2, 88; 4, 588f.; 5, 19; 6, 206f.; 6, 219; 6, 262; 6, 390f.; 6, 410; 7, 115f. [Back to text.](#)

⁵² See KD 1, 252; 2, 41; 2, 48; 3, 90; 6, 413; 7, 115f. [Back to text.](#)

⁵³ See KD 2, 158; 2, 262; 3, 349; 6, 168; 6, 417. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁴ See KD 2, 91-92; 3, 654f.; 4, 717f.; 4, 829-30. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁵ A 178-80. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁶ te 14, 19. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 5: Zeal For His Father's House

¹ KD 7, 171f.; 7, 189f. All other numbers in parentheses in this chapter refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 6: Praedestinatio Gemina

¹ R 409. [Back to text.](#)

² R 310, 333L All numerals in parentheses in this chapter refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

³ See Max Strauch, *Die Theologie Karl Earths*, 2d ed. (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1924), 35. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ C 70. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ C 81. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ C 84. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ C 81. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ G 83. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ G 117f., 219, 222. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ C 147. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ C 109-10. [Back to text.](#)

¹² C 147f. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ C 36. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 7: The Structure and Form of Barthian Theology

¹ 1 D 403-5; cf. TE 5, 20f. [Back to text.](#)

² 1 D 70. [Back to text.](#)

³ This principle was consistently maintained, if expressed in a variety of ways: *Actus sunt praevis potentiis* (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 79, 10 obj. 3), *actus est prior potentia ratione* (I, 9, 7b and 8a), *secundum substantiam, id est perfectione*,

tempore, secundum naturam (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, 2, 78). [Back to text.](#)

⁴ There is throughout this quotation a play on the word *Recht*, which means both “right” and “justice”, which cannot be reflected in the English (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁵ ZdZ 5, 37; W 210. See also Thurneysen’s remarks on this term in ZdZ 6,10. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 8: The Roots of Barth’s Thought

¹ When Brunner wrote “Die Mystik und das Wort” (1924), Barth protested against what he felt was Brunner’s “dismissal” of Schleiermacher (see ZdZ 8 [1924]: 49-64). [Back to text.](#)

² TK 165-66. All numerals in parentheses in the text of this chapter refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

³ See the 1927 essay, “Das Wort in der Theologie von Schleiermacher bis Ritschl” (TK 190-211), the essays on Overbeck, Feuerbach, Strauss, Herrmann and, finally, his 1947 book summarizing this history, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (London: SCM Press, 1972). [Back to text.](#)

⁴ It is interesting that Barth always mentions Herrmann in this regard and *not* Kierkegaard. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ TK 136-89. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ TK 154. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ TK 136. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ TK 141. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ TK 144. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ TK 146-47. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ TK 150. [Back to text.](#)

¹² TK 151. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ TK 157. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ TK 160. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ TK 161. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ TK 162. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ TK 163. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ TK 175. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ TK 175. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ TK 182. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ TK 186. [Back to text.](#)

²² TK 156. [Back to text.](#)

²³ TK 157. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ TK 160. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ TK 169. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ PT 343-78. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ These are terms developed in post-Chalcedonian Christology to explain how the human nature of the incarnate Word of God does not possess its own metaphysical substance [*hypostasis*] but subsists in the *hypostasis* of the Son of God. By *anhypostasis*, classical Christology asserted that in the assumption of the flesh the human nature of Christ had no independent subsistence *per se* apart from the event of the Incarnation, apart from the hypostatic union. By *enhypostasis*, however, it asserted that in the assumption of the flesh, the human nature of Christ was given a real and concrete subsistence within the hypostatic union: it was, in the technical terminology, “enhypostatic” in the Word. As T. F. Torrance rightly says, the concepts must always go together: “*Anhypostasias* and *enhypostasias* are inseparable. In the Incarnation, the eternal Son assumed human nature into oneness with himself, but in that assumption Jesus Christ is not only real man but a man” (*Scottish Journal of Theology* 7/3, 249). Barth himself, immediately after the section quoted by Balthasar, affirms this same position: “In this we are repeating in other words the doctrine of the early Church concerning the *anhypostasias* and *enhypostasias* of the human nature of Christ by which John 1:14 (“the Word became flesh”) was rightly interpreted: *ut cum illa nullam propriam substantiam extra Dei Filium habeat sed ab illo et in eo vere sustentetur et gestetur* (this flesh has no properties of its own outside of God but rather is sustained and is born from him and in him). Because the man Jesus came into being and is by the Word of God, it is *only* by the Word of God that he came into being and is. Because he is the Son of God, it

is only as such that he is real man” (KD 6, 80) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ “Moderne Theologie und Reichgottesarbeit”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 19 (1909): 317-21. [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ Ibid., 479-86. [Back to text.](#)

³⁰ Ibid., 318. [Back to text.](#)

³¹ Ibid., 319. [Back to text.](#)

³² Ibid., 321. [Back to text.](#)

³³ Ibid., 482. [Back to text.](#)

³⁴ Ibid., 484. [Back to text.](#)

³⁵ The published version is a more expanded version of the lecture and appeared in two installments in 1912 in the *Schweizerische Theologische Zeitschrift* (1912): 1-18; 49-72. [Back to text.](#)

³⁶ Ibid., 4. [Back to text.](#)

³⁷ Ibid., 6-7. [Back to text.](#)

³⁸ Ibid., 8. [Back to text.](#)

³⁹ Ibid., 10-11. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁰ Ibid., 12. [Back to text.](#)

⁴¹ Ibid., 15. [Back to text.](#)

⁴² Ibid., 17. [Back to text.](#)

⁴³ Ibid., 50. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 50-51. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁵ Ibid., 53. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁶ Ibid., 54. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁷ Ibid., 55. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid., 58. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁹ Ibid., 58. “Die wirksame Geschichte ist der gewirkte Glaube” (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁰ Ibid., 60. [Back to text.](#)

⁵¹ Ibid., 63. [Back to text.](#)

⁵² Ibid., 64. [Back to text.](#)

⁵³ Ibid., 60. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁴ Ibid., 69. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁵ Ibid., 68. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid., 70-71. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁷ Ibid., 72. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁸ Delivered at a pastoral conference in Lenzburg in May 1913, and published in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* (24 [1914]: 21-32, 65-95). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁹ Ibid., 30-31. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁰ Ibid., 31. [Back to text.](#)

⁶¹ Ibid., 89. [Back to text.](#)

⁶² Ibid. [Back to text.](#)

⁶³ Most of the critics who accuse Barth of philosophism go beyond the points we have made here and thereby abandon this position. It is not only those Lutherans who accuse Barth of “bloodless abstraction” and of rationalism (see, for example, Bernhard Dörres, *Am Scheidewege* [1928]; Otto Dibelius, *Die Antwort der Kirche* [1931]; Erich Schick, “Die Botschaft des Pietismus in den theologischen Kämpfen der Gegenwart” [Basel, no date]; Martin Schian, *Ecclesiam habemus* [1931] and, much more seriously, Torsten Bohlin, “Luther, Kierkegaard und die dialektische Theologie”, *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 7 [1926]: 162-98; 268-79), but also critics like Jean Rilliet (“Le Système de Karl Barth à la lumière de la Kirchliche Dogmatik III”, 1, *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* [1947]: 36-48), who undertakes—with R. Prenter—to interpret Barth in terms of Schelling and Hegel. According to this thesis, under the name of faith, Barth consigns dogmatics over to metaphysical speculation. He oversteps the boundaries of the Credo; he has done this since the very first edition of *The Epistle to the Romans* and has not changed any since then: “The Bible’s reserve is quite foreign to Barth” (44). Instead of faith there is Gnosis, instead of ethics a dangerous indifference to praxis. Barth is a step backward from Kierkegaard to Idealism. With this attack, Rilliet has once more summarized what had already been the main point of attack earlier (see Paul Althaus, “Theologie und Gcschichte”, *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* I, 4 [1923-24]: 741-86 where Gogarten’s later critique has already been anticipated).

While our previous analysis might help us to see why critics would come to that conclusion, our further analysis has shown that it cannot have the last word. One must agree with H. W. von der Vaart Smit when he says: "It is not self-evident why this connection [between theology and Idealism] must be characterized a priori as impossible. . . . Just as there is an affinity between Karl Barth and the Marburg school while Barth's theology is hardly a Marburg theology, so too we can see a connection between Augustine and Platonism or Thomas and Aristotelianism without identifying these theologies with the philosophies that respectively influenced them. Barth's theology is founded on revelation and uses the material of Kantianism only for constructing his building, but it is not the building itself" ("Die Schule Karl Barths und die Marburger Philosophie", *Kantstudien* 34 [1929]: 333-50).

A positive attempt to understand Barth from the categories of German Idealism was undertaken by Ludwig Lambinet in a penetrating study of great genius ("Zur Analogia-Entis-Problematik in Karl Barths Theologie", *Catholica* 6 [1937]: 89-107). This study once more shows the immense advantage that accrues to the interpreter who can bring to the discussion an exact knowledge of the whole Protestant-Idealist intellectual tradition. Such an expert is in a far better position than the best, but one-sided, expert in Catholic Scholasticism. The categories of Schelling's doctrine of potentialities has proven to be the right ones for understanding as well as critically circumscribing Barth's concept of religion. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 9: Idealism and Revelation

¹ KD 4, 198. Numbers in parentheses in the text of this chapter will refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

² See especially this essay of 1914, "Der Glaube an den persönlichen Gott", and the essay of 1929, "Schicksal und Idee in der Theologie", both of which were discussed in the previous chapter. [Back to text.](#)

³ German allows a nice word play between the concept of vanity (*das Nichtige*) and nothingness [*das Nichts*], which is apparent in English if one recalls that the fundamental meaning of vanity is

emptiness (the Latin adjective *vanus* means “empty”) (trans, note.) [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Citations in KD 5, inf., 119, 136f, 141, 148f, 153, 164f.; 7, 84, 97f, 406f. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ A 31-36. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ A 35. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ For example, “it is not an existing but a happening reality” (4, 609). [Back to text.](#)

⁸ “That God abides in himself does not exclude but rather includes the fact that God’s Being is decision” (4, 192). [Back to text.](#)

⁹ ZdZ (1929): 330. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ ZdZ (1929): 309. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ *Aufgeklärt*: This participle also implies the methods that the Enlightenment [German: *Aufklärung*] used in critique of its Christianity (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

¹² “Can one really ask in all seriousness whether there is a philosophical Idealism without it including the problem of theology? Is it not precisely the thought of God that alone provokes it to begin and to carry through that second Idealist reflection?” (ZdZ [1929]: 329). [Back to text.](#)

Part III

Chapter 1: Identifying a Catholic World View

¹ “Quam disparatis doctrinis, quae sese mutuo compleant, quamvis sibi invicem quodammodo opponantur,” *Humani generis* (Denz. 3894). All numbers in parentheses in the text of this part refer to KD. [Back to text.](#)

² “Quamlibet philosophiam vel opinionem, quibusdam additis, si opus fuerit, correctionibus vel complementis, cum dogmate catholico componi posse” (ibid.). [Back to text.](#)

³ Hermann Schell, *Kleinere Schriften*, ed. by Hennemann (1908), 97-98. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* (1932), 152. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ This consideration also disposes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's attack on Przywara (*Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie. Beiträge zur Förderung der christlichen Theologie von Schlatter und Lutgert*, vol. 34, second issue [1931]), who—relying on Barth—accuses the doctrine of the analogy of being of precisely what Przywara said in the above citation it was not: “The human being who exists in the tension of being-essence must already bear within himself as existential possibility the possibility of a direct view of the ‘Is’, of the *esse-essentia* identity. From this it follows that in this concept of existence it is already implicitly thought what can only become explicit in the possible ways God relates to man and *vice versa* in the boundary of the analogy of being” (59). Against this presentation, Przywara consciously turned in his eponymous book. Yet we should admit that he succeeded in making his clearest answer to this objection only in his second period. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ See above all, “Metaphysik und Religion”, *Stimmen der Zeit* (1922), reprinted in *Ring der Gegenwart* I, 403ff. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* (1949), 1-9 (brackets in the following quotation from this article are Balthasar's insertions [trans, note]). [Back to text.](#)

⁸ *Analogia entis*, 80. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ “Reichweite der Analogie als katholischer Grundform”, *Scholastik* (1940), Heft 3, 527. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ See in this regard, Etienne Gilson, “Etre-Essence” (1948), according to whom the extreme essentialistic thinking of certain Neo-Scholastics derives more from Wolff than from Thomas. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ One only need think of the study by Hal Koch on Origen. [Back to text.](#)

¹² Balthasar, it should be noted, refuses to affix the famous “Pseudo-” before the name of the Areopagite: “That a man of the foremost rank and of prodigious power hid his identity not only from centuries of credulity but also from the critical acumen of the modern period, and precisely through that concealment exercised his influence: that, for our modern and above all German scholarly

world, is unforgivable. After their tank formations have laid waste his garden, there is for them not a blade of grass left: all that remains is PSEUDO-, written in bold letters and underlined with many marks of contempt” (*The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics II: Studies in Theological Style: Clerical Styles* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984], 145) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

¹³ As Gustav Siewerth has done in *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* (1939). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ “At ne quid eo amplius alii ab aliis exigant, quam quod ab omnibus exigit omnium magistra et mater Ecclesia” (Denz. 2192). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ The first *questiones* of the *Summa* provide an example of this. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ “Sacred doctrine deals with singulars, such as the deeds of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and the like” (S. Th., I, q 1, a 2 ad 2.). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ “Singularia traduntur in sacra doctrina non quia de eis principaliter tractetur, sed introducuntur turn in exemplum vitae, sicut in scientiis moralibus, turn etiam ad declarandam auctoritatem virorum, per quos ad nos revelatio divina processit, super quam fundatur Scriptura seu sacra doctrina” (1 c.). In regard to this text one must ask whether even the *singularia Christi* (from which indeed all the other *singularia* of revelation get their singular character) are subsumed under this interpretation—a question which we must unconditionally answer with a No if Christ’s life as such is to be the truth and not merely an example for life (*exemplum vitae*) or an authoritative witness to a doctrine which in itself is timelessly true. The teaching against which we here take our stance, as indeed we do in this entire book, has recently been advocated by M. D. Chenu, O.P with a—it seems to us—frightening clarity: “It is quite true that the Treatise on Grace is constructed (by St. Thomas) without referring to the unique Mediator, that the Treatise on Charity abstracts from the ‘unique Foundation’ of which St. Paul speaks, that the theory of contemplation never specifies what the Father has revealed. In other words, the Incarnation is, in truth, a contingent event: in the cycle of *Exitus* and *Reditus*, it does not take place as an

absolutely gratuitous work of the absolute freedom of God. The predestination of Christ is a matter of fact and does not impinge on this economy by right: it is impossible to situate it *a priori* in the series of divine decrees” (*Introduction a l’étude de S. Thomas d’Aquin* [1950], 270). One quite understands the vigorous objections of Henri Rondet to this subsuming of the highest fact of all, the *factum Christi*, among the “contingent truths of history” (cf. *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 38 [1951], 144-60, esp. 154f). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ “Particulars do not affect the perfecting of what is intelligible” (Aquinas, *De Anima*, q and a 18, ad 16). [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 2: The Concept of Nature in Catholic Theology

¹ Henri de Lubac in his “Études historiques”, which he published as *Surnaturel* (1946), discussed this issue so lucidly (see esp. 431-80) that we no longer need to recapitulate the main lines of his argument. Dom M. Cappuyns, so balanced in his judgments, has recognized this. And the sober and careful theologian Henri Rondet has admitted that at least the historical analysis is irrefutable and indeed has demonstrated the foundational authority of St. Thomas for this question in a carefully researched article (*Revue de science religieuse* 35 [1948]: 481-521) that takes the issue up to the end of the sixteenth century. This helpful study lets every unprejudiced reader see how late and with what effort the modern problematic won out and how even in thinkers who were very near to this period (like Soto, Sylvester of Ferrara, Tolctus), the old schema of thought, amazingly enough, kept forging ahead. Only the direct necessity of refuting Baius forced the new issue to the forefront, in Bellarmine, which then suddenly (in Molina, Lessius, Suarez) developed into a generally accepted theological opinion. [Back to text.](#)

² *Die zwei Wege der neueren Theologie* (1926), 272. Cited in the *Deutsche Thomasausgabe* of P. Fr. Utz, O.P., vol. XV, 325. [Back to text.](#)

³ S. Th. III, q 9, a 2 ad 3: “Visio scu scientia beata est quodammodo supra naturam animae rationalis, inquantum sc. propria virtute ad eam pervenire non potest; alio vero modo est secundum naturam ipsius, in quantum sc. secundum naturam suam capax est ejus, prout sc. ad imaginem Dei facta est.” [Back to text.](#)

⁴ This is true provided we are speaking with the unaffected impartiality of the St. Thomas of the *visio* as *finis quodammodo naturalis* and even (with Duns Scotus) of this vision as the *finis naturalis licet supernaturaliter adipiscendus* (*Sent. Proi*, q 1). Dominic Soto consciously introduced this too (*effingere nihil vetat, clarioris disputationis gratia* [*De nat. et grat.* I, c. 3]), although Soto himself could not finally imagine any other goal for humans created in *purs naturalibus* than the supernatural! [Back to text.](#)

⁵ The following remarks in their basic outline already originated in 1944 and 1945 in the foreword to the articles in *Divus Thomas* already cited and were prompted, in no small part, by the suggestions of Erich Przywara. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ See our presentation of this in *Kosmische Liturgie* (1941), 193-272, esp. 245ff. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ “Humanae naturae sublimatio et exaltatio in consortium divinae naturae debita fuit integritati primae conditionis et proinde naturalis dicenda est et non supernaturalis” (Denz. 1021). [Back to text.](#)

⁸ Emil Brunner, *Natur und Gnade* (1935), 24. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ Ibid. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ Scheeben, *Dogmatik* II, 240. See Aquinas, S. Th. I, q 29, a 1 ad 4. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ See S.Th. I/II, q 6, a 5 ad 2. [Back to text.](#)

¹² See S. Th. I/II, q 84, a 1 ad 3. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ Indeed, both had to be thought of as being identical, because personality is constituted by the nucleus of that spiritual and teleological schema that in its totality is called human *physis*. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ By beatific vision we mean that self-manifestation of the Creator that promises and bestows an intrinsic participation in the divine nature: in God’s own life, thought, love and creation (author’s note). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ Sohngen justifiably draws our attention to the fact that the Platonic categories of “participation” (in God) are vulnerable within philosophy because they exchange God’s gracious relationship to his creation for his natural relationship, which can be expressed in the Aristotelian categories of causality. The result of this is to lead to a confusion of orders, a mixture that entails the supernaturalizing of nature. “I can’t help myself: from the perspective of Christian theology, the Neoplatonic philosopher seems to me to be like the philosopher’s monkey, who apes theology (as *scientia Dei et beatorum*) by mimicking the state of being adopted by God.” In the intoxicating elixir of Neoplatonic mysticism, there lurks a “very hidden poison”, something like “a sweet poison” (Sohngen is borrowing here the words of Barth’s criticism of Augustine):

This reveals the healthy critical sense Aquinas the theologian had when he expressly defended himself against interpreting our spiritual and intellectual knowledge (and thus too our natural knowledge of God) as a [genuine] cognitive participation. A theologian can prefer Aristotelian over Platonic philosophy, but not because, for example, Aristotle is more purely a philosopher than he is theologically minded, in contrast to the Christian Neoplatonic. This is the usual estimate. The real issue for the theologian is the purity of theology. This is how we should value the Aristotelianism of Aquinas theologically [Sohngen, “Analogia fidei”, *Catholica* 3 [1934]: 202-4]. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶“Naturale est quidquid pertinet ad naturam aut constitutive, aut consecutive, aut exigitive” (Lecher, *Institutiones theologiae dogmaticae*, 3d ed. [1940], II); 344. The same axiom is repeated by all the more recent theological manuals. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ Even with Scheeben it is no different. While he will follow Augustine in describing nature as that essence “that perfectly corresponds to the divine Idea” (*Dogmatik* II, 241), he straightaway defines nature using the modern concept as that without which its possessor “can neither correspond to its Creator’s intention nor find its own contentment” (242). And he defines grace as that which cannot have its principle in the nature of either angels(!) or human beings in virtue of their essential constitution. Nor can grace by his definition be claimed for a being to reach its essential determination.

But the real question is why this “intention of the Creator” should not coincide with that “divine idea” of man.

J. B. Heinrich (*Dogmatik*, 2d ed. [1888], V, 368ff.) is instructive in this regard. He begins as usual with a presentation of the multifaceted ambiguity of the concept of nature and tries to exclude nontheological meanings: for example, nature as the counterconcept to nonbeing, accident, coincidence, freedom, custom, spirit, God, miracle, sin. Among these definitions that are to be *excluded* can be found the following: “By nature and the natural are to be understood what nature requires of a being and what is owed to that being (*naturae debitum*. . .) and what is necessary to the continued existence and activity of its nature and for the attainment of its natural determinations” (375). But then it goes on farther: “Wherefore, the supernatural is a divine gift added to the nature of a creature and not owed to its natural definition—a *datum naturae superadditum et non debitum*” (381). Of course Heinrich has placed an explanatory proviso between these two mutually exclusive definitions: “If we are speaking of the supernatural order in theology, then the name ‘nature’ will naturally not be understood in one of its denoted meanings but in contrast to the supernatural. *Wherefore, everything is natural that is not supernatural in the particular sense*” (377). This, of course, is a tautology. But even this tautology, which at least *safeguards* the theological moment, saves the preceding sentence from being a vacuous tautology. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ “Natur und Uebernatur”, *Religion, Christentum, Kirche*, ed. by Esser-Mausbach (1911), I, 318. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ Ibid., 324. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ *Dogmatik*, 5th ed. (1921) II, 3. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ Palmieri, *Tractatus de gratia divina actuali* (1885), 7 and 8. [Back to text.](#)

²² For anything that the subject possesses in the way of being able to raise a “claim” has already been settled *analytically* in its being a subject and having a nature. [Back to text.](#)

²³ “Potest intelligi duplex debitum: unum quidem ex merito proveniens, quod refertur ad personam,. . . aliud. . . secundum conditionem naturae, puta, si dicamus, debitum esse homini, quod

habeat rationem et alia, quae ad humanam pertinent naturam. Neutro autem modo debitum dicitur propter hoc, quod Deus creaturae obligetur, sed potius, in quantum creatura debet subjici Deo, ut in ea divina ordinatio impleatur: quae quidem est, ut talis natura tales condiciones vel proprietates habeat” (S. Th. II/II, q in, a 1 ad 2). Thomas puts it even more strongly in an earlier passage: “Est autem duplex ordo considerandus in rebus. Unus, quo aliquid creatum ordinatur ad aliud creatum, sicut partes ordinantur ad totum. . . et unaquaeque res ad suum finem. Alius ordo, quo omnia creata ordinantur in Deum. Sic igitur et debitum attendi potest dupliciter in operatione divina: aut secundum quod aliquid debetur Deo, aut secundum quod aliquid debetur rei creatae; et utroque modo Deus debitum reddit.”

“Debitum enim est Deo, ut impleatur in rebus id, quod eius sapientia et voluntas habet, et quod ipsius bonitatem manifestat; et secundum hoc justitia Dei respicit *decentiam* ipsius (not, for example, the ‘claim’ of the creature!), secundum quam reddit *sibi*, quod *sibi* debetur. Debitum etiam est alicui rei creatae, quod habeat id, quod ad ipsam ordinatur, sicut homini quod habeat manus et quod ei alia animalia serviant, et sic etiam Deus operatur justitiam, quando dat unicuique, quod ei debetur secundum rationem suae naturae et conditionis. *Sed hoc debitum dependet ex primo*, quia hoc unicuique debetur, quod est ordinatum ad ipsum secundum ordinem divinae sapientiae. Et licet Deus hoc modo debitum alicui det, non tamen ipse est debitor, *quia ipse ad alia non ordinatur*, sed potius alia in ipsum” (ST 1, q. 21, s. 1, ad 3). [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ “Natura consistit in ea aggregatione rerum, quae ab ordine supernaturali et gratia *dividitur*” (Ripalda, *De ente supernaturale* I, d 1, s 1 and 9). [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ Heinrich, *Dogmatik*, 377. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ This overlapping of the two roles, the philosopher as theologian and the theologian as philosopher, can be exemplified by the two paths Augustine and Aquinas took: Augustine took the path of a philosophy that, like no other, was a disguised theology, that led from Neoplatonism to true theology. He did this by calling things by their right name, by recognizing the true Son of the Father in the emanating Logos. He then showed how an allegedly philosophical

Platonism could be explained by a true participation theology. Augustine's genius was primarily theological: he searched until he was able to find himself.

Thomas' genius, however, was philosophical: he proceeded from a philosophy with strong theological implications (the Augustinianism of his Commentary on the Sentences and his *De veritate*) along the path to an explicit philosophy: an ontology of secondary causes. His purpose was to reach, through rigorous reasoning, to an ever-greater reserve about the creature's knowledge of God. For Augustine, the concrete concept of nature becomes more and more concrete as he unveils its theological fullness. For Thomas, it becomes more and more abstract, until one reaches the boundary of pure nature (which Thomas never did), defined as that for which God is nothing more than the *principium et finis mundi*, whose *an sit* [whether he exists] is indeed recognizable but whose *quod sit* [what he is] remains hidden. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ Time and again we find this paradox in Thomas Aquinas. One example will suffice to show this: "Wherever one nature is subordinate to another we find that two things concur toward the perfection of the lower nature, one of which is in respect of that nature's proper movement, while the other is in respect of the movement of the higher nature. Thus water by its proper movement moves toward the center [of the earth], while, according to the movement of the moon, it moves round the center by ebb and flow." Notice how Thomas moves inductively and tries to make out what the relationship of nature is to grace by highlighting certain universal patterns that obtain within the world of nature: *every* nature is perfected from within and from above, from within itself and from a higher reality. Thomas continues: "Now the created rational nature alone is immediately subordinate to God, since other creatures do not attain to the universal but only to something particular, while they partake of the Divine Goodness either in *being* only, as inanimate things, or also in *living* and in *knowing singulars*, as plants and animals. Whereas the rational nature, inasmuch as it apprehends the universal notion of good and being, is immediately related to the universal principle of being." And now Thomas clinches the argument by making the step that lies beyond any philosophy and a

priori transcends every *finis ultimus naturalis*: “Consequently the perfection of the rational creature consists not only in what belongs to it in respect of its nature but also in that which it acquires through a supernatural participation in the Divine Goodness. Hence it was said above (I/II, q 3, a 8) that man’s ultimate happiness consists in some kind of supernatural vision of God. . . .” In this phrase “some kind of” [*quadam*], Thomas is leaving open what neither thought moving inductively from below nor “nature” herself can determine. At this point only Thomas the theologian can continue and, looking down from above, give to Aristotle’s universal law a specific content, just as the Church Fathers did: “. . . to which vision man cannot attain unless he be *taught by God* according to John 6:45 (‘Everyone who has heard of the Father and learned comes to Me’). . . and as even the Philosopher says (*De Soph. Elench*, I, 2): ‘It behooves a learner to believe.’ Hence, in order that a man arrive at the perfect vision of heavenly happiness, he must first of all believe God, as a disciple believes the master who is teaching him” (S. Th. II/II, q 2, a 3, c). [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ According to Söhngen, “As an abstract, philosophical concept, it is an unavoidable conceptual aid” (*Catholica* 4 [1935]: 104). [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ See the controversy over a text of Augustine between C. Boyer (“Dieu pouvait-il créer l’homme dans l’état d’ignorance et de difficulté?” *Gregorianum* [1930]: 32-57) and Y. Montcheuil (“L’Hypothèse de l’état originel d’ignorance et de difficulté d’après le *De libero arbitrio* de S. Augustin”, *Revue de science religieuse* [1933]: 197-221). [Back to text.](#)

³⁰ “It is difficult to press the concept of a pure nature even a little, at least if we want to obtain more than a large X that corresponds to no mental image and thus would offer thought no aid, without ascribing to it, one after another, a whole series of properties and inclinations that humanity as it is presently constituted already possesses in its relation to God. The supernatural order thus loses its unique dimensionality and finally becomes only a kind of *Doppelgänger* of the natural order. And that is undoubtedly the steep plane on which an entire sector of modern theology seems to have perched, all because of the logic of its initial presuppositions. Nature

and supernatural find themselves in certain of their relations put on the same level. And whatever one might say against this, it includes them both in one species-concept, each being two branches of the same tree.

“And then, to make sure they really are distinct, they are rigidly separated from each other, and they then develop along parallel—and necessarily similar—planes. Prayer, love, grace, faith, the virtues: everything is reimported into an imaginary ‘purely natural’ order. Everything is done up as double images—even the *visio immediata* and the *possessio Dei*! [There then follows the proof for this charge in the footnote.]

“And the only comprehensible distinction between the two series is the extremely adventitious one: here is the natural, there is the supernatural. Is this not the most perfect nominalism? The most perfect verbal hair-splitting?

“But if we want to avoid this danger and be directed by the opposite logic, then we attain to a being who is self-sufficient, who does not pray, who never throws himself into the arms of providence, seeks out a jealous autonomy vis-à-vis God, is involved in no loving relation to God. A ‘purely natural’ world according to this schema would be without even a moment of grace. But can such a bizarre picture be harmonized with what we imagine to obtain (for the moment it does not matter if through pure reason or through revelation) under the one true God?” (Henri de Lubac, “Le Mystere du surnaturel”, *Revue de science religieuse* [1949]: 88-89).

Henri Rondet poses the same alternative: “Either one admits to pure nature such an autonomy that it then becomes completely independent of God, still possessing the freedom it was once given. But this gives us a kind of Nietzschean man and a thoroughgoing Pelagianism. Or one subscribes to the idea of Suarez that in every possible condition of man there is a certain necessity for grace. But then one has reintroduced supernatural back into the concept of pure nature” (*R.S.R.* [1948]: 520). [Back to text.](#)

³¹ Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis*, I, 48. [Back to text.](#)

³² *Ibid.*, 51. [Back to text.](#)

³³ “Qui melius unitur Deo in hac vita, unitur ei sicut omnino ignoto” (Dionysius the Areopagite, as quoted by Thomas Aquinas, S. Th. I, q

12, a 12, obj. 1 ad 1). [Back to text.](#)

³⁴ Walter Brugger (“Ziel des Menschen und Verlangen nach der Gottesschau”, *Scholastica* ²⁵ [1950]: 535-48) joins in de Broglie’s opinion of *De fine ultimo* (1948): “The impossibility of proving our supernatural vocation from inductive argument [*Tatsachenbeweis*] is true only under the presupposition that we are looking on philosophy as the science of essence and being. But if one *extends* the area of philosophy’s competence, as is often done today, to give a descriptive analysis of man as he exists in the concrete, then the possibility arises that the philosophical contemplation of man as he exists in fact and not just in his metaphysical essence will uncover indications of his supernatural vocation” (544).

Here we see once more the circular reasoning that justifies the usual position in all its dubiousness: What kind of Being would ever be the object of philosophy if not—at least since the time of Plato and Aristotle—concrete, existing Being? And how did a philosopher ever come to such a pass to distinguish even at all between this Being and the realm of essences, unless because of *theological* presuppositions, which however certainly could use some examination themselves? It is scarcely surprising that Brugger, who works away at the analysis of the essence of *hypothetical* objects, never even gets halfway to any illuminating results. [Back to text.](#)

³⁵ Przywara, *Analogia ends*, 46. [Back to text.](#)

³⁶ “Systematically, this means that theology has the urgent task of searching for a systematic determination for the relationship between the concrete concept of nature in salvation history and the abstract, philosophical one. For the abstract, philosophical concept of nature cannot be avoided in a fully developed theology. . . . And precisely because both kinds of concept of nature are positioned on different levels, a contradictory linkage of the two is a priori possible, even if a living link is certainly difficult to bring about. The proper arrangement of the two concepts according to their rank must therefore not be overlooked or, even more, distorted. The abstract metaphysical concept of nature is a formal *theological* concept and only later in theology does it come into its own, even if the process had started much earlier. The concrete concept of nature in salvation history, on the contrary, or rather the view of human nature one gets from within

the perspective of salvation history, is no 'concept' first formed by theology but is a direct resource culled from biblical revelation. In other words, the abstract, metaphysical concept of nature was created by theologians and for the sake of a more exact understanding of the biblical, salvation-history concept of nature. But this means that the abstract and metaphysical concept of nature must be constantly linked with the biblical and salvation-history concept of nature. And here Catholic theologians of the present will have to think and speak more critically in the spirit of St. Augustine, which has only occasionally happened so far. Even according to Catholic doctrine, there is no *theologia naturalis* that can be unmoored from salvation history" (Söhngen, *Catholica* 4 [1935]: 110-11). [Back to text.](#)

³⁷ Such as Johannes B. Lotz, *Sein und Wert* (1938); Max Müller, *Sein und Geist* (1940); Gustav Siewerth, *Der Thomismus als Identitätssystem* (1939); the earlier works of Karl Rahner, *Geist in Welt* (1939) and *Hörer des Wortes* (1941); and B. Welte, *Der philosophische Glaube bei Karl Jaspers* (1949). [Back to text.](#)

³⁸ "Il nous reste à repenser le thomisme en fonction des philosophies modernes" (*Mélanges Joseph Maréchal* [Mus. Lessianum, 1950], vol. I: *Oeuvres*, 46). [Back to text.](#)

³⁹ *A propos du sentiment de présence chez les profanes et chez les mystiques* (1908). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁰ "Cette intuition de l'Être, qui, tout inaccessible qu'elle soit à l'effort de la seule intelligence, en prolonge pourtant le mouvement initial" (*Études sur la psychologie des mystiques* [1924], I, 179). [Back to text.](#)

⁴¹ "L'activité transcendente, expression de l'unité objective de l'esprit, *descend* fatalement (en ordre de raison) de l'être illimité aux essences limités" ("Abstraction ou Intuition?" [1928], printed in *Mélanges*, I, 102-80; here, 113); "En deçà de Dieu, aucun absolu ne tient par lui-même!" (ibid., 133). [Back to text.](#)

⁴² ibid., no, in. [Back to text.](#)

⁴³ *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique*, 1st ed. (1917), printed in *Mélanges* I, 289. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁴ “La fin absolue du sujet intelligent entre, comme élément constitutif, dans tout jugement” (“Jugement ‘scholastique’ concernant la racine de l’agnosticisme kantien” [1914], *Mélanges*, 278). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁵ Ibid., 286. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁶ For Maréchal, this natural desire for the vision of God was a “desiderium in se necessarium, quod subiciatur extrinsecae et indebitae conditioni (nempe dono gratiae) ut impleri possit” (“De natural! perfectae beatitudinis desiderio”, *Mélanges*, 327). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁷ Ibid., 328. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁸ Ibid., 333-34. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁹ For example: “Pour atteindre Dieu, au sens vrai du mot, il ne faut rien de moins qu’un *retournement* de perspective, une *conversion* de l’exigence dynamique, vers le présupposé spéculatif, du devoir-être vers l’être nécessaire. . . . [Ce n’est pas] comme exigence prospective, mais comme *condition ‘régressive’*, ‘logique’ de cette exigence même que l’existence de Dieu s’impose à notre assentiment” (“Le Problème de Dieu d’après M. Edouard Le Roy”, *Mélanges*, 258). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁰ So A. Milet, in *Mélanges* I, 32. [Back to text.](#)

⁵¹ “Subtili inquisitori fortasse videmur argumentum hausisse non quasi a priori, ex sola essentia metaphysica nostri intellectus, sed a posteriori ex experientia quadam illimitati desiderii causas cognoscendi, de quo desiderio dubitari possit, num non sit referendum ad conditionem historicam hominis” (“De naturali perfectae beatitudinis desiderio”, *Mélanges*, 335). [Back to text.](#)

⁵² See my assessment of the earlier work of J. B. Lotz and Karl Rahner in *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 63 (1939): 371-79. [Back to text.](#)

⁵³ For the following remarks, see the two excellent summaries of de Lubac’s thought: “Le Mystère du surnaturel”, *R.S.R.* (1949): 80-121, and P. Delaye’s essay in *Orientierung* (Zurich, June 30, 1950): 138-41. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁴ To the first level, the second work of salvation will also seem “undeserved”, which only at this point gives rise to the concept of the

supernaturale late dictum. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁵ Delaye, 138. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid., 140. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁷ Karl Rahner, 141-45. It should also be mentioned that Michael Schmaus gave a positive treatment of the basic intention of de Lubac's thought (*Dogmatik*, II [2d ed., 1949], 194f). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁸ "What cannot be determined as grace does not therefore need to be transcendent to every experience. . . . If what God wishes to make use of in man must by definition be an inner ontological constitution of his essence, that does not mean that God's necessity to be is what is most interior and intrinsic to man." It is already true: "If God gives to creation and above all to man a supernatural goal and if this goal is the first in intention, then the world *is* and man *is* by that very fact different in structure, everywhere and in every feature, from what they would be if they did not have this as their goal. And so it is entirely legitimate to sketch from this starting point the one concrete 'being' of man, even though his 'nature' is not a counterconcept to grace." [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁹ "It follows from the innermost essence of grace that man cannot have a capacity for grace [*Anlage für die Gnade*] that belongs to his nature. Or, if it is necessary to his nature, it must itself already belong to the order of the supernatural. . . . Naturally the concrete goal of man is the first thing that God wills and for which he designed the concrete essence of man in the first place. But this only means: if God wills a supernatural and undeserved goal for man, and if God so wills it that the created essence has a capacity for this goal either of a positive or unconditioned type, then God must give to man along with this a capacity for this goal. But it does not follow that this capacity must then itself belong to his nature. Otherwise, God would have created, freely and in this sense undeservedly, a creature that had been created with this natural capacity. But God would not have created a creature to whom then *grace* would be undeserved" (citations for the Rahner section not provided; trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁰ As Rahner says, "Everything else is so that this one thing can be." [Back to text.](#)

⁶¹ *Analogia ends*, 51. [Back to text.](#)

⁶² See volume 6 of the *Church Dogmatics*. [Back to text.](#)

⁶³ Again, see volume 6 of the *Church Dogmatics* for Barth's exposition. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁴ "Sancta mater Ecclesia tenet et docet, Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, *naturali* humanae rationis lumine e rebus creatis certo cognosci posse" (Denz. 1785; author's emphasis). [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁵ ". . . duplicem esse ordinem cognitionis, non solum principio, sed objecto etiam distinctum: principio quidem, quia in altero *naturali* ratione, in altera fide cognoscimus; objecto autem, quia praeter ea, ad quae *naturalis* ratio pertingere potest, credendo nobis proponuntur mystica in Deo abscondita, quae, nisi revelata divinitus, innotescere non possunt" (Denz. 1795; once more, author's emphasis). [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁶ H. Lennerz, *Natürliche Gotteserkenntnis* (Herder, 1926). [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁷ J. M. A. Vacant, *Études théologiques sur les constitutions du Concile du Vatican*, two volumes (1895), I, 288. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁸ Annotation 6 to the Schema, Vacant, vol. I, 583. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁹ Ibid., 289. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁰ "Licet omnes fere nationes hominum propter originalem culpam obscuratum habentes intellectum et desideria cordis sui facientes, invanucrant in cogitationibus suis et honorem soli Deo debitum creaturae tribuerunt" (*Coll. Lac.* VII, 121). [Back to text.](#)

⁷¹ "Si quis dixerit, humanam rationem, *uti nunc est*, non posse suo rationali lumine Deum e rebus creatis cognoscere, anathema sit." Gasser, however, replied: "[Agitur] solum de relatione ad *ordinem*, nam de relatione originis [that is, concerning the *de facto* origin of the knowledge of God] nihil in capite continetur." For him, the issue was threefold: man's potentiality, God as origin and goal, and knowing with certitude (ibid., 127). A reference to "nature as it really is" is not necessary "cum ea, quae in ista doctrina docentur, *generatim* vera habenda sint, sive sumatur homo in statu naturae purae, sive in statu naturae lapsae" (131). At issue, by the way, is not an outright proof from causality but a way of opening up the whole breadth of the ways to God (132). "Ambitus vero ordinis

naturalis nullatenus definitur” (148). It is especially not a question of “whether from man as he now is God can or cannot be known with certitude by the light of natural reason. It is a matter of the condition of human nature *in genere*” (150). [Back to text.](#)

⁷² For example: “Haec propositio. . . non veram esse opinor. Nullus enim Philosophorum, neque Aristoteles, neque Plato, neque Tullius. . . poterunt cum certitudine cognoscere Deum principium et finem omnium rerum. . . . [Ideo] unicuique fulget veritas non moralis sed necessaria de impotentia humanae rationis perveniendi cum certitudine ad cognoscendum Deum principium et finem” (ibid., 224). Another Father objected: “Non placet vox ‘naturalis’; homo enim nunquam in statu mere naturali fuit, nec proinde esset rationis lumen” (225). “Delenda videntur verba: Creatorem et Dominum nostrum” (since creation is something reason can recognize only with difficulty). [Back to text.](#)

⁷³ Vacant, Document XXIC, *Études théologiques* II, 936. And with noticeable impatience: “Non acquiescunt hi Romani Patres, quamvis ipsis dicatur, agi in hoc capite *solummodo de homine in genere*, quidquid sit de singulis; non acquiescunt, cum ipsis dicatur agi *solummodo de potentia*, utique non mere passiva, sed activa, Deum lumine naturali certo cognoscendi” (ibid., 434). But a reference to concrete nature was no longer avoidable after these objections: “Sed instant: potentia quae nunquam deducitur ad actum potius dicenda impotentia, et quidem non solummodo moralis, sed physica.” [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁴ Denz. 1786. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁵ The whole doctrine is once more clearly laid out in *Humani generis*: “Nam licet humana ratio simpliciter loquendo [that is: *absolute sumpta*] veram et certam cognitionem unius Dei personalis. . . suis naturalibus viribus ac lumine assequi revera possit, nihilominus non pauca obstant, quominus eadem ratio hac sua nativa facultate efficaciter fructuoseque utatur. . . . Quapropter divina revelatio moraliter *necessaria* dicenda est.” [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁶ “Cum. . . usum rationis habere incoeperit [homo],. . . primum quod tunc homini cogitandum occurrit, est deliberare de se ipso. Et si quidem sc ipsum ordinaverit ad debitum finem, per gratiam

consequetur remissionem originalis peccati, si vero non ordinet se ipsum ad debitum finem, secundum quod in illa aetate est capax discretionis, peccabit moraliter” (S. Th. I/II, q 89, a 6 a). [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁷ Michael Schmaus, *Dogmatik I*, 2d ed. (1948), 180-84, 204. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁸ *Apokalyptetai* (Rom 1:18); *ho Theos gar autois ephanerosen* (1:19). [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁹ If this distinction between *creatio* and *conservatio* is at all conceivable. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁰ “A kind of self-revelation therefore stands at the beginning of every possible knowledge of God. Not only that, but even the possibility of accepting this self-revelation is given only through God’s action. The self-revelation of God that proceeds from him is the objective creation, which in its own essence is a gift of existence from the Creator. And this action of God that effects the acceptance of his self-revelation consists in him giving to man the ability to find him. And he brings about this finding, although it is not exclusively the result of his work” (Erich Przywara, *Ring der Gegenwart I* [1929], 407). [Back to text.](#)

⁸¹ *Coll. Lac.* VII, 520. [Back to text.](#)

⁸² “Cum homo a Deo tamquam Creatore et Domino suo totus dependeat et ratio creata increatae veritati penitus subjecta sit, plenum revelanti Deo intellectus et voluntatis obsequium fide praestare tenetur” (Denz. 1789). [Back to text.](#)

⁸³ “Aided by his grace: *juvante ejus gratia*” (Denz. 1799). [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁴ See Denz. 1622 (*contra* Bautain) and Denz. 1650 (*contra* Bonnetty). [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁵ Vacant, *Etudes theologiques I*, 308-9. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁶ These remarks throw a whole new light on St. Thomas’ highly significant observation: “Ex duplici parte potest operatio cognitiva affectari. Uno modo, inquantum est perfectio *cognoscentis*, et talis affectatio operationis cognitivae procedit *ex amor sui*, et sic erat affectatio in vita contemplativa philosophorum. Alio modo inquantum terminatur ad *objectum*, et sic contemplationis desiderium procedit ex amore *objecti*, quia ubi amor, ibi oculus; et ubi est thesaurus tuus,

ibi est cor tuum (Mt 6:21), et sic habet affectionem vita contemplativa sanctorum” (3, d. 35, 1, 2q 1a 1 n. 23). St. Thomas held to the same teaching in his later *Summa Theologiae* (2/2, q 180, a 1 c). The dynamism which motivates the transcendence of “philosophical” knowledge is self-love and is therefore the expansion of the self into the sphere of the Absolute. On the other hand, the dynamism that motivates the transcendence of “theological” (that is, Christian) knowledge is that love for God which is grace and comes from God, which thus entails the inner self-opening of the transcendental object. Emile Mersch can formulate it in this way: “In knowing this relation (of the creature to its principle), the spirit does not attain transcendent Being, which is infinite and inaccessible. It attains only its end, but it attains it as something unintelligible and unknowable in itself. In other words, it attains it as something needing a cause which is not finite” (*Theologie du Corps Mystique* [1946] I:161). Just as the spirit speaks *itself* to the Absolute, so too does the *finite object*: “Man does not transcend creation. His spirit cannot climb higher than the ideas that he has received from the things of this world can carry him. Water seeks its own level, and the flow of water from the fountain cannot flow higher than the source of the water itself. The most that man can reach to is the knowledge of the world as a whole and its ultimate cause, all the way to the First Cause, but only to the extent that they are causes” (H. M. Christmann, *Lebendige Einheit* [Salzburg, 1938], 41-42). But with this insight we come to notice the concrete problematic of Original Sin in the term “*ex amore sui*”: the experience of the boundary of the world becomes an obscure and ambiguous experience of the “divine”. Then this experience is almost necessarily hypostatized into “God” by the experiencer, although in itself this experience is really only the creaturely quality of the world itself as it comes up against the boundary between it and God (Guardini, *Offenbarung* [1940]). “And then man becomes the creator of his own God” (Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* [1949] IL27). That is why Schmaus is quite right: “All of our images of God which we have drawn from nature must be corrected by the event of God’s revelation in Christ” (ibid., 107). [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁷ Gottlieb Söhngen, “Analogia fidei”, *Catholica* 3/4 (1934): 198-200. On this whole issue, see especially Söhngen’s five lectures on the occasion of the *Salzburger Hochschulwochen* in 1950, summarized in *Die Furche* Vienna, Sept. 3, 1950. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁸ Söhngen, “Wunderzeichen und Glaube”, *Catholica* 4/4 (1935): 163. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁹ “Second Theological Talk”, *PG* 36:45. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁰ *Epist.* 233 to Amphilochius, *PG* 32:865-67. [Back to text.](#)

⁹¹ *In Epist. ad Rom.*, *Hom.* 3, *PG* 60:413. [Back to text.](#)

⁹² *Interpret. Ep. ad Rom.*, c. 1, *PG* 82: 61 c. [Back to text.](#)

⁹³ *Expos, in Ep. ad Rom.*, c. 1, *PG* 124:894 CD. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁴ *Comment, in Ep. ad Rom*, *PG* 118:344 B. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁵ *Strom.* VII, 11, 1; *PG* 9:413 CD. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁶ *Comment, in Ep. ad Rom.*, liber 1; *PG* 14:863 C. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁷ *Comment, in Ep. ad Rom*; *PL* 17:57 A. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁸ *De vocat. omn. gent.* c. 5; *PL* 51:651 AB. Many of the cited passages can be found in a collection by Joseph Huby, *Épître aux Romains* (Paris: Collections Verbum Salutis X, 1941), 88-90. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁹ “Videre perfecte ac salubriter non potuerunt, quia superbi fuerunt.” *Sermones* ed. by Morin, in *Misc. Agost.* I (1930), 361. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁰ *In Epist. ad Rom.* c. 1, 1. 7. Edition Parm. XIII, 17-18. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰¹ See H. Rondet’s impressive presentation, *Gratia Christi* (Paris, 1948), 200ff. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰² For example, we could still compare Maximus the Confessor’s detailed discussion on the law of nature and Scripture in their relation to the grace of Christ (see my work *Kosmische Liturgie* [Freiburg: Herder, 1941], 290-320). And we might look at the whole Greek tradition of the *theoria physiké*: summarized there, which clearly has a Christian and supernatural stamp to it. The same thesis may be found in J. Loosen, *Logos und Pneuma im begnadeten Menschen bei Maximus Confessor* (Münster, 1941), passim. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰³ According to Thomas Aquinas, S. Th. 1, q 13, a 9 ad 2. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁴ Erich Przywara, *Analogia entis* I, 80, footnote. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁵ “Potentia quae numquam deducitur ad actum potius dicenda impotentia, et quidem non solummodo moralis sed physica” (Vatican I, 304). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 290. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 302. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁸ Vacant seems to be making more concessions in his explanation of *posse* than are necessary. “In fact,” so he writes, “the basic statement is false that human nature does not possess the physical possibility to attain to any other truths than those that were already known to the great philosophers. Msgr. Gasser pointed this out without justifying his statement any further. But a moment of reflection suffices to demonstrate the impermissibility of this principle. Human nature certainly possessed the natural potential to know the laws of electricity and their application that man only discovered in our century [nineteenth] and that mankind had not suspected until then. Human reason possesses the potential of knowing many other truths that our era does not suspect and future generations will discover. Why should the great philosophers have discovered everything that reason can naturally know of God? . . . *Natumli rationis lumine cognoscere* [to know by the light of natural reason] means *to know*, means to be convinced of a truth through natural arguments. But now today all Christian philosophers prove all kinds of truths pertaining to the most perfect concept of God using purely natural arguments, just as physicists prove the laws of electricity through their experiments that they have only nowadays discovered” (1,310-n).

Vacant’s example, however, limps. Knowledge of God cannot be equated with any other kind of natural knowledge we care to mention. The views of St. Thomas on this matter, which Marechal has once more brought back to their rightful place of honor, that God necessary and inclusively is co-known in every spiritual act of knowing and willing, do not admit the cogency of Vacant’s example.

In the matter of the knowledge of God, it is a question of the basis of every intrahorizontal and intraworldly act of knowing and striving, which as such cannot remain hidden to man (the way a law of nature like electricity can). Of course, the part of the comparison that does hold water is the fact that this knowledge of God can remain buried under a layer of almost complete unconsciousness, even among the great non-Christian thinkers. And Vacant is also right in what he adds:

“But, so the objection runs, reason could not know God so perfectly if it had not been illumined by revelation! We do not dispute this, the Constitution *Filius Dei* will draw this same conclusion.” The development of the truths of reason in the light of revelation is the actual process of *Christian philosophy*. To try to bring the truths of creation before the light of the truths of covenant and redemption is a task that neither pure philosophy nor pure theology can perform. It is a job for a “philosophy” that thinks and works in dependence on and as a function of theology. *Romano Guardini* has often expressly drawn our attention to this “third option” between philosophy and theology and devoted to this the main portion of his life work. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁹ Note 11 to the Schema, Vacant, I, 588. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁰ “Investigatio naturalis rationis non sufficit humano generi ad cognitionem divinorum, etiam quae ratione ostendi possunt” (S. Th. II/II, q 2, a 4 ad 1). See Bartmann, *Dogmatik* I (8th ed., 1932), 81. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹¹ Pascal, Fragments 571, 572 (Brunschwig edition); quoted in Romano Guardini’s *Christliches Bewußtsein* (1943), 165. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹² On this there is much excellent material in Przywara’s “Gotteserfahrung und Gottesbeweis” as well as in “Metaphysik und Religion”, *Ring der Gegenwart* I (1929), 329-418. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹³ S. Th. I, q2, a 1. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁴ *De veritate* 22, 2 od 1. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁵ As the Tridentinum describes: ss. 6, c. 5-6. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁶ Ibid. c. 5. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁷ “Benignissimus Dominus et errantes gratia sua excitat atque adjuvat ut ad agnitionem veritatis venire possint” (Denz. 1794), with an allusion in the last clause to 1 Timothy 2:4. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁸ Przywara, “Reichweite”, *Scholastik* (1940): 362. See also his “Metaphysik und Religion”, cited above: “The grace of assistance is dependent on the various orders of salvation. Therefore it is given in a supernatural order, as ours is, in the form of a supernatural assistance. But now the way to know God is the basis of salvation. Therefore we also have in our movement toward the knowledge of God the effect of this prevenient, accompanying and subsequent [supernatural] assistance” (415). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁹ Henri Bouillard, *Conversion et grace chez S. Thomas d’Aquin* (Paris: Aubier, 1944). And Henri Rondet, *Gratia Christi* (1948), 216ff. [Back to text.](#)

¹²⁰ “Divini est muneris, cum. . . recte cogitemus” (Denz. 182). [Back to text.](#)

¹²¹ Denz. 1794. [Back to text.](#)

¹²² Heinrich, *Dogmatik* V, 448. [Back to text.](#)

¹²³ Diekamp, *Dogmatik* II, 51. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 3: Christocentrism

¹ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* (4th ed.) II, 500. [Back to text.](#)

² S. Th. III, q 1, a 3 c. [Back to text.](#)

³ S.Th. II/II, q 2, a 7. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ See C. von Schätzler, *Das Dogma von der Menschwerdung Gottes, im Geiste des hi. Thomas dargestellt* (1870), 316-24. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ Godoy, quoted by E. Mersch, *Theologie du Corps mystique* (1946) I, 166. Further references in this same work. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ *De Incarn.* q 1, disp. 5, sec. 2-5. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ Emile Mersch, *ibid.*, I, 170. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ *Summula* (Clock und Lutz, 1946), 75. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ *Ibid.*, 17-18. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ See Przywara's "Reichweite", *Scholastik* (1940): 339f.: "The natural relationship between creature and Creator [appears] in the supernatural trinitarian One. . . . The theology of the Scholastics is thus genuine theology inasmuch as it is the maturation of the theology of the Greeks and of Augustine. To divorce nature from reason would have led directly to the 'natural theology' of the Enlightenment and of rationalism: that is, it would have led to a pantheism of pure nature and of pure reason. . . . Nature and reason are exclusively a reason and nature elevated and redeemed in the concrete supernatural order. All other kinds of nature and reason are lifeless abstractions" (362). "Thus there is no such thing as a purely natural religion in the real existent order. On the contrary, everything bears without exception, either consciously or unconsciously, in varying degrees, the one supernatural 'God in Christ in the Church' as its ultimate form" (527). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ *Deus semper major* (1940) III, 91f., 107f. [Back to text.](#)

¹² *Wesen des Christentums* (1940), 68. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ Ibid., 54. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ Ibid., 55-56. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ Ibid., 39f. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ Ibid., 52. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ *Welt und Person* (1939), 109f. cf. 168f. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ *Der Herr* (6th edition, 1949), 545-46. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* (4th edition, 1949) II, 539. [Back to text.](#)

²⁰ Ibid., 855. [Back to text.](#)

²¹ Ibid., 290f. [Back to text.](#)

²² Ibid., 51-52. [Back to text.](#)

²³ Ibid., 48-49. [Back to text.](#)

²⁴ Ibid., 492-93. [Back to text.](#)

²⁵ Ibid., 152. [Back to text.](#)

²⁶ Ibid., 185-86. [Back to text.](#)

²⁷ Ibid., 118. [Back to text.](#)

²⁸ Ibid., 212ff. [Back to text.](#)

²⁹ Ibid., 224. [Back to text.](#)

³⁰ Ibid., 225. [Back to text.](#)

³¹ Eucharius Berbuir, *Zeugnis für Christus* (Herder, 1949), 28-29. [Back to text.](#)

³² Emile Mersch, *La Théologie du Corps mystique* I, 47-48. [Back to text.](#)

³³ Ibid., 89. [Back to text.](#)

³⁴ Ibid., I, 99ff., 115; II, 96f. 124f. [Back to text.](#)

³⁵ Robert Grosche, "Natur und Geschichte", *Catholica* 4/2 (1935): 49-60. [Back to text.](#)

³⁶ Ibid., 57; Grosche is also drawing on the insights of Rosenmoller in this passage. [Back to text.](#)

³⁷ The preparations for this were started by the Tübingen School, in France by Blondel and Laberthonniere, in England by the Oxford Movement and by Newman. Then all the leading Catholic thinkers carried on and developed this trend, of whom we can mention only a few: Josef Bernhart, *Sinn der Geschichte* (1931); Peter Wust, *Dialektik des Geistes* (1928); Theodor Haecker, *Der Christ und die Geschichte* (1935); Karl Buchheim, *Wahrheit und Geschichte* (1935); A. Schütz, *Gott in der Geschichte* (1935); Philipp Dessauer, *Der Anfang und das Ende* (1939); Oskar Bauhofer, *Das Geheimnis der Zeiten* (1936); Karl Rahner, *Hörer des Wortes* (1941); Alfred Delp, *Der Mensch und die Geschichte* (1948); Karl Thieme, *Gott und die Geschichte* (1948); Michael Schmaus, *Von den letzten Dingen* (1948; with introductory chapters on the temporal-historical constitution of man and on the historicity of revelation); Josef Pieper, *Über das Ende der Zeit* (1950); and nearly the entire work of Guardini and Reinhold Schneider.

In France, Henri de Lubac's *Catholicisme* (1937), with its rich citation of material from the great tradition, effected the breakthrough and was followed by the historical and theological work of Gaston Fessard, Yves de Montcheuil, Jean Daniélou. In England, we can cite Christopher Dawson.

The reality of history forms the main theme not only of such Catholic thinkers as Th. Haecker, A. Dempf, H. Meyer, A. Wenzl, H. E. Hengstenberg, M. Müller, E. Spiess, B. Welte and so on, but even

more so of those theologians who to some extent rediscovered the earlier tradition and were engaged in a creative attempt to work out methodologically and consciously for the first time the historical and theological categories for this issue. [Back to text.](#)

³⁸ On existentialism, the Pope says: “The fictitious tenets of evolution, which repudiate all that is absolute, firm and immutable, have paved the way for the new, erroneous philosophy that, a rival of Idealism, immanentism and pragmatism, has come to be called existentialism, because, forgetful of the immutable essences of things, it concerns itself *only* with the individual existence (immutabilibus rerum essentiis posthabitis, de singulorum existentia *tantum* sollicita sit).” And on historicism: “There is also a certain false historicism, which, hewing *solely* to the random happenings of human life, undermines the foundations of all truth and absolute law (qui *solis* humanae vitae eventibus inhaerens, cujusvis veritatis legisque absolutae fundamenta subvertit) in the domain of philosophy as well as in that of Christian dogma” (*Humani generis*, nos. 6, 7). [Back to text.](#)

³⁹ Michael Schmaus, *Von den letzten Dingen* (1948), 52. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁰ Ibid., 60. See also, G. Söhngen, “Analogia fidei”, *Catholica* 3/4 (1934): 191f. [Back to text.](#)

⁴¹ Romano Guardini, *Wesen des Christentums*, 68-69. [Back to text.](#)

⁴² Guardini, *Die Offenbarung: ihr Wesen und ihre Form* (1940), 79-84. [Back to text.](#)

⁴³ Ibid., 83. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 88-93. See also Guardini’s *Jesus Christus*, 2. Teil: *Das Christusbild der johannischen Schriften* (1940), especially the whole chapter entitled “Wesen und Geschichte” (129-51). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁵ Balthasar is here drawing on a pun unavailable in English between *Leistungen* (accomplishments) and *Fehlleistungen* (a generic word for error and sin both) (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁶ Guardini, *Welt und Person* (1939), 71. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁷ Michael Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik II*, 277-78. [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁸ F. X. Arnold, “Glaubensschwund und Glaubensverkündigung”, *Die Warte* (Luxembourg, October 27, 1950). See the same author’s *Untersuchungen zur Theologie der Seelsorge*, in two volumes (Herder, 1948/1949). [Back to text.](#)

⁴⁹ Laberthonnière, *Le Réalisme chrétien et l’idéalisme grec* (1904). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁰ Guardini, *Die Offenbarung*, 76, 84. [Back to text.](#)

⁵¹ Hermann Schell, *Das Problem des Geistes* (1897), in *Kleinere Schriften*, edited by Hennemann (Paderborn, 1908), 189. [Back to text.](#)

⁵² Quoted in Schmaus, *Dogmatik* II, 536. [Back to text.](#)

⁵³ Schmaus, *Dogmatik* I, 445. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁴ Ibid., 454; see also II, 588. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁵ Ibid., 477. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁶ Ibid., II, 4. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁷ Ibid., II, 199. [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁸ Ibid., II, 210. See Guardini’s *Welt und Person*: “God’s whole being stands in act. Everything that he is he thinks. Everything that is true about God he has measured. Everything God has he accomplishes. There is nothing in God that is merely an external component [*vorhanden*]” (55). [Back to text.](#)

⁵⁹ Erich Przywara, “Corpus Christi mysticum: eine Bilanz”, *Zeitschrift für Ascese und Mystik* 15 (1940): 212. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁰ I. von. Kuhn, Article Bay, *Kirchenlexikon* of Wetzer und Welte, 694; quoted in J. Bernhart, *Chaos und Dämonie* (1950), 69. [Back to text.](#)

⁶¹ “Alii veram gratuitatem ordinis supernaturalis corrumpunt, cum autumnet, Deum entia intellectu praedita condere non posse, quin eadem ad beatificam visionem ordinet et vocet” (26). [Back to text.](#)

⁶² The historical analyses of Henri de Lubac should therefore be essentially unassailable. They have won the approval of many prominent researchers, such as Jules Lebreton, Henri Rondet (*Revue de science religieuse* 35 [1948]: 481-521), Dom M. Cappuyn (*Bulletin de théologie ancienne et médiévale* [1947], 251-54), Karl Thieme (*Gott und die Geschichte*) and Michael Schmaus. The

boundaries of systematic reflections have been partially drawn by Pius XII's encyclical *Humani generis* but still need to be determined more carefully through further research. See also T. Deman's "Französische Bemühungen um eine Erneuerung der Theologie", *Theol. Rev.* 46 (1950): 61-82. [Back to text.](#)

⁶³ Guardini, *Welt und Person*, 186-87. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁴ Ibid., 23. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁵ Guardini, *Freiheit, Gnade, Schicksal!* (Munich, 1948), 163-66. In the footnote, Guardini has added: "I hope that one cannot object to these reflections that they make grace into an essential element of man's constitution. Grace is supernatural, removed from every compulsion as well as from every right or claim. But as soon as 'man' means that being whom God definitively intended when he created him, then it is clear that he can only become real through grace. . . . There is no such thing as a natural human being. This is an imaginary construct. . . . Modern naturalism tried to construct a purely natural human being who is fully meaningful in his ontic constitution in himself. . . . But those who really want to see the issue directly can see everywhere that this theory is not true. . . . [It is] a postulate of the will to emancipate oneself from God" (ibid., 166). See the excellent discussion of the dialectic of the notion of grace in history in *Christliches Bewußtsein: Versuche über Pascal* (1935), 102. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁶ Daniel Feuling, *Katholische Glaubenslehre* (1937), 214-17. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁷ See his *Das Geheimnis der Zeiten* (1935), *Die Heimholung der Welt* (1937) and *Die rettenden Gewalten* (1950). [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁸ Bauhofer, *Das Geheimnis der Zeiten*, 22-25. [Back to text.](#)

⁶⁹ Bauhofer, "Die beiden Möglichkeiten des Menschseins", printed in *Die rettenden Gewalten* (Vienna, 1950), 91f. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁰ Ibid., 128. [Back to text.](#)

⁷¹ Josef Pieper, *Über das Ende der Zeit* (Munich, 1950), 18-27. [Back to text.](#)

⁷² "Christliche Philosophie?" *Hochland* 40 (1948): 503. [Back to text.](#)

⁷³ Berbuir, *Natura Humana* (Munich, 1950), 23. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁴ Ibid., 51. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁵ Schmaus, *Katholische Dogmatik* II, 382. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁶ Ibid., 68-69. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁷ Ibid., 70-72. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁸ Ibid., 191-92. [Back to text.](#)

⁷⁹ Ibid., 199-200. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁰ Ibid., 63. [Back to text.](#)

⁸¹ Ibid., 161f. [Back to text.](#)

⁸² Ibid., 122. [Back to text.](#)

⁸³ Ibid., 346f., 494. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁴ Ibid., 663. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁵ Ibid., 424. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁶ Ibid., 540-41. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁷ Ibid., 492-93. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁸ Wust, *Ungewissheit und Wagnis* (Salzburg, 1937), 62-63. [Back to text.](#)

⁸⁹ Ibid., 69. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁰ *Katholische Dogmatik* I, 452 (with slight alterations in the text). August Brunner, S.J., has gone the farthest in this noetic issue in the way he grounds knowledge on faith (*Glaube und Erkenntnis* [Munich, 1951]). For Brunner, relying on Scheler here, personal disclosure (revelation) and trusting readiness to accept such disclosure are the basis of every act of communication. Here the loftiest personal forms of knowing and being true are realized. All other forms of knowing and evidence are accordingly “derivative”. So true is that for Brunner that he has a certain difficulty in not making the Christian faith seem like an “instance of faith in general”—if yet the highest. [Back to text.](#)

⁹¹ Munich: Kösel, 1950. [Back to text.](#)

⁹² Ibid., 91. [Back to text.](#)

⁹³ Ibid., 102. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁴ Ibid., 67f. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁵ Ibid., 103-4. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 67-72. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 70-71. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁸ See our study, *Présence et pensée: Essai sur la philosophie religieuse de Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris, 1942), 29-60. [Back to text.](#)

⁹⁹ Bernhart, 57-58. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 44. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 101-2. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰² Ibid., 45, 95. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰³ Ibid., 95. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 92-94. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 98. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 99. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 108. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁸ Of course the reference here is to the noncontradiction between terms that experience shows are only separated, whereas the insight into a logical (analytical) noncontradiction is quite possible to the human spirit. But how is man seriously to assert the possibility of, for example, a centaur? In the abstract, no such being is possible but only in connection with an environment, with a world that once was and continues to be—in short, with a world as such. And how is a finite spirit to be able to decide whether another “world as a whole” has enough meaning, weight, depth and divine character [*Gottebenbildigkeit*] to be able to be called into existence and thus to that extent be possible? If a world in which God did not become man might seem to our eyes to have something even more attractive about it, who can say whether it would have been worthwhile for God? [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰⁹ Guardini, *Das Harren der Schöpfung* (1940), 21-22. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁰ Guardini, *Glaubenserkenntnis* (Basel, 1944), 245-50. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹¹ Guardini, *Der Hen* (6th edition, 1949), 606. See further: “The mystery of predestination rests on this Christ. It is a mystery of love and not of fear” (548). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹² Guardini, *Die letzten Dinge* (1949), 76. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹³ Przywara, *Deus semper major* III (1940), 374. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁴ Ibid., II, 384. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 176 (the German is a quote from an Easter Triduum hymn [trans, note]). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 70. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁷ Ibid., I, 233, 236ff. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 441-42. [Back to text.](#)

¹¹⁹ See E. Berbuir, *Natura humana* (1948), 93,143. [Back to text.](#)

¹²⁰ See J. Bernhart, *Chaos und Dämonie* (Munich, 1950), 98. "That something, however, whereby man is always transcending his existence and where is he in his deepest core the most afraid, is also his innate claim on salvation, which even in despair he cannot forsake, because it is precisely despair which confirms his highest good. Despair in fact is constituted by the absence of the good for which he is destined. . . . There is something in our very selves that is already at home" (99). [Back to text.](#)

¹²¹ Przywara has recently so loosened and dissolved his earlier formula that it no longer takes on the appearance of being a crypto-metaphysical principle. Now a *process* has taken its place: God's *history* in Christ, who lives on in the Church for humanity. This is a history that cannot be depicted except by a theology that is itself on the *way* from a *theologia directa positiva* to a *theologia indirecta dialectica*, which then opens up into a *theologia negativa* (or its equivalent in Christology or ecclesiology), a *theologia excessus*. This answers to the strictest of Barth's methodological demands. [Back to text.](#)

Chapter 4: Grace and Sin

¹ As is sometimes expressed in the case of the deficient act of awareness of the child at baptism, which must be replaced with the whole vicarious act of faith of the Church. [Back to text.](#)

² The younger Blumhard, but also H. Kutter, L. Ragaz and J. Müller as well as, from the other side, J. Weiss and Albert Schweitzer have followed this line, and Barth and his disciples were part of this movement. [Back to text.](#)

³ For further references, see: Robert Grosche, "Simul Justus et peccator", *Catholica* 4/3 (1935): 132-39. For a discussion of the

general interpretation history of this formula (in both Protestantism and Catholicism) see: Alfons Kirchgassner, *Erlösung und Sünde im NT* (Freiburg: Herder, 1950). For Emil Brunner's teaching on the issue, see: Hermann Volk, *Emil Brunners Lehre von dem Sünder* (Regensburg, Munster, 1950). [Back to text.](#)

⁴ HK 30-41. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ HK 37. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ HK 35. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ *Deus semper major* I, 245-56; II, 135-38. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ This is especially apparent in Jesus' struggle before his death on the Mount of Olives, where he must wrestle with the conflict of two wills, his own and his Father's. Without this, the *voluntas naturalis humana* could never make the transition from the *forma peccati* to the *peccatum* of the *voluntas elicitata*. [Back to text.](#)

Part IV

Chapter 1: A Look Back

¹ *Excitati divina gratia*. [Back to text.](#)

² *De veritate* I, 6; S. Th. I, 16, 8. Max Müller in particular has been emphasizing this radical dichotomy between God's eternal truth and the finite created truth of the world. [Back to text.](#)

³ Gottlieb Söhngen, *Catholica* 3/4 (1934): 202. [Back to text.](#)

Afterword

* The following was published in 1961 as a foreword to the second edition. [Back to text.](#)

¹ It should be noted in this preface that von Balthasar is using the enumeration of the volumes of the *Church Dogmatics* that Barth himself gave them: this vast work is divided into four main parts of from two to four volumes each. In 1951, however, this work was not yet complete, and so von Balthasar used a separate schema of

citation, the table for which is given in the Appendix of this book (trans, note). [Back to text.](#)

² I have been reproached myself for this term, but of course it comes from the theory of the musical fugue (author's note). (Generically, this word means a narrowing of focus, but in music it refers to the highlighting of an individual voice in the chorus, or an instrument in a symphony [trans, note].) [Back to text.](#)

³ KD IV/1, 7. Barth's emphasis. [Back to text.](#)

⁴ Wolfhart Panneberg, "Zur Bedeutung des Analogiedenken bei Karl Barth: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Urs von Balthasar", *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 78/1 (1953): 7-24; here, 24. [Back to text.](#)

⁵ Erich Przywara, "Analogia fidei", *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* I (1957), col. 474. [Back to text.](#)

⁶ Gottlieb Söhngen, "Analogie", *Wörterbuch theologischer Begriffe* (Kösel, in press); and his classical and clear formulas in "Analogia entis in analogia fidei", *Antwort* (1956), 266-71. [Back to text.](#)

⁷ P. Gutwenger, "Der Begriff der Natur in der Theologie", *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* (1953): 461-64. [Back to text.](#)

⁸ Ibid., 452-61. [Back to text.](#)

⁹ Henri Bouillard, *Blondel et le Christianisme* (Seuil, 1961). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁰ Gustav Siewerth, *Schicksal der Metaphysik von Thomas zu Heidegger* (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 1959); cf. esp.: "Die Frage nach Gott", 361-517. We should also mention that if this inner relationship (which for Barth is entailed by the relationship between creation and covenant) is not reflected onto its very foundations, then the superstructure of biblical statements will once more seem threatened by presuppositions that are insufficient for such statements. And it can then happen that the seriousness of the issue of the analogy of faith will be doubted and come under the suspicion of merely being an outer veil thrown over to obscure the old dialectic. This, for example, is the approach of Emmanuele Rivero ("La Teologia esistenzialistica di Karl Barth", Naples [no further citation given: trans.]). [Back to text.](#)

¹¹ Walter Kreck, "Analogia fidei oder analogia entis?" in *Antwort: Karl Barth Festschrift* (1956), 272-86. [Back to text.](#)

¹² Grover Foley, "The Catholic Critics of Karl Barth", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 136-55. [Back to text.](#)

¹³ Henri Bouillard, *Karl Barth*, in three volumes (Paris: Aubier, 1957); Hans Küng, *Rechtfertigung: Die Lehre Karl Barths und eine katholische Besinnung. Mit einem Geleitbrief von Karl Barth* (Einsiedeln: Johannesverlag, 1957). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁴ KD IV/1, 858-59. Barth means the term "representation" polemically, as an effort to replace Christ and his work with that of the saints. For him, this is intimately linked with the Roman theology of the sacrifice of the Mass. As it might be helpful to the English-speaking reader to know what von Balthasar is responding to in this passage, I have included Barth's response to von Balthasar's book cited in this footnote:

"In modern Roman Catholic theology, there is a promising but, of course, unofficial movement that is apparently aiming in the direction of what we might call a christological renaissance. I am not thinking only of the well-known book that Hans Urs von Balthasar addressed to me, in which I find an understanding of the concentration on Jesus Christ attempted in the *Church Dogmatics* that is incomparably more powerful than that of most of the books that have clustered around me. For H. U. v. Balthasar has with him and under him quite a chorus of German and especially French friends who in different ways and with varying emphases all seem to wish to look again to the center, to 'the author and perfecter of our faith' (Heb 12:2), who alone can make possible either theology itself or any attempt at ecumenical agreement. And, more recently, von Balthasar himself has written a small series of other notable books, on Thérèse of Lisieux, Elizabeth of Dijon and Reinhold Schneider. And if I understand aright their theological content, it seems plain to me that he too (like Bultmann, but with infinitely richer material) sees from that center that he has grasped so clearly and finely a whole field of possible and actual representations of the history of Jesus Christ, the repetitions or reenactments of his being and activity by the saints or by those who achieve some measure of sanctity. And as the author sees and represents them, these have taken place and do

take place in history *post Christum* and in our own time with such significance, such positive and stimulating force, that the One whose being and activity is supposedly reproduced obviously fades into the background as compared with his saints. I now have an inkling of something that at first baffled me: what is meant by the ‘christological constriction’ that my expositor and critic urged against me in terms of a mild rebuke. But we must bring against him the counterquestion, whether in all the spiritual splendor of the saints who are supposed to represent and repeat him, Jesus Christ has not ceased—not in theory, but in practice—to be the object and origin of Christian faith. I do not know sufficiently whether the ‘christological renaissance’ in Roman Catholic theology is developing in the same way in the case of its other representatives. If so, it unfortunately means that this promising new beginning in Roman Catholic theology is in danger of returning to (or maybe it has never left) the well-worn track on which the doctrine of justification is absorbed into that of sanctification—understood as the pious work of self-sanctification that man can undertake and accomplish on his own strength. My concern is whether this is perhaps the case. For the doctrine of the sacrifice of the Mass, the archetype of the whole idea of representation, is still unshaken. If I were a Roman Catholic theologian, I would begin my attempt at reconsideration and cautious amendment at the point where the Roman Catholic Church has in practice her christological center, perhaps reaching out from there to an appraisal of the saints that would be more subdued—and and probably less impressive, but all the more truthful, because it gives more honor to the Holy One. If only we were agreed—and this applies to my neighbor on the left as well as on the right—that the ultimate and penultimate things, the redemptive act *of God* and that which passes for *our* response, *are not the same*. Everything is jeopardized if there is confusion in this respect” (CD IV/1, 768).

This quotation shows, perhaps more than any other, how deeply Protestant Barth’s thinking really is, and how deeply Catholic are the presuppositions that von Balthasar brings to his objections to Barth. Consider this quintessential passage from Luther and see how much Barth’s objections to von Balthasar reflect Luther’s position here:

“Yes, they say we must honor the saints and belittle ourselves and act humbly toward them. Answer: In this, not humility is of value when it concerns God’s grace, but pride. Thou shouldst be humble in thy own cause and being, for thou art nothing but a bag of worms. But thou canst never be proud enough of Christ’s goodness and must say, Were I ten times as filthy, I still have the blood that makes me clean and holy, and it cost Christ as much to redeem me as to redeem St. Peter. They were just as low as we, and we are just as high as they, so that none has more than I except they were stronger in the faith, but the cost and the benefit are not greater” (WA 24, 484). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁵ See for example the new edition of *Kosmische Liturgie* (1961) and the selection of readings from Augustine’s *City of God* (1960). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁶ “Chistlicher Universalismus”, *Antwort*, 237-48. Reprinted in *Explorations in Theology, I: The Word Made Flesh* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1965), 241-54. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁷ *Thomas von Aquin: Besondere Gnadengaben und die zwei Wege menschlichen Lebens. Kommentar zur Summa Theologica 11/II* (Heidelberg: A. Pustet Verlag, 1954). [Back to text.](#)

¹⁸ KD III/4, 434. [Back to text.](#)

¹⁹ In the meantime, see the contribution in the collection of essays called *Der Sinn der Geschichte* (Beck, 1961). [Back to text.](#)