

**MCMASTER UNIVERSITY**

**READING BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION**

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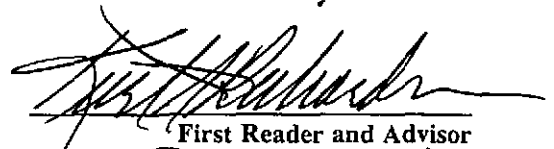
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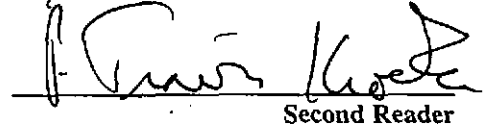
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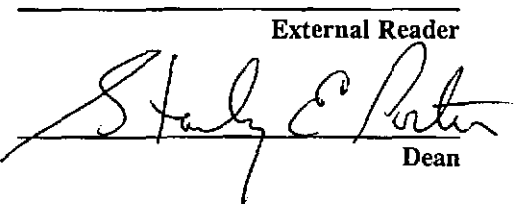
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To my first educators, Mom and Dad,  
with love and gratitude

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### *a) Decisive Moments in the History of the Doctrine of Creation*

Why Karl Barth's doctrine of creation? In the grand scheme of things this guiding thesis topic is justified simply because Barth is consistently recognized as the most influential Christian theologian of the twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Within the scope of this work, it is because of the unique role that Barth's doctrine of creation plays within the history of the doctrine itself.

Throughout the history of theology, the doctrine of creation has been shaped by areas of thought outside Christian dogmatics.<sup>2</sup> Those developing the doctrine regularly neglected the central doctrine of Christianity, salvation, and its significance for the doctrine of creation. In its incipient stages, the doctrine of creation did contain a focus on the doctrine of salvation and its trinitarian reality. For example, Irenaeus (180 ca.) drew connections between Christ and creation and implications followed for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, even during this time, the doctrine of creation was very much influenced by Greek philosophical understandings of the world. Throughout

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Watson notes that "Pope Pius XI called Barth the greatest theologian since Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), v.

<sup>2</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).



history the doctrine continued to be influenced by philosophy and eventually it was understood that this doctrine belonged to this domain. As Hugo Meynell has noted, people would “build up a doctrine of creation on philosophical grounds, which is then shown to correspond, as far as it goes, with Christian doctrine, and thus to be useful in commending or confirming it.”<sup>3</sup> As Christianity faced reformation (sixteenth century) the doctrine was presented in trinitarian fashion (e.g. John Calvin), but this was not long-lived. Following Newton (seventeenth century), the origin of the doctrine switched somewhat from the domain of philosophy to science. This separation of domains is expressed in Galileo’s suggestion that “theology is about how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go.”<sup>4</sup> Subsequently, during the nineteenth century, theology became dominated with ideas of pantheism and panentheism.

Barth’s doctrine of creation marks a return to a trinitarian approach to the doctrine of creation.<sup>5</sup> He focuses more on why there is a creation than how creation originated. His doctrine is not a protology of the world. He emphasizes that creation is a result of the will and love of God and that, accordingly, it is directed toward the covenant. In doing so Barth attempts to move beyond dependence upon science or philosophy by presenting a doctrine of creation based upon the Christian faith. He wishes to start with the true God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth’s “Church Dogmatics”* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 143.

<sup>4</sup> Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 145.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 157; Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 2. Cf. Robert W. Jenson, “Karl Barth,” *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, vol. 1., ed. David Ford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 47.

The importance of Barth's doctrine of creation is also marked by those following Barth. Many who follow Barth historically also begin with him theologically. Barth began the trend of approaching the doctrine of creation from a trinitarian perspective. Although not uncritically, contemporary thinking concerning the doctrine of creation must, and does, come to terms with Barth's doctrine of creation.<sup>6</sup> So, for example, we find H. Paul Santmire whose quest for a theology of nature and an ecologically responsible theology commenced with his doctoral dissertation focusing on Barth's doctrine of creation.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, Jürgen Moltmann's ecological and pneumatological doctrine of creation begins by setting out guidelines for his presentation, which are in large part a response to Barth's presentation of the doctrine.<sup>8</sup>

#### b) *The Context of Barth's Project*

All writing and thought is influenced by the surroundings people find themselves in and it is therefore important to understand Barth's context as we approach his doctrine of creation.

Born in Basel 10 May 1886, Barth grew up in a Swiss Protestant home worshipping within the Reformed tradition, and under the fatherhood of a New Testament

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<sup>6</sup> Per Lønning has noted that "To a large extent current issues in the theology of creation reflect advocacy versus questioning of the Barthian inheritance," in *Creation—An Ecumenical Challenge?: Reflections Issuing From a Study by the Institute for Ecumenical Research Strasbourg, France* (Mason, GA: Mercer University Press, 1989), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Harold Paul Santmire "Creation and Nature: A Study of the Doctrine of Nature with Special Attention to Barth's Doctrine of Creation" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1966); followed by his *Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: T. Nelson, 1970); *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); and *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology, Theology and the Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Creation, Covenant and Glory: A Conversation on Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation," in *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden

and Church History professor.<sup>9</sup> Barth went on to study theology, being trained under the liberalism of Adolf von Harnack and Wilhelm Hermann, subsequently pastoring for a number of years (1910-1921). In 1914 Barth found his teachers' embrace of Kaiser Wilhelm's war policy to be an ethical failure. Accordingly he questioned their theology: "Their exegetical and dogmatic presuppositions could not be in order... A whole world of exegesis, ethics, dogmatics and preaching, which I had hitherto held to be essentially trustworthy, was shaken to the foundations, and with it, all the other writings of the German theologians."<sup>10</sup> Barth, by contrast, became part of the Confessing Church in Germany. Barth taught at the German universities of Göttingen, Münster, and Bonn (1921-1935) but, on account of his criticism of Nazism, he was forced by the German government to return to Switzerland, where he taught at Basel until his retirement (1962). Barth passed away six years later.<sup>11</sup>

On the theological side of things, Barth wished to focus on the revelation of Jesus Christ. His project is a response to the natural theology of Enlightenment liberalism, which emphasizes that divine and human nature and reason are essentially the same – a modern version of the classic *analogia entis* – and, therefore, that God can be known by use of human reason in the construction of theological concepts. Barth rejected any

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(London: SCM Press, 1991), 125-142; and his *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 1-19.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley J. Grenz and Ed. L. Miller, *Fortress Introduction to Contemporary Theologies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 1; G. W. Bromiley, "Karl Barth," in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 27; and Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, quoted in Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 81.

<sup>11</sup> Grenz and Miller, *Fortress Introduction*, 2-5; Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *20<sup>th</sup>-Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*, 66; Bromiley, "Karl Barth," 28, 29; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 9-10; and Jenson, "Karl Barth," 24.

*analogia entis* because Barth did not want “to justify the Word of God in terms of a correlation with the structure of creaturely existence.”<sup>12</sup> Barth’s shift in thinking from his predecessors’ is found in his *Epistle to the Romans* (1919) in which he emphasizes the otherness of God and in his study of Anselm (*Fides quarens intellectum*, 1931) through which he confirmed the impossibility of any natural theology. Barth was also responding to existentialism, which he had studied especially in the works of Søren Kierkegaard. He found existential theology subjective and wanted to focus on the objectivity of Jesus Christ.

Politically, Barth was writing in response to the war surrounding him. In fact, volume 3/1 of his *Church Dogmatics* was published in 1945 only a few months after the war had ended. H. Berkhof has noted that “Only after the unexpected catastrophe of the First World War did the belief in creation begin to lose its obviousness. Barth consequently derives it strictly and exclusively from the revelation in Christ which proves that neither God nor man is alone and that God rules over this world and it is rightly his.”<sup>13</sup>

Following the above context it may be said that Barth’s doctrine of creation is essentially a response to the theological liberalism in which he was nurtured, a response which was triggered by the situation of war surrounding him. Barth’s response took the form of a theology focused on the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> Watson, *God and the Creature*, 125. Cf. Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 85-86.

<sup>13</sup> H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: And Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 150-151.

c) *What is Creation?*

Within the above context Barth turns to the doctrine of creation. When Barth speaks of 'creation' he means a few different things. Firstly, and this is where Barth's emphasis lies, creation refers to an action. It is the first work of God *ad extra*. This is necessarily so because as soon as God does something 'outside' of himself there must be something in or on which for him to act.

As an act of God, it is a completed act.<sup>14</sup> God created, "in the beginning." The completion of this act, as Barth understands it, is marked by God's Sabbath rest.<sup>15</sup> Barth does not deny the concept of a *creatio continua*, but this concerns providence rather than a continuation of the original work of creation. Barth cautions that "To attribute the Church or revelation directly to creation or the creative will of God as such is to forget or ignore the fact that the Church or revelation can be an event only as an answer to the sin of man, or it is to be forced to try to integrate the sin of man into creation."<sup>16</sup> God indeed did more creations – salvation is 'new creation' – but here creation refers to the first originating work.

As a work of God, Barth asserts that creation is also history. Creation was not a timeless act (as Augustine supposes). Rather, as with salvation history, God took time as he created the world. If creation were not history it would not be "the presupposition and

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<sup>14</sup> It is unclear how Aung could present such a contrasting interpretation: "For Barth creation is not a reality which has been completed once and for all. Rather, creation is an ongoing work of God, and we ought to name it *creatio continua*. The work of creation is still going on. This means the history of creation is an ongoing process," in *The Doctrine of Creation*, 81.

<sup>15</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3/1, trans. ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957-1975), 215. (References to *Church Dogmatics* will herein simply refer to the volume and part numbers, e.g., 3/1).

<sup>16</sup> 1/1, 446.

preparation of the whole history which follows it.”<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, in the first Genesis creation narrative, Barth interprets the seven days to refer to creation history.

This history, however, does not record precisely how God created. Barth argues this because he believes that creation history could not be known precisely by humans. Creation is not history as historians speak of it today. That is, since humans were not observers of its happening, they can not record or verify what occurred. In this sense, Barth speaks of creation history as ‘non-historical’ or ‘pre-historical history.’ In addition, Barth finds that the Genesis accounts of creation are partially contradicted by references to creation elsewhere in the Bible.<sup>18</sup> He explains that they do have a common denominator and that the differences are found simply because the accounts of creation were told for different purposes, by different sources. On account of these factors, Barth does not interpret the creation narratives literally. They are also not interpreted as myth; they are not just a story teaching a general principle, the characters of the story having the ability to be dispensed with. Rather, the creation narratives are sagas expressing in poetic form the theological truth (i.e. actual event) that God created the world in a history. Barth says the creation narratives are “an intuitive and poetic picture of a pre-historical reality of history which is enacted once and for all within the confines of time and space.”<sup>19</sup>

As a work of God, creation is not just a question of how the creation came into existence but also who the Creator is. Meynell correctly notes that “that is not creation,

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<sup>17</sup> 3/1, 77.

<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 80.

<sup>19</sup> 3/1, 70.

in Barth's sense, which is not attributed explicitly to the God revealed in Jesus Christ."<sup>20</sup> Similarities or not, other creation theories do not point to the true identity of the Creator and thus can not present a true understanding of creation.

Secondly, 'creation' for Barth is a thing. It is the product of God's act of creation. One might say that creation is all that is distinct from God. The creation is not just the physical universe, but includes heaven and earth; the invisible and the visible. In fact, even Barth says that "All that exists is either the Creator Himself or else His creature – God or creation."<sup>21</sup> However, according to Barth, there are things that exist which God did not create, for example, evil. Accordingly, in Barth creation can not properly be defined as all that is not God.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, it is certainly true for Barth that creation is distinct from God. Creation is not emanation. Barth writes, "That would really not be creation, but a living movement of God, an expression of Himself. But creation means something different; it means a reality distinct from God."<sup>23</sup> In summary, Barth speaks of creation as a thing and, as the title of volume 3/1 of his *Church Dogmatics* suggests,<sup>24</sup> as a work of God.

#### d) *Purpose*

Much has been said here and there concerning Barth's doctrine of creation since he produced it, but the contexts vary greatly and do not always approach his work from a

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<sup>20</sup> Meynell, *Grace versus Nature*, 159.

<sup>21</sup> 3/1, 117. Cf. 42, 43.

<sup>22</sup> Accordingly Barth limits creation to that which God has actualized: "We speak of creation, of the *creatura* which is distinct from God yet actualised by Him, of the creaturely world," in 4/3 137. Cf. 3/1, 95.

<sup>23</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 46.

theological perspective.<sup>25</sup> In addition, much of what has been said critiquing Barth has reflected misunderstandings of Barth's message. It is time that an extensive study brought the discussion together and evaluated it. How is Barth misunderstood? What strengths or weakness have been justifiably observed? This study aims at doing this from a theological perspective. It will study Barth's doctrine of creation including how this aspect of Barth's theology has been approached by others. Part I will be dedicated to hearing those who have already studied Barth's doctrine of creation. Part II will focus on Barth's doctrine itself. We will find that while Barth is critiqued for being a-historical and inconsistently trinitarian in his doctrine of creation, Barth actually emphasizes the historical relationship between the triune Creator and his creation. Barth is also critiqued for being anthropocentric, which is a fair critique, but the scope of the problem (if it is one) is not as great as is often proposed.

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<sup>24</sup> "The Work of Creation."

<sup>25</sup> For example, Aung's *The Doctrine of Creation*, deals with theological ideas, but seems just as concerned, perhaps more concerned, with the context Barth writes in.



PART I  
RESISTING BARTH

Here we will discuss Barth's doctrine of creation by surveying Barth's interpreters with the intention of gaining knowledge of the criticisms of Barth's doctrine of creation. This will provide a starting point and background for presenting my reading of Barth. Complaints against Barth's doctrine of creation have three main thrusts. Interpreters critique Barth for neglecting the significance of history in his doctrine of creation, for neglecting non-human creation, and for the way he applies his doctrine of the Trinity.

## CHAPTER 2

### IS BARTH A-HISTORICAL?

#### a) *The History/Eternity Dialectic*

The first major critique of Barth concerns the place of history, or lack thereof, in his doctrine of creation. It concerns how Barth relates the covenant and Jesus Christ to creation and salvation history. G. C. Berkouwer, one of Barth's early interpreters, identified a dialectic between history and eternity in Barth, but concluded that Barth displayed an unbalanced emphasis on the eternal aspect of God's creative work. He identifies this in Barth's emphasis on the priority of the covenant. Covenant is considered pre-history rather than creation, which is part of history. This is displayed by the prefiguration of reconciliation found in creation, the first work of God. Berkouwer believes this displays the "triumph of grace" in Barth's doctrine of creation.<sup>1</sup> To bring this to light, Berkouwer, reversing Barth's order, considers the doctrine of creation before election. He does this because he feels that following this traditional order will show how significant grace – the pre-historical covenant – is in Barth's theology.

Berkouwer's response to Barth is somewhat indirect in that it appears as a dialogue with Regin Preter. Preter, a former pupil of Barth, criticizes Barth for the

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Colin Brown has written of Barth that, "All God's dealings with men are effected in and through Jesus Christ through whom grace triumphs over all," in *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 151.

unity he gives to reconciliation and creation.<sup>2</sup> He finds that the result of this is that “the significance and decisiveness of history are imperiled.”<sup>3</sup> Everything with regards to salvation has been completed before creation, it only has to be actualized in history.<sup>4</sup> This makes it difficult to speak of a historical fall, or historical reconciliation. Thus, Prenter accuses Barth of ‘creation docetism.’<sup>5</sup> Thomas Idinopulos presents a similar critique of Barth. He argues that since before creation Barth can only speak of an *a priori* and *ideal* Christ, and consequently an ideal creation rather than a necessarily actual one, Barth is unable to and does not show how creation is real.<sup>6</sup> By comparison Dan Deegan draws a parallel between Barth’s thought and early Christian Platonists.<sup>7</sup> George Hendry and Salai Hla Aung draw a parallel between Barth and Plato himself. Aung writes, “Here we see the resemblance of this proposition regarding his doctrine of creation to that of form/idea concept in Plato’s philosophy. That means that the idea of creation is already in the mind of God from the beginning and takes on its present form when God actualizes it according to that idea.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Regin Prenter “Die Einheit von Schöpfung und Erlösung. Zur Schöpfungslehre Karl Barths,” *Theologische Zeitschrift* 2.3 (1946): 161ff., cited by G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 250-255.

<sup>3</sup> Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 250.

<sup>4</sup> By comparison, outside of the doctrine of creation Gustaf Wingren argues that Barth neglects the significance of history in the fact that salvation simply concerns recognition (knowledge) of the revelation of all that which has occurred before creation, in *Theology in Conflict*, trans. Eric H. Wahlstrom (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 23-44, 108-28.

<sup>5</sup> Prenter “Die Einheit von Schöpfung und Erlösung,” 175, cited by Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 251.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas A. Idinopulos, “The Critical Weakness of Creation in Barth’s Theology,” *Encounter* (1972): 162, 165.

<sup>7</sup> Dan L. Deegan, “The Christological Determinant in Barth’s Doctrine of Creation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 129; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 151.

Berkouwer responds to Prenter's accusation of 'creation docetism' by saying that this is an unjust criticism of Barth since Barth affirms the goodness of creation because it is "created *in* Jesus of Nazareth, and exists only in terms of His *saving* grace."<sup>9</sup> Regarding Prenter's primary criticism of Barth, Berkouwer agrees that Barth "points continually to the *unity* of God's work from the viewpoint of its a priori omnipotence and irresistibility, and to the eternity-aspect of that work, through which it becomes impossible to separate creation and redemption in terms of historical stages."<sup>10</sup> However, Berkouwer points out that Prenter is wrong to think that simply separating or disuniting the works of creation and reconciliation will correct the loss of significance of history in Barth, because God's eternal counsel keeps one from separating the works of creation and reconciliation. Berkouwer writes,

The real issue raised by Barth's Christological doctrine of creation is not whether his conception may be opposed in terms of the center of the redemptive process, namely, *Jesus* Christ, and therefore by an *historicizing* of the works of God, but rather whether the unity of God's work *may ever be presented in antithesis to what Barth has called the 'step-wise' character of God's works and against which he directs his sharp protest.*<sup>11</sup>

Berkouwer argues that this is precisely what one finds in the Bible. One finds the Bible presenting God's decisions 'from eternity' and presenting the unity and omnipotence of God's works, while not devaluating the historical 'step-wise' character of creation and redemption, as seen, for example, in the transition from death to life as confessed by the

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<sup>8</sup> Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 41, 22; George Hendry, "The Transcendental Method in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): passim. Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163.

<sup>9</sup> Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 251 (author's emphasis).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 250 (author's emphasis). Berkouwer also finds this to be exemplified in Barth's preference for supralapsarianism. See *Ibid.*, 255-256.

apostle Paul.<sup>12</sup> Berkouwer cautions that the historical 'reaction' to sin must not overshadow the initiative of God's works prior to sin and that, likewise, God's initiative must not overshadow His reaction to the fall in history. "When it is attempted to construct a *synthesis* of these two elements which will be perspicuous to our understanding, it is inevitable that we shall fail to do justice to one or to the other and that we shall fall into the abyss of either eternalizing God's works or historicizing them."<sup>13</sup> In contrast to Prenter, Berkouwer does not suggest any major changes to Barth's theology but only suggests a shift in emphasis upon the historical aspect of God's works rather than upon the eternal aspect.

Berkouwer posits that Barth does speak of God's 'reaction' to sin, but that God's initiative and predetermined plan threatens to overshadow the former aspect of Barth's thought. "The initiative of grace wholly absorbs the full *historical significance* of evil because this initiative was itself the reaction which, according to God's eternal grace, would be *illustratively* revealed in history and in man's confrontation with the power of the chaos."<sup>14</sup> Thus, Berkouwer finds that Barth can't speak of the reality of sin without being confronted with "insoluble difficulties and antinomies."

#### b) *Does Barth Recognize the Reality of Evil and Sin?*

Barth's presentation of evil and sin has been a basis for the critique that Barth is a-historical in his doctrine of creation. Hugo Meynell has considered this aspect of Barth's doctrine of creation at length. He notes that in Barth's doctrine of creation, chaos

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 252 (author's emphasis).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 257-258, 370.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 253 (author's emphasis).

is seen “as a kind of by-product of creation.”<sup>15</sup> This is analogical to how darkness is separated from light, but not created. Meynell opposes Barth who believes that evil is opposition to God’s creative activity. Barth argues that the fall was impossible because God rejected this possibility in creation. Meynell responds, “The objection to this is that if no *possibility* of the Fall existed in creation prior to the occurrence of the Fall, it couldn’t have happened; and hence that, if Barth were right, there would be no Fall.”<sup>16</sup> Consequently he labels Barth as logically inconsistent with respect to evil. In addition, he states, “it is difficult to see how the existence of such a by-product is consistent either with God’s omnipotence or with the creation of the world out of nothing.”<sup>17</sup> Idinopulos makes the same critique of Barth by noting God’s grace: “If, as Barth claims, grace is the creative or material basis of all reality, then logically speaking, there should be no sinfulness in the world.”<sup>18</sup>

Meynell correctly labels Barth as logically inconsistent with respect to evil. Meynell is right to assert that viewing evil as a by-product of creation conflicts with the doctrines of God’s omnipotence and creation out of nothing. Nevertheless, any acceptance of the existence of evil will seem to conflict with a doctrine of God’s omnipotence. Barth himself writes that, “It will always be obscure, unfathomable and baffling that something which is merely opposed to the will of God can have reality.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. (author’s emphasis). Cf. 248.

<sup>15</sup> Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth’s “Church Dogmatics”* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 81.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 181 (author’s emphasis).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>18</sup> Idinopulos, “Critical Weakness,” 163.

<sup>19</sup> 4/3, 177.

Meynell's critique of evil as an impossible possibility displays that he misunderstands Barth. What is most important is to understand that Barth is wishing to deny that God created evil and sin. Meynell seems to grasp this when he writes, Barth "will not accept that chaos and the evil spiritual principles of which it consists are properly speaking part of God's creation at all."<sup>20</sup> In the act of creation, God's will excludes all that is neutral or hostile to God's will.<sup>21</sup> This is all Barth means to say when he says that evil and sin are 'non-real' or 'impossible.' This is so because God did not create them. In saying this, Barth does not actually deny their existence, he simply refuses to suggest its origin and he wishes to assure that evil and sin are not a threat to God.<sup>22</sup>

Berkouwer notes that Nothingness is in some sense real although it has been passed by and not created. "For him [Barth] the triumph of God's Yes by no means justifies the conclusion that this is a sinless and exclusively light-filled world."<sup>23</sup> It is not, however, found in the shadow side of creation. This belongs to the nature of the creature and is part of its perfection. That is, creation is needy and thus perfect. "In this way the joy but also the misery of existence have their ground in the will of God. This meaning of creation becomes manifest in the fact that God in Jesus Christ makes Himself 'the subject of both aspects of existence.'"<sup>24</sup> This is the best possible creation because the

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<sup>20</sup> Meynell, *Grace versus Nature*, 183.

<sup>21</sup> Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 56; Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 48.

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 120-121; Brown, *Karl Barth*, 119.

<sup>23</sup> Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, quoting Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik* (German original of *Church Dogmatics*), 3/1, 432.

negative aspect or shadow side of creation is the means to a higher end. Berkouwer concludes, "When we see *Him* [Jesus] we can no longer see the shadow-side of created reality as being identical with the threatening chaos."<sup>25</sup> The former only reminds us of the latter. Nothingness is only recognized in Jesus Christ who overcomes it. Accordingly, Meynell is wrong to say that Barth is logically inconsistent on the basis that Barth denies existence to evil that in fact exists. Rather, Barth denies that God created evil, which exists.<sup>26</sup> G. C. Berkouwer has correctly found this to be the logical inconsistency in Barth's discussion of evil.<sup>27</sup> Whether or not Berkouwer and Barth are correct to embrace this inconsistency is another question, and possible reason for criticism.

Since Barth is inhibited from being able to speak of the historical existence of evil, Berkouwer concludes, "Within *this* framework of thinking the *decisiveness* of history can not longer be fully honored. ...He [Barth] places heavy emphasis precisely on God's revelation *in time*, on the great mystery of the incarnation, on God Himself entering our reality in the fact of His becoming flesh and in His submitting to judgment" but he "fails to do justice to the harmony of the multicolored witness of the Scriptures."<sup>28</sup>

To summarize, Berkouwer presents Barth's doctrine of creation as "the triumph of grace in creation." This triumph is the triumph of Jesus Christ over Nothingness, which takes place in and even before creation. This triumph is said to cause Barth to place an overemphasis on the unity, and thus completion, of God's works to the detriment of

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 65 (author's emphasis).

<sup>26</sup> Barth writes, "When I speak of nothingness, I cannot mean that evil is nothing, that it does not exist, or that it has no reality," in 4/3, 178.

<sup>27</sup> Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 63 n. 49.



history. Berkouwer does not propose correction but only a critique regarding the significance of history in Barth's doctrine of creation. Berkouwer seems content to remain in the state of contradictions and to affirm the antinomies he feels are found in the Bible, only while emphasizing the historical aspect of reconciliation more than Barth. This seems to be a very limited advance, if it is one at all.

c) *The Supra-Temporal Jesus*

Barth himself has responded to Berkouwer and his response is sufficient for all those who critique Barth's doctrine of creation saying that he neglects history, and the salvation found therein. Against Berkouwer's overall claim that Barth presents the gospel as the triumph of grace, Barth writes, "We are concerned with the living person of Jesus Christ. Strictly, it is not grace, but He Himself as its Bearer, Bringer and Revealer, who is the Victory, the light which is not overwhelmed by darkness, but before which darkness must yield as it is itself overwhelmed."<sup>28</sup> This criticism against Berkouwer includes his discussion of Barth's doctrine of creation and those criticisms that claim that all of the salvific work of Christ is completed before creation in Barth's theology. Berkouwer's reading of Barth's doctrine of creation is not erroneous, however it is unbalanced. Berkouwer's aim of portraying the triumph of grace in creation as found in Barth causes Berkouwer to place an overemphasis on Barth's doctrine of Nothingness. In fact, it takes up the majority of his discussion of Barth's doctrine of creation. Rather, the focus should have been the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ, by which we come to know of the triumph of grace.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 254-255, 257, 258 (author's emphasis).

<sup>29</sup> 4/3, 173.

Barth does not present history as purely illustrative, nor is it an ideal history. As noted above, Barth does not focus on a principle of grace, but rather on the works of Jesus Christ.<sup>30</sup> It is in the historical life of Christ that evil and sin is actually struggled with and defeated. It is only in history that evil and sin is recognized. This is the true christological thinking of Barth. There is not already in the doctrine of election “a principle which has priority over the person and work of Jesus Christ,” and Jesus Christ is not “understood only as the mighty executive organ of the divine will of grace.”<sup>31</sup> Rather, “To say ‘Jesus’ is necessarily to say ‘history,’ His history, the history in which He is what He is and does what He does.”<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, the two aspects of eternity and history still remain in Barth.

Colin E. Gunton observes that in Barth’s writings God’s eternity means his “contemporaneity to all times.”<sup>33</sup> George Hunsinger has noted that, “Jesus Christ in Barth’s theology *is* the unity of time and eternity. Eternity is not to be understood in abstraction from Jesus of Nazareth. ...eternity is *defined* as inseparable from the particular temporality of Jesus, as ontologically filled and shaped by it.”<sup>34</sup> God’s eternity is transcendent of time, but also includes time. It is “perichoretic not only in itself, but

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<sup>30</sup> See the whole of Barth’s response to Berkouwer in 4/3, 173-180. This point will be explained further when I consider the meaning of covenant (chapter 8).

<sup>31</sup> 4/3, 175.

<sup>32</sup> 4/3, 179.

<sup>33</sup> Colin E. Gunton, “Salvation,” *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 156.

<sup>34</sup> George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 16-17. Hunsinger expounds this further in “Mysterium Trinitatis: Karl Barth’s Conception of Eternity,” in *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 186-209.

also in its reception of history.”<sup>35</sup> God is in ‘pure duration’ of eternity, having the character of temporality, namely pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality. In contradistinction, time is a one-way sequence that is created by God and is relative to God’s eternity.<sup>36</sup> According to this understanding of time one sees that God is eternally loving, able and intending to overcome evil and sin. From this perspective one understands that they are not a threat to God. On the other hand, they still exist and are overcome in history by Jesus Christ as he fulfills the eternal will of God. This means that there is no antinomy in Barth as Berkouwer has suggested. Rather, evil and sin are overcome in history, which is ever present to God. With regards to Jesus, his life remains in Barth thoroughly historical.<sup>37</sup>

d) *Can Barth Maintain the Rationality of Creation and the Creator/creature Distinction?*

Gordon Watson also comes to the conclusion that Barth has neglected history in forming his doctrine of creation. Watson argues that the cause for the deficiency in Barth’s theology is that Barth makes an inadequate doctrine of the Trinity, and with it the doctrine of election, the framework for his understanding of the doctrine of the creation. Watson argues that Barth should have followed the Eastern church and considered the place of the dogma of the Trinity in liturgy, celebrating the experience of creatures new life when confronted by God in history.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth*, 241. Cf. Barth, 2/1, 45, 396.

<sup>36</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 70; Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 61.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Jenson who writes regarding Christ that “In *our* history God makes His *eternal* decision” (author’s emphasis), in *Alpha and Omega*, 163.

<sup>38</sup> Gordon Watson, *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), 54, 169-172.

Watson sums up Barth's doctrine of creation in the assertion that the act of revelation in Jesus presupposes all distinctions in God and God with the creature. He continues by considering if "Barth's method of understanding God and the creature provide an adequate basis for taking account of what any Christian doctrine of creation must explicate."<sup>39</sup> This is that, Watson explains, creation is rational and distinguished from the rationality of God and that the relationship between God and creation is not necessary. This establishes the created integrity of the world. In the Christian doctrine of creation there must be no correlation between the divine essence and created rationality. Accordingly, one must distinguish between the eternal generation of the Son and His incarnation in time. This is, again, an issue of the significance of history. Creation must be understood to proceed not from God's nature but from his will in order for creation to be legitimately understood as distinct from God. Watson concludes that Barth's analysis of the doctrine of creation is inadequate.<sup>40</sup> He argues that it does not allow for the created integrity of the world because it does not suggest that creation can be known by considering its processes, for example through science.<sup>41</sup> The same criticism has been made by David Mueller: "It seems at times that Barth calls in question even the relative independence of creation, human history, and human freedom – which he elsewhere affirms – in his desire to show that what occurs in human history and in the history of Jesus Christ has been determined in advance in the counsel of God."<sup>42</sup> Watson's

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 165-168.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>42</sup> D. L. Mueller, *Karl Barth, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind*, ed. Bob E. Patterson (Waco: Word, 1972), 152.

conclusion may be considered as two critiques: one concerning the rationality of creation, the other concerning the Creator/creature distinction.

The ordered creation is a significant theological theme.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to Watson, this theme is found in Barth or could at least be understood from Barth's writing. Barth never directly asserts the 'independent and distinct rationality' of creation, but this theme can be understood from the fact that he speaks of an ordered creation which is distinct from God. Interestingly enough, around the same time that Watson was complaining that Barth neglected to prove that creation is rational, Syd Hielema was identifying an aspect of Barth's theology which displayed the order of creation. Hielema presents an account of Barth's *Church Dogmatics* volume 3/1 and evaluates it from the viewpoint of the Calvinist theological tradition following Abraham Kuyper.<sup>44</sup> Hielema praises Barth for noting the ordered nature of creation, even though it does not take the prominent position he believes that it should be given. He complains along with other Kuyperians that Barth is over-anxious about natural theology in his doctrine of creation. He believes that this obscures some of this theology and causes some of Barth's finest points to be missed.<sup>45</sup> Hence, Hielema attempts to connect these 'disconnected wires.'

Throughout *Church Dogmatics* 3/1, and particularly in Barth's discussion of the second creation narrative, Barth discusses the creation in terms of what Hielema calls

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<sup>43</sup> We find this being affirmed, for example, by Philip Hefner and Colin Gunton. See P. J. Hefner, "The Creation," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 306; and Gunton, *Triune Creator*, 87. See also a standard introduction to Christian theology such as Alistar E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 3d ed. (Blackwell: Oxford, 2001), 296, 297.

<sup>44</sup> Syd Hielema, "Searching for 'Disconnected Wires': Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation Revisited," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 75-93.

<sup>45</sup> Hielema notes that "A decade after publishing this volume, Barth himself recognized the imbalance of stressing the teleological character of creation at the expense of the sacramental," in *Ibid.*, 83.

‘ordered creatureliness.’ ‘Ordered creatureliness’ is the form of existing in right relationship. Hielema observes that “creatureliness, in Barth’s view, is characterized by ordered relationships, and this sense of order becomes evident through limits and distinctions, primarily between creatures and their Creator, but also between different kinds of creatures.”<sup>46</sup>

Barth’s discussion of the two trees provides the primary forum in which Barth discusses ordered creatureliness with respect to the Creator and creature. The tree of life illustrates how the Creator is the life-giver of creation and that, therefore, creation is dependent upon the Creator. The distinction between Creator and creature is affirmed in the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because this knowledge is knowledge that only God has the capacity to bear.

Barth explicates the ordered creatureliness among creatures as he discusses the creation of woman. Here one learns that woman was made for man, for whom none other could be found as a fitting partner. Thus, humans are set apart as different from the remainder of creation. Nevertheless, Hielema notes, “this order must be seen as an order within an order: The ordered character of the cosmos exists within the overarching, all-encompassing ordered relationship between the Creator and his creatures.”<sup>47</sup>

Hielema finds that Barth defines ordered relationships with the parameters of shalom. This only occurs “when humanity accepts its creatureliness in humility and thankfulness.”<sup>48</sup> This is found in the normal state of rest and peace in the Garden of

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Hielema then quotes from Karl Barth, *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey, *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* 10 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 51.

<sup>46</sup> Hielema, “Disconnected Wires,” 84.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

Eden. This state of normalcy is possible because Jesus Christ provides justification for creation. "In Christ, creatures are free to be creatures, distinct from and dependent upon God, living with him and with each other in ordered relationship characterized by peace and rest."<sup>49</sup>

On the basis of the above points Hielema concludes that, according to Barth, "the orderedness of creatureliness is ordered relationally." Humans are dependent on other creatures for existence. Similarly, creatures depend on humanity in order to participate in the covenant. The creatures of creation are interdependent and moreover dependent upon the Creator. Each creature is dependent upon God and other creatures. Barth celebrates this creatureliness. Ordered creatureliness is an emerging category in Barth's theology which focuses on the teleological character of creation.

Barth himself does refer to creation having an order. For example: "To the faithfulness of the Creator...there corresponds the persistence and constancy of the creature...so that He is always the Guarantor, Sustainer and Protector of His creaturely world, of the cosmos or nature, thus giving it constancy in the being with which He endowed it at creation."<sup>50</sup> In addition Barth writes, "Yet this is the rhythm for the fulfilment of which God has ordained terrestrial being as its Creator. This is the character which He has given to the existence of the world."<sup>51</sup> A creation that is 'orderly' or 'ordered' and has a rhythm implies that it is rational. However, it seems that the ordered,

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>51</sup> 4/3, 138, 144-145. Other examples may be given: "Again (2) it is also light, word and truth that this being for one another of the intelligible and the intelligent is not static but dynamic yet dynamic in an

constant or intelligibility of creation is not something that Barth wishes to dwell upon at great length in his *Church Dogmatics* 3/1. This is quite okay.

In contrast to Watson, Norman Young argues that Barth has established the created integrity of the world. He sees that God is generous in creating that which is not God. "More than this, he shows his love for what he creates by making it no mere extension of himself but something different, with its own distinct reality."<sup>52</sup> Young actually draws the implication of the "secular integrity" of the world from Barth's doctrine of creation.<sup>53</sup>

Nevertheless, Young does observe a move in Barth's theology that leads Young to question the created integrity of the world. Young points out that Barth's theology progressed from an extreme 'transcendentalist' theology in which he was most concerned with God's deity, to emphasizing that the gulf between God and creation is overcome in Jesus Christ. Based upon this progression of thought, Young suggests an advance upon Barth's theology. In light of the fact that God and man are found united in Jesus Christ, and where it is only in Jesus Christ that one can know of the relationship between God and humans, Young suggests "why not agree with Tillich that the basic relationship between creator and creation is continuity rather than discontinuity?"<sup>54</sup> This kind of thinking is exactly what Watson is claiming needs to be avoided.

Young's proposition does have merit. Somehow God the Son, who is not created, was able to take on human form and humans are part of creation. However, Young's

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orderly and not disorderly way. In its fulfilment there is a definite rhythm which is steady even if it is also multiform" (4/3, 144). "God preserves the creature in the reality which is distinct from His own" (3/3, 86).

<sup>52</sup> Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 90.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.



insight is anthropocentric. That is, any continuity in Jesus Christ between the Creator and creation may properly only be spoken of as continuity between God and humans, or more appropriately, continuity between God the Son and humanity. Thus, non-human creation remains unconsidered theologically. Furthermore, as one ponders the continuity between the Son and humanity, one is brought right back to Barth's starting point. The Son is neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit. Thus, the discontinuity between the Creator and creation remains. Young neglects this trinitarian insight. In addition, if the Son is not actually incarnate eternally, any continuity between the Creator and creation would be bound to a specific age of time and therefore not be a continuity regarding something internal to the Creator at all. This last condition, the a-historical nature of the incarnation, is exactly what leads Watson to claim that Barth has not established the created integrity of the world.

e) *The Logos Asarkos as a Correction*

Watson proposes a correction for Barth's theology. As seen above, Watson found the Creator/creature distinction lacking in Barth. In response, Watson posits that one must distinguish between the eternal generation of the Son and His incarnation in time. He argues that Barth does not place enough emphasis on the humanity of Jesus Christ in the hypostatic union and its significance for the doctrine of creation. He proposes that Barth accept the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*. Watson writes, "inclusivity of the divine prototypicality raises questions as to the integrity and contingency of created nature. [*sic*] Since the explication of the divine 'possibility' which presupposes the 'reality' of God's self revelation pervades Barth's theological logic and his exposition of Christian

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 120.

doctrine.”<sup>55</sup> Watson’s argument seems to be that if the created nature of Jesus Christ is taken as part of the prototypicality for creation, then the created nature of Christ no longer appears to be a created nature (since it exists before creation), and thus, the creation (which follows the ‘prototype’ of Christ’s created existence) no longer appears to have a nature distinct from God. Charles Waldrop has observed that Barth’s rejection of the *logos asarkos* makes it seem as though the incarnation occurred, and flesh existed, in eternity before creation.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, since Christ is the eternal image for creation, creation appears to come from God’s nature rather than his will. This line of thinking is that which lead Young to suggest that Barth affirm continuity between the Creator and creation.

Dan Deegan makes a proposal similar to Watson’s in order to place focus on salvation history. Deegan also finds that the way Barth views “Jesus Christ as the basis and meaning of the divine creative will”<sup>57</sup> leads one to doubt the significance of the creaturely mode of existence (i.e. human history). Creaturely reality becomes only significative.<sup>58</sup> That is, it is only a symbol of what has already taken place. This position, Deegan argues, neglects the earthly-historical component of the incarnation. To correct this, Deegan proposes that Barth take more seriously his own affirmation that in Jesus Christ there are both a human and divine will as well as two natures; divine and

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<sup>55</sup> Watson, *God and the Creature*, page v.

<sup>56</sup> Charles T. Waldrop, *Karl Barth’s Christology: Its Basic Alexandrian Character* (New York: Mouton, 1984), 46; Robert W. Jenson, “Karl Barth,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century* vol. 1, ed. David Ford (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 39.

<sup>57</sup> Deegan, “Christological Determinant,” 120.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 129-130.

human.<sup>59</sup> Reaffirming that Christ had two wills leads one to say that the incarnation and life of Jesus Christ is historical and actually took place in creaturely reality because there is a continuous uniformity of divine and human wills. According to Deegan's advance, focus would be placed on what Jesus did for humankind in history, along with what/who he was (i.e. his natures), when relating Christology to the doctrine of creation.<sup>60</sup> This would place an emphasis on the history of reconciliation by focusing on the historical coming of the Son of God into the creaturely mode of existence in the incarnation.<sup>61</sup> This would, like Watson's desire for Barth to embrace the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*, place an emphasis on the history of reconciliation by focusing on the historical coming of the Son of God into the creaturely mode of existence in the incarnation. In other words, he wishes to say that the incarnation happens in history. Here Deegan has the same goal as Watson. What Watson and Deegan aim at is reemphasizing that "in the incarnation something genuinely new actually happens in time."<sup>62</sup>

First, in response to Watson, whether the incarnation is seen as within God's eternity or within human history (or both), it remains the *incarnation* in which the Son of God assumes human form. This is clearly affirmed by Barth and does not question the affirmation of creaturely reality but only confirms creaturely reality. Barth writes, "In the fact that God becomes one with creation there is revealed that God and creation as such are two distinct realities, and that the creature has its own reality over against God."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 127, 131.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>61</sup> Deegan's proposal seems to imply that it would also reject Barth's suggestion of Jesus' prototypicality. His conclusion is ambiguous. See Ibid., 130-135.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 132.

Secondly, by refusing to speak of a *logos askaros* Barth does not intend to say that Jesus Christ has only a divine nature. Barth only affirms the human nature of Christ by saying that it is the basis of the creation, i.e. the beginning of God's relation to that which is not God.

Thirdly, even if one understands Barth's doctrine of time, the question remains, if there is no *logos asarkos*, can creation (thus, the incarnation) ever be considered new for God according to Barth. This question only gains force in light of Barth's doctrine of time because it now seems that the incarnation is an eternal actuality for God. Unfortunately, the answer is ambiguous in Barth. On one hand, it seems the newness of the incarnation is something Barth must affirm because creation, for him, is not eternal. On the other hand, by denying the *logos asarkos*, Barth seems to suggest that the incarnation is eternal. This fits well with Barth's assertion that creation was eternally the object of God's love.<sup>64</sup> In contrast to this interpretation, John Thompson argues that "Barth is not saying that there was a man Jesus who pre-existed as such or was eternal as God is but that, in the light and by the power of election and incarnation, we cannot think of God without or apart from this man through whom alone he is known as God."<sup>65</sup> Also Barth himself writes of the "Son who was to *become* man," which was based on the will of the Father<sup>66</sup> and of the indispensable nature of the doctrine of the *logos asarkos*.<sup>67</sup> Barth however contradicts himself because the interpretation that the incarnation is

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<sup>63</sup> 2/1, 515.

<sup>64</sup> We shall explore this further in chapter six below.

<sup>65</sup> John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 99.

<sup>66</sup> 3/1, 50 (emphasis mine). Also 3/1, 26, 56.

eternal also finds support in Barth. He once commented, "No, the incarnation makes no change in the Trinity. In the *eternal decree* of God, Christ is God and man. Do not ever think of the second Person of the Trinity as only *Logos*. ... There is no *Logos asarkos*, but only *ensarkos*. ... Since there is only and always a *Logos ensarkos*, there is no change in the Trinity, as if a fourth member comes in after the incarnation."<sup>68</sup> Comparable statements seem to indicate the same idea. For example, "from all eternity God turned to the creature in the person of His Son."<sup>69</sup> By affirming that the *logos ensarkos* is eternal and that the incarnation makes no change in God, Barth affirms the eternality of creation (or created nature). Barth has contradicted himself.

As Thompson has identified, by refusing to speak of a *logos asarkos* Barth's goal is simply to communicate that *in relation to creation* one can only think of Jesus Christ, the *logos ensarkos*. This understanding differs from that of Robert Jenson. Jenson proposes that one must keep the doctrine of the *logos asarkos* and his argument has historical reasoning (although it differs from Watson). Jenson is not concerned with the Creator/creation distinction, but rather the distinct nature of the work of reconciliation.<sup>70</sup> He claims that Barth refuses to speak of the incarnation apart from the concepts of sin and our need for salvation. However, Jenson argues, as the agent of creation the Son is not yet the Reconciler, and should thus, not be considered as the *logos ensarkos*. Jenson presents a dialectic in which one would understand that Jesus is eternally incarnate, because of the eternal character of God, but is not eternally incarnate, because of the

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<sup>67</sup> 3/1, 54.

<sup>68</sup> Barth, *Table Talk*, 49 (author's emphasis).

<sup>69</sup> 3/1, 76.

<sup>70</sup> Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 165-167.

temporal/historical life of God in Jesus Christ. In contrast, it seems that Barth is saying that the Reconciler is the Creator. It is Jesus Christ, the *logos ensarkos* who is an agent in creation. Accordingly, one can see that Barth speaks of the incarnation not only in relation to sin and our need for salvation, but also in relation to the whole of the created reality, including the work that brought it into existence.

Following Barth's intention, his own contradiction may easily be overcome. There is no *logos asarkos* in relation to creation because the first work of God is the self election of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is always God for us. God had good intentions toward creation from the point at which it was a 'new thought' to him. Since one can only know God as God is in relation to creation, Barth is then justified not to speak of a *logos asarkos*. There is no *logos asarkos* in relation to creation because even before creation it seems God intended to become man in Jesus Christ.<sup>71</sup> In this sense, Christ is eternally incarnate for God, but only in God's *relation to creation*. Thus, Jesus Christ and his incarnation are still part of history and are thus new for God when he relates to creation. This change in Barth's thought would have to include the affirmation that the incarnation does make a change for God and that the eternal decree of God (i.e. election) is a qualified eternal decree, that is, it was in some way, at some point, new. Barth's doctrine of election could be amended to say that with the Father and Holy Spirit the *logos asarkos* elected the *logos ensarkos*.

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<sup>71</sup> Thompson notes this direction in Barth's thought, in *Christ in Perspective*, 23. Also, Colin Brown, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Creation," *Churchman* 76 (1962): 100; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 76, 91; and J. L. Scott, "The Covenant in the Theology of Karl Barth," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 17 (1964): 184. Iain Torrance comes to this conclusion based on insights drawn from Barth (and others) in "The Trinity in Relation to Creation and Incarnation," *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38 (1996): 37. Also compare with Thompson's reading of Barth at note 65 above. Cf. 4/1, 48, where Barth writes, "But in the first and eternal Word of God the sin of man is already met, refuted and removed from all eternity. And in delivering and fulfilling this first and eternal

To conclude I will simply reiterate that Barth does not deny creaturely existence, although it is implied in his understanding of the prototypicality of Christ, nor does he neglect the significance of history. Barth is not a-historical.

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Word in spite of human sin and its consequences, as *He would in fact have delivered and fulfilled it quite apart from human sin*, sin is also met, refuted and removed in time" (emphasis mine).

## CHAPTER 3

### IS BARTH ANTHROPOCENTRIC?

#### a) *Barth Neglects Nature*

The second major, and most raised, critique of Barth's doctrine of creation concerns its anthropocentric nature. At first encounter this might seem like an odd accusation considering the fact that Barth is very much against the use of natural theology, which he labels as anthropocentric. This criticism against Barth is of a different kind. 'Anthropocentrism' is observed in Barth's doctrine of creation in his focus on humanity to the neglect of nature, that is, all non-human creation.<sup>1</sup> This critique is clearly justified and is easily understood. The result, it is claimed, is that Barth's doctrine can not address contemporary issues regarding nature, such as the ecological crisis. Although these critiques are warranted, it will be seen that Barth does not neglect nature completely.

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<sup>1</sup> This anthropocentric character has been noted by Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 100-102; Stuart McLean "Creation and Anthropology," in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth May 10, 1886*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1986), 115; Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991), 128; John Webster, *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2000), 112; Kathryn Tanner, "Creation and Providence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 125; H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 146-155; Gordon Watson, *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), 167; Thomas F. Torrance, *Karl Barth, Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 137; Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers, or Partners?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 22; and Walter A. Whitehouse, *Creation Science and Theology: Essays in Response to Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 15.



### b) *Creation as a Means to an End*

There are numerous causes for this critique of anthropocentrism. Firstly, the road to anthropocentrism is identified in Barth's central thesis that creation is the external basis of the covenant and the latter is the internal basis of creation. Aung finds "creation is subordinated to the idea of covenant both structurally and conceptually."<sup>2</sup> From the structural side of things, Syd Hielema criticizes Barth for allowing the external statement to take precedence over the internal statement. He notes that "this imbalance results in lessening the role of the creation in covenant history."<sup>3</sup> This imbalance is demonstrated by the fact that Barth's introductory and concluding chapters both stress the external statement. Accordingly, Colin Gunton sees Barth's fault more as a subordination of creation to redemption rather than as anthropocentrism.<sup>4</sup> He does, however, see that this is detrimental to the status of the whole of the material world. From the conceptual side of things, creation tends to be portrayed as simply the stage on which the covenant is played out. Barth tends to discuss creation more as a means to an end than as an end in itself.<sup>5</sup> Hielema notes that Barth's maxim that creation is the external basis of the covenant portrays creation as simply the 'vehicle' to the covenant. John Webster argues that Barth is anthropocentric because he focuses on God's relations in history, as in the

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<sup>2</sup> Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 274.

<sup>3</sup> Syd Hielema, "Searching for 'Disconnected Wires': Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation Revisited," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 80.

<sup>4</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 165. Hielema sees this as well, but focuses on the resulting anthropocentrism rather than the cause of it in, "Disconnected Wires," 78.

covenant, rather than within nature.<sup>6</sup> It is true that Barth subordinates creation to the covenant and portrays creation as a means to an end.

c) *Focused on Humanity*

Secondly, one sees the anthropocentric nature of Barth's doctrine of creation as he argues for his covenant/creation thesis in his exposition of the Genesis creation narratives. Hugo Meynell has observed that all of creation is interpreted with regards to its use for humans. For example, heavenly bodies, while not divine, are useful for people by marking time, God graciously prepares a table for humans before they are created, and humanity is considered the crown of creation.<sup>7</sup> Hielema argues that this "diminishes the significance of the creation and thereby diminishes the role of the internal statement in the doctrine of creation."<sup>8</sup> This is confirmed in how Barth often uses the word 'creature' when referring to humanity alone.<sup>9</sup>

Thirdly, Barth's christological focus has been identified as something that causes Barth's doctrine of creation to be anthropocentric. As a result, Norman Young carries the criticism of anthropocentrism even further and concludes that Barth's theology actually discourages theological attention to non-human creation. He reasons that if knowledge of creation begins and ends with Jesus Christ, theological interest is immediately limited to

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<sup>5</sup> Hielema, "Disconnected Wires," 77; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 43; Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 169.

<sup>6</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 112. In light of the previous section on the significance of history, it is ironic that Webster notes presents this antithesis of history and nature and suggests that Barth focuses on the former.

<sup>7</sup> Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 82; Hielema, "Disconnected Wires," 78. Cf. Barth who writes, "When creation ended with man, having found its climax and meaning in the actualisation of man..." in 3/1, 213.

<sup>8</sup> Hielema, "Disconnected Wires," 81.

the relationship between God and humans.<sup>10</sup> The focus on Christ brings a methodological constraint to Barth. Young finds this to be true of Barth's earlier and later theology. Barth's earlier theology focused on the gap between the Creator and creatures. His later theology focused on God overcoming this gap, however, this is explained almost completely in human terms. Young laments, "In the *Dogmatics* Barth posited an act of God's grace that preceded the creation, namely the election of Jesus Christ before time and us in him. By giving priority in this way to the election of humanity rather than to the creation of the world Barth has actually increased the emphasis on man, and the rest of the created order becomes even more dependent and derivative than before."<sup>11</sup> Young expresses his disappointment that Barth's theology does not and can not give theological direction to the current ecological crisis. On the other hand, Young concludes his discussion by encouraging readers. He claims that Barth's transcendentalist approach does not necessarily lead one to have nothing to say regarding the ecological crisis, nor to the possible outcome of exploiting creation. In fact, Barth's theology, in particular his theology of the fall, leads one to appreciate the scope of the problem and that the change necessary in people to reverse the crisis can only come as a result of the grace of the Creator.

Fourthly, Barth's doctrine of creation is anthropocentric because, it is argued, he presents humanity as the only creature who is a partner in the covenant. Aung notes, "It is undeniable that the covenantal relationship between God and humanity appear to be primary as far as Barth's doctrine of creation is concerned because humanity alone is

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>10</sup> Also Watson, *God and the Creature*, 167; and Tanner, "Creation and Providence," 125.

seen as the covenant partner of God. Barth mentions that 'he (man) alone is honored to be God's partner in the covenant of grace.'<sup>12</sup> Elsewhere Barth writes, "The covenant is God's encounter with man with a view to being man's salvation in His own person."<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, when Barth speaks of the work of creation in the context of the covenant he defines creation anthropocentrically as "the divine establishment of human existence as such."<sup>14</sup>

Fifthly, Barth's anthropocentric doctrine of election is foundational for Barth's doctrine of creation and his 'covenant' thesis. Gordon Watson and Robert Jenson refer to election as "the original covenant."<sup>15</sup> Barth defines covenant as the election of grace.<sup>16</sup> For Barth, election and covenant are inseparable. We even find him using the terms interchangeably:

The eternal decree of God which precedes creation and makes it possible and necessary is the gracious election of man in Jesus Christ. And God's covenant of grace with man, in which God makes Himself Lord and Pledge and Saviour of His people and therefore the God of all men, is the internal basis of creation. It is not, then, the case that God first determined Himself as Creator, then made man His creature, and only then in a later development and decision elected man and instituted His covenant with him. On the contrary, it is for the sake of this election and in relation to this institution that He created heaven and earth and man.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith*, 101.

<sup>12</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 74 and quoting Barth, 3/1, 178. Also, Hielema "Disconnected Wires," 88.

<sup>13</sup> 4/2, 760.

<sup>14</sup> 3/1, 281.

<sup>15</sup> Watson, *God and the Creature*, 100; and Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 51.

<sup>16</sup> 2/2, 9.

<sup>17</sup> 3/4, 39-40. Cf. 3/1, 97.

In fact, all God's works are "grounded and determined in the fact that God is the God of the eternal election of His grace."<sup>18</sup> Others have also noted the foundational character of the doctrine of election for Barth's doctrine of creation and have even referred to election as "the heartbeat of his whole theology."<sup>19</sup> The problem here is that Barth understands election as an election of only humanity in Jesus Christ. The whole of creation is not elect. Rather, it is the external basis of the election, or the covenant. Thus it is seen that the relation of the covenant, thus creation, and election also leads Barth's doctrine of creation to be anthropocentric.

#### d) *The Scope of the Problem*

Barth does indeed neglect nature. H. Paul Santmire quotes Barth as saying in conversation "What... did that [nature] have to do with the faith of the Holy Bible?"<sup>20</sup> Within *Church Dogmatics* Barth wrote, "The attempt to penetrate to the inner secrets of the relation between God and the rest of creation [i.e. non-human creation], and the consequent attempt to explain and present the latter from the standpoint of this relation, can never be more than exercises in pious surmise or imagination."<sup>21</sup> Such an attitude and posture hindered Barth from dwelling on nature to any great extent. It must be stated, however, that Barth's doctrine of creation does not exclude the possibility of a relationship between God and nature (or humanity and nature). Kathryn Tanner notes

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<sup>18</sup> 2/2, 14.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 174. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 60; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 41; Colin Brown, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of the Creation," *Churchman* 76 (1962): 100, 104; Watson, *God and the Creature*, 100; and Whitehouse, *Creation Science and Theology*, 15.

<sup>20</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *Nature Reborn: The Ecological and Cosmic Promise of Christian Theology, Theology and the Sciences* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 117.

that the covenantal “privilege of human beings does not exclude other creatures from having their end in Christ; it merely specifies the manner of their inclusion. As Israel mediated participation in fellowship with God to the nations, so humanity has its hope in Christ in indissoluble connection with the hope of the whole cosmos.”<sup>22</sup>

Barth does not, however, totally neglect nature (although one might wonder if he spoke of it by mistake). ‘Anthropocentrism’ denotes a focus and neglect, but not necessarily complete neglect. Firstly, Barth is clear that all of creation has its origin in God. This includes nature. Furthermore, upon completing creation, God declared that the whole of it was good in the sense that this is the creation that God wanted.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, Barth does acknowledge that nature has a part to play in the covenant. Covenant does, in some way, embrace the whole of created reality. It is not only the home of humanity, but, Barth speculates, it also participates in the covenant through humanity. How it does so, however, is a mystery.<sup>24</sup> Barth suggests, “It is only in this relationship, in dependent connexion with man, that the animal kingdom can and will participate in the mystery of all creation as it is revealed in man, and in the promise of this mystery. The ascription of this position and function to man does not mean that the rest of creation is excluded from this mystery; it describes the manner of its inclusion.”<sup>25</sup> That all of creation participates in the covenant is exhibited in Barth’s awareness of the

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<sup>21</sup> 3/2, 17.

<sup>22</sup> Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” 125-126

<sup>23</sup> McLean notes this latter point in “Creation and Anthropology,” 115.

<sup>24</sup> Heilema, “Disconnected Wires,” 91.

<sup>25</sup> 3/1, 187. Cf. 178, 223.

future redemption of the world, which includes the new heaven and the new earth.<sup>26</sup> In light of Barth's emphasis on the place of humanity in the covenant it is almost surprising to see how he speaks of covenant in certain places of his theology. Even before the creation of humans Barth observes, "In God's blessing of the fish and birds we really transcend the concept of creation and enter the sphere of God's dealings with His creation. What we have here is the beginning of its history, or at least an introductory prologue which announces the theme of this history, i.e., the *establishment of a covenant* between God and His creation." This is "as an element in the history of creation but already as an element in the history of the covenant."<sup>27</sup> Such an assertion not only runs counter to Barth's emphasis on humanity in the covenant, but also counters his suggestion that creation only participates in the covenant through humanity. Contra Jürgen Moltmann, Barth does not relate "God's covenant to human beings and only to them."<sup>28</sup>

Thirdly, it has already been seen in chapter three how Barth does not completely neglect nature. Hielema has identified this in the 'disconnected wire' of Barth's doctrine of creation. The disconnected wire that Hielema observes is the "joyfully free affirmation of the creation characterized by ordered creatureliness within a context that denigrates this same creation."<sup>29</sup> 'Ordered creatureliness' means living in right relationship. Hielema notes that this includes human relationships with God, and within

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<sup>26</sup> E.g. 3/1, 17, 18, 149.

<sup>27</sup> 3/1, 170 (emphasis mine). These statements even seem to contradict his earlier statement that the covenant began with Abraham: "The history which commences with Abraham, or rather is revealed in Abraham as the history of God with man, as the execution of God's covenant with the earth, cannot be reversed or arrested," in 3/1, 151.

<sup>28</sup> Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 128.

this relationship, human relationships with nature. He has made an important observation. Barth notes that with respect to creatures, "Man is not their Creator; hence he cannot be their absolute lord, a second God."<sup>30</sup> For Barth, human lordship is finite. This insight has ecological implications. Since humans have finite lordship, assault on the earth is not necessarily okay. Humans are not creators to do as we please.

e) *Suggested Corrections*

In response to Barth's anthropocentrism, Aung suggests that this subordination of nature could be corrected by interpreting Barth's formula "in an ecological sense by defining and interpreting the nature and character of creation teleologically in relation to the covenant."<sup>31</sup> Aung suggests that creation as a whole should be seen as a covenant partner.<sup>32</sup> Aung does not delineate this proposition beyond this statement, but it seems he is suggesting that the covenant partners be reinterpreted as, firstly, the Creator and, secondly, all of creation. Similarly, Santmire poses the question, "Would it be possible, in a Barthian mode, to think of God electing nature, as well as humanity, in Christ?" and wonders if, as a result, nature could be viewed as a "covenant partner" with God.<sup>33</sup>

Can all of creation be considered as a covenant partner? From a Barthian perspective, the answer must be "no." How could inanimate objects be partners in anything? This does not seem possible. Tanner has noted that in Barth humans are

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<sup>29</sup> Hielema, "Disconnected Wires," 89.

<sup>30</sup> 3/1, 187.

<sup>31</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 274.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 277. Gunton, in response to Barth, seems to suppose that the whole world should be viewed as an object of the covenant in *Triune Creator*, 180.



God's covenant partners because they "knowingly and freely respond."<sup>34</sup> Animals could possibly be covenant partners with God, but there is no reason to believe that this is the case, and there is no way for us to know if this were the case.<sup>35</sup>

Perhaps one could qualify Aung's suggestion and rather suggest that creation should be viewed as participating in the covenant. This, however, would not be an improvement on Barth for Barth has already made this assertion. Improvement could only be made if the implications of this assertion were considered in greater depth.

Moltmann also suggests an advance over Barth's doctrine of creation. He presents the doctrine of creation within his messianic theology. He, similarly to Aung, suggests that all of creation participates in the covenant. Barth does not deny this. Moltmann also suggests that the ground and goal of creation is not covenant, but rather the future kingdom of glory.<sup>36</sup> Moltmann feels that it is necessary to be eschatologically oriented and focus on the end goal of creation. Creation is interpreted in terms of its direction and the process towards liberation. Accordingly nature is not neglected because God will be all in all in the kingdom of Glory.

Moltmann's advance is not an advance at all. Firstly, his emphasis on the end denigrates the significance of all that comes between creation and the eschaton, that is, salvation history. Secondly, his suggestion presupposes that the covenant ends at the

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<sup>33</sup> Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, 171-172.

<sup>34</sup> Tanner, "Creation and Providence," 125.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Barth notes that in creation vegetation did not need blessing, only living creatures, in 3/1, 174.

<sup>36</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 4-5, 55-56; idem, *History and the Triune God*, 128-130.

beginning of the kingdom of glory.<sup>37</sup> In actuality, Barth's emphasis on the covenant embraces and corrects all of Moltmann's suggestions. Where the work of creation clearly ends according to Barth, there is no suggestion that the covenant ends with the new creation. In fact, one even finds hints that the covenant is only fully realized in the new creation. Barth writes that the realization of the covenant "can only be the work of His [God's] incomprehensible mercy, and how it can only be an event through the passing and renewal of man *and of the world*."<sup>38</sup> He also speaks of the Creator's activity as directing history towards reconciliation *and redemption* and says that the covenant is fulfilled in Jesus' death *and resurrection*.<sup>39</sup> Covenant includes the way to the kingdom of glory as well as the kingdom glory itself. Indeed, it is only in the kingdom of glory that the covenant is fully realized and God is God, and his people are his people. In Barth, the complete historical covenant is recognized as significant.

#### f) *Unanswered Questions*

The integral question that seems to be neglected in this discussion is if the doctrine of creation should not be anthropocentric. Perhaps the anthropocentric nature of

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<sup>37</sup> This is also implied in Moltmann's statement that "at the end of the history of the covenant stands not the covenant ...but creation again: the new creation," in *History and the Triune God*, 129.

<sup>38</sup> 3/1, 275 (emphasis mine).

<sup>39</sup> 3/1, 115 and 3/1, 75 (emphases mine). Granted, Barth later distinguishes between the covenant and the kingdom writing, "The covenant is the promise of the kingdom. The kingdom is the fulfilment of the covenant," in 4/2, 760. However, it is most likely that this is a later distinction – and not an absolute one if the kingdom is the fulfillment of the covenant – for Barth because there is no hint of it within 3/1 and on account of the fact that he seems to include the idea of 'kingdom' within 'covenant' in the above given passages (cf. 3/1, 46). Also, Barth says that creation is made to be the theatre of God's glory (*Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson [London: SCM Press, 1949], 49) and that "The primal and basic purpose of this God in relation to the world is to impart and reveal Himself – and with Himself His glory, He Himself being the very essence of glory" (2/2, 140). He also speaks of redemption and eternity being the goal and end of all creation in the same way he speaks of the covenant (2/1, 629). Compare with von Balthasar who takes Barth's understanding of the covenant to mean "the incarnation and redemption," in *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 108.

Barth's doctrine of creation does not need to be corrected. Unfortunately, those who critique this anthropocentrism seem to presuppose that this is something that needs correction. It is often unclear whether they believe this because of their cultural values or whether they might actually have a theological reason for making this correction. Before any correction is made, the rationale for such a correction must be addressed.

One wonders how one could discuss at length the role of creation in the covenant from a non-anthropocentric point of view. It seems Barth's anthropocentrism is justified in that the material he has to discuss limits him. His presentation could only be 'balanced' if he neglected that which can be said. It just so happens that that which can be said is largely anthropocentric. Like God addresses humans, Barth was writing for humans. Similarly, although Barth recognizes the invisible world (e.g. heaven), he does not dwell on it to any great extent because there is little that can be said dogmatically.

It is clear that 'anthropocentrism' in Barth's doctrine of creation must not be understood to mean a complete neglect of nature. Indeed, according to Barth the whole of creation participates in the covenant. Barth does not develop a theology of nature, however, this does not inherently mean that something within his theology needs correction. Rather, in neglecting nature Barth has simply not said all that can be said.

## CHAPTER 4

### IS BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION (INCONSISTENTLY) TRINITARIAN?

#### a) *Barth as Inconsistently Trinitarian*

A third critique of Barth's doctrine of creation concerns his trinitarian approach, or lack thereof, with respect to the doctrine of creation. This assessment comes primarily from Salai Hla Aung. Aung praises Barth for taking a trinitarian approach to the doctrine of creation and for somewhat considering the social sense of Trinity, nevertheless, Aung finds inconsistency in Barth's application of the trinitarian approach.<sup>1</sup>

#### b) *Image of God*

Firstly, Aung considers Barth's teaching of the image of God and determines that Barth was correct to interpret the image of God in a social sense. Hugo Meynell similarly argues that Barth is consistent by interpreting the creation of human beings in the light of the covenant. Following a rejection of any analogy of being, Barth argues that the image of God is not a matter of being but of relation. Man is given a covenant partner to remind him of the covenant with God. Meynell writes, the man-woman relation "is

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<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Thomas F. Torrance complains that Barth's doctrine of creation was not "from an overarching *Trinitarian* perspective" in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 61.

one of the clearest illustrations of the internal basis of creation in the covenant which is the very reason for its existence.”<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Aung argues that Barth faulted by interpreting the image of God in a twofold fashion as an I-Thou relationship. Aung understands Barth to mean that “humans [were] created after the model of the Trinity” and therefore believes that a truly trinitarian understanding of the image of God must be threefold.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, Aung follows Elizabeth Frykberg’s critique of Barth, which interprets the trinitarian image of God in a threefold fashion as an I-Thou-He/It relationship, with the third person being a child. Aung suggests that this threefold interpretation is concordant with concrete human relationships.

With respect to Aung’s proposed advance regarding the image of God, the I-Thou-He/It model he subscribes too seems arbitrary, or at best a product of natural theology. The latter seems to be the case where he appeals to concrete human relationships. What would keep one from adding another fourth aspect or from supplying something else in place of the relation to the child? Perhaps in liberation theology one would wish to place a relation across cultural or racial boundaries into the image of God. Thus the model would be I-Thou-Other Culture.

Aung wrongly understands Barth to be interpreting the image of God in a twofold fashion, exclusively in terms of male/female relationships.<sup>4</sup> The image of God is based

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<sup>2</sup> Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 86.

<sup>3</sup> Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 34-35, 268, 274.

only on an analogy; an analogy of relations. All analogies point to discontinuity. Accordingly, Barth points out that there is no sexuality in God. Likewise, one should note that the divine persons are not individuals like humans and that humans do not have the perichoretic unity found among the divine persons. As the limits of analogy are understood, one can understand that Barth is not presenting a twofold interpretation of the image of God. Rather than searching for a threefold interpretation of the image of God, it is important to understand that Barth correctly recognizes the relational aspect of the image of God. This is all that is meant to be expressed in the idea of 'I-Thou' relationships. It does not suggest that the image of God is only expressed in a relationship between two people, but rather simply that it is expressed in relationship. Focus should not be placed on the number three, or on a dual sexuality. The analogy is of "free differentiation and relation."<sup>5</sup>

Meynell also critiques Barth's understanding of the image of God in humans. Meynell finds Barth's insight that the image of God pertains to relationship valuable but finds no reason to accept this as the exclusive definition of the image of God unless one, like Barth, rejects the *analogia entis*.<sup>6</sup>

I agree in part with Meynell's critique of Barth's understanding of the image of God. There is no reason to define the image of God exclusively in terms of relationality. Such concepts as creativity, for example, still seem plausible. With respect to Genesis 2:24, which Barth was interpreting, the image of God is found within the context of

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 268. Cf. Gordon Watson, *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), 105.

<sup>5</sup> 3/1, 185.

creativity. In addition, this concept agrees with Barth's christological insight that Jesus Christ takes part in creating. However, in contrast to Meynell, this challenge to the exclusive definition of the image of God, does not require an acceptance of the analogy of being. G. W. Bromiley also critiques Barth for interpreting the image of God exclusively in terms of relationship, however without affirming an analogy of being.<sup>7</sup>

### c) *Sphere of God*

Secondly, Aung discredits Barth for presenting God as being in a different sphere from the world.<sup>8</sup> Barth was successful in applying the trinitarian formula so that creation was not viewed as a necessary work of God, that is, because God has inner trinitarian fellowship. However, in so doing, Aung argues, Barth separates God from the world. Similarly, H. Paul Santmire finds that according to Barth God's immanence in the created world is limited to heaven, that is "in the realm of the spiritual, with the angels, not on earth."<sup>9</sup> Along this line of thought, Norman Young labels Barth's doctrine of creation 'transcendentalist.'<sup>10</sup> Aung finds this problem overcome in Jürgen Moltmann's trinitarian panentheism.

Aung's criticism that Barth presents God as outside the sphere of creation must be qualified. Barth indeed speaks of God as 'outside' creation and as having a "divine

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<sup>6</sup> Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 174.

<sup>7</sup> G. W. Bromiley, "Karl Barth," in *Creative Minds in Contemporary Theology*, ed. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 54.

<sup>8</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 270-271.

<sup>9</sup> H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature: The Ambiguous Ecological Promise of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 154

space” distinct from “creaturely space.”<sup>11</sup> However, these affirmations are made in a metaphorical or ontological sense rather than a spatial sense, that is, to say that creation is distinct from God and God exists without creation before he creates. Similarly, Vladimir Lossky notes (quoting St. John of Damascus), creation “is of another nature than God. It exists outside of God, ‘not by place but by nature.’”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, Herbert Hartwell finds Barth teaching that we learn in Jesus Christ’s relationship with God his Father that “there is a sphere in which God acts and reveals Himself apart from His own sphere.”<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, it may be added that, in some sense, God the Father is the one who is outside the sphere of creation.

God’s close relation with our created sphere is indicated by the fact that “God is with us” in Jesus Christ. Barth is well aware of this. For example, Barth writes, “In Jesus Christ there is no isolation of man from God or of God from man.”<sup>14</sup> As a result, even though Barth speaks of God’s place being heaven, Barth concludes that “so surely is something done on earth as subsequently and from heaven that it too becomes the place of God.”<sup>15</sup> Oddly enough, before his criticism, Aung had recognized in Barth that God is continually with us through his Word. Thus, Aung writes, “God does not reside in

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<sup>10</sup> Though Norman Young suggests that this applies most appropriately to Barth’s earlier theology of the nineteen-twenties when Barth was most concerned with God’s deity, in *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 84.

<sup>11</sup> For example, Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 43-46; 1/1, 142; 2/1, 536; 3/1, 25, 43, 70-71, 97, 349; 3/3, 436ff.

<sup>12</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Ian and Ihita Kesarcodi-Watson (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1978), 51.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 113.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 46.



remote transcendence far away from the world,” and “Through the incarnation the whole creation has been lifted up into the realm of God Himself. Creation is no longer outside of God, but lies within the being of God.”<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, when Barth discusses God’s omnipresence he speaks of our space existing within God’s space, God surrounding creation, and even creation existing in God.<sup>17</sup> For Barth, creation is certainly not without or apart from God. The assertion that God is with creation is indeed central to Barth’s doctrine of creation and is expressed in his thesis that the covenant is the internal basis of creation. Barth writes, “It would be a strange love that was satisfied with the mere existence and nature of the other, then withdrawing, leaving it to its own devices. Love wills to love.”<sup>18</sup> It is central in Barth’s thought that the Creator creates a relationship.

Where Aung finds Barth’s fault corrected in Moltmann’s panentheism, I suspect that Aung finds a lack in Barth’s pneumatology.<sup>19</sup> However, although Barth does not discuss the Holy Spirit explicitly to any great extent within his doctrine of creation, the

<sup>15</sup> 3/3, 444.

<sup>16</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 49-50, 67. Also see John Thompson who notes how Barth claims we can only speak of the Son of God as *Logos ensarkos*, in *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 98ff., 102ff.

<sup>17</sup> 1/2, 162; 2/1, 411, 475-477, 500, 503. It should be noted that Barth does not go to the extent of Jürgen Moltmann who speaks of Creation as kenosis in the sense of God withdrawing himself to create a space (nothingness) in which God creates the world. See *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 108-111; idem, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 86-90; and idem, “God’s Kenosis in the Creation and Consummation of the World,” *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 145-146.

<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 95.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. John Webster, who notes that those who complain that Barth lacks “an adequately triune account of God as creator and God’s relation to creation” often do so because they feel something is lacking in Barth’s pneumatology, in *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2000), 111; and Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 180.

ideas are certainly there, as expressed in divine action, and Barth has much to say regarding the Holy Spirit in later volumes of *Church Dogmatics*.

#### d) *Modalism*

Thirdly, Aung argues that Barth's concern of safeguarding the unity of God causes him to present God modalistically in His relationship with the world. Aung suggests that an inconsistency results from Barth's concern: "On the one hand Barth presents God in a trinitarian sense when the subject becomes a question of divine mode of being in His self-revelation and the relationship between the being of God and the creation of the world. On the other hand he presents God in an absolute monotheistic sense when it becomes a question about the unity of God."<sup>20</sup>

It may be said that Aung is justified in saying that Barth is concerned with safeguarding the unity of God. Barth is not, however, a modalist. Aung himself notes the activity between the divine persons in creation (at least between the Father and Son) as expressed by Barth. Rather, Aung's preference for a social doctrine of the Trinity leads him to this critique. We will further consider how Barth presents the Trinity in the context of the doctrine of creation in chapter seven.

#### e) *Binary Divine Creativity*

Lastly, Aung finds that Barth's trinitarian approach is inconsistent in his discussion of divine activity in creation. Aung suggests that Barth's discussion is binary, not trinitarian, because Barth only discusses the role of the Father and Son. Aung writes, "the Father appeared as the one who gave the command and the Son was seen as the one

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<sup>20</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 270.

who executed and fulfilled the command. The third person is missing in the process.”<sup>21</sup> Aung believes that Barth’s “overemphasis on the place of Christ”<sup>22</sup> hindered Barth from consistently following his trinitarian approach in this area.

Aung was wise to note the binary character of divine creative activity in Barth’s work. However, Barth does not totally neglect the role of the Holy Spirit – that is, Barth’s understanding of creation is, in fact, trinitarian. This will be reflected in my reading of Barth, again, as we consider the Trinity in the context of the doctrine of creation (chapter seven). Aung’s critique again stems from his following the social model of the trinity, which conflicts with Barth’s bestowal model.

#### f) *Summary*

Aung has critiqued Barth for being inconsistently trinitarian. He has critiqued Barth for a seemingly twofold interpretation of the image of God, for presenting God as outside creation, for modalism, and for a binary understanding of divine creativity. Generally these critiques reflect the social trinitarian perspective from which they arise. Most of his critiques arise from a misunderstanding of Barth. With regards to the image of God, it is important, as even Aung has noted, that Barth has interpreted it relationally. In contrast to Aung’s critique, Barth does not present God as apart from creation and he is not a modalist. Aung is, however, correct to note a binary character in Barth’s understanding of divine creativity.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

## PART II

### BARTH'S DOCTRINE OF CREATION

Here we will focus on expounding Barth's doctrine of creation. We will consider what is important for Barth. We will see that for Barth knowledge of creation is an article of faith. From this article of faith we learn of the free and loving Creator who has created the world out of nothing. We will also see how Barth's doctrine of the Trinity limits him from attributing creative work to the Holy Spirit. Following this, Barth's position that the covenant is the goal of creation will be considered. Lastly, we will observe that this covenantal relationship leads Barth to affirm that creation is distinct from God and that creation is good.

## CHAPTER 5

### KNOWLEDGE OF CREATION

Barth's intention is to present a Christian, therefore truly theological,<sup>1</sup> doctrine of creation. This, he believes, can only be done within the teaching of the church. This is indicated by his title, *Church Dogmatics*.<sup>2</sup> In practice, a Christian doctrine of creation gains its knowledge only from the revelation of Jesus Christ;<sup>3</sup> creation has its noetic grounding in Christ.<sup>4</sup> By this is meant the historical redemptive and reconciling work of Christ.<sup>5</sup> This is true of all Christian knowledge. Just as "God can be known only through God,"<sup>6</sup> creation can only be known through God.<sup>7</sup> One can not reason from nature to

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<sup>1</sup> Salai Hla Aung studies Barth's doctrine of creation as a theological perspective in contrast to the doctrine of creation from the ecological and philosophical-scientific perspectives found in the theology of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg respectively in *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998). Walter A. Whitehouse also identifies Barth's doctrine of creation as genuinely theological in *Creation Science and Theology: Essays in Response to Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 11.

<sup>2</sup> John Webster defines Dogmatics as "the church's evaluation of its own utterance by its own given norm of revelation," in *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2000), 53.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Kathryn Tanner who notes that Barth makes it distinctively Christian by making it to "reflect the centrality of Jesus Christ for understanding God and world" in "Creation and Providence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 111.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Whitehouse notes that there is the noetic and ontological relationship in Jesus Christ regarding creation. We know of creation because God is with us, and we learn of the ontological origin in Jesus. See *Creation, Science, and Theology*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> Barth notes that one can not think of creation apart from redemption and reconciliation because to think of it separately and abstractly is to no longer think of the Christian God (2/1, 80).

<sup>6</sup> 2/1, 79.

know that creation is created.<sup>8</sup> Barth writes, “By becoming man in Jesus Christ, the fact has also become plain and credible that God is the Creator of the world. We have no alternative source of revelation.”<sup>9</sup> This means that the knowledge is known only by faith.

The knowledge expressed in the doctrine of creation is the “secret of creation.”<sup>10</sup> That is, the true knowledge of the existence and identity<sup>11</sup> of the Creator and creature. It must be noted, however, that with respect to creation it is the reality of the creature that is most in question, not the reality of the Creator.<sup>12</sup> With the center of the knowledge of creation being found in Jesus Christ, John Webster has noted, “what is axiomatic is not created consciousness but the Word’s assumption of creaturely existence at the incarnation.”<sup>13</sup>

#### a) *Content of the Article of Faith*

The content of the doctrine of creation limits it to being placed in church dogmatics. Positively, this is because the existence of God – the Creator – and the creature is a matter of faith. Negatively, this is so because the secret of creation is not a human hypothesis. This means that the doctrine of creation must be grounded on the

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<sup>7</sup> Gordon Watson has also drawn this connection in Barth in, *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), 103.

<sup>8</sup> I/1, 148, cf. 131.

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 43; cf. 4/3, 149-150.

<sup>10</sup> 3/1, 31.

<sup>11</sup> “That is, it talks of the creator’s identity rather than of some opaque act undertaken by a nameless force.” Webster, *Barth*, 96.

<sup>12</sup> 3/1, 6; Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 62.

divine self-witness. Barth expounds in great length the fact that the secret of creation is gained only by means of revelation. Barth offers three reasons why the doctrine of creation is not other than an article of Christian faith,<sup>14</sup> that is, belonging to Christian dogmatics, as well as an argument for why this is the case. Firstly, the doctrine asserts an actual existence of a reality distinct from God. In negative terms, Creation is not non-existing and God is not alone. This assertion is not self-evident and can be disputed. One might argue that life is just a dream. Such doubts can only be replaced with certainty if the assertion of existence is based on divine self-witness that God has created.<sup>15</sup> The divine self-witness is the only ground that can make belief in creation something other than speculation or a blind leap of faith.

Secondly, the reason why the doctrine of creation is not other than an article of Christian faith is that it “asserts that this whole sphere is from God, willed and established by Him.”<sup>16</sup> This assertion includes the affirmations that God is the ground of the world’s existence and that the world cannot be alone. These affirmations are, again, not self-evident. Rather, one could just as well hypothesize that this is an eternal world or that there was a cosmic monster that created. All hypotheses following deductions from the human situation – for example, Schleiermacher notes our dependence – can be wrong and contradictory. Confessions of creation on these grounds are weak and uncertain. In contrast, doctrine properly flows from God to man, not man to God.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 3/1, 5-22.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Webster who writes of Barth, “The existence of the creator and creature is a matter of faith, that is, a matter of which the knowledge is certain only in so far as it is derived from the self-manifestation of God” in *Barth*, 96.

<sup>16</sup> 3/1, 7.

Thirdly, the doctrine of creation is not other than an article of Christian faith because the affirmation that God is the Creator of heaven and earth is determined entirely by the language and content found within Holy Scripture. The doctrine is therefore an appeal to faith and can only be accepted and known by faith. As is understood by the Christian affirmation of creation in the creeds, 'God', who is the subject, "Is not synonymous with the concept of a world-cause, rightly or wrongly postulated, disclosed or fulfilled."<sup>18</sup> Such a concept is a product of human minds and belongs to the creaturely sphere. Rather, when speaking of 'God,' one means God the Father of Jesus Christ. 'Creator,' a predicate of the credal affirmation of creation, refers to a completed act of God, yet also to the One who is still involved with creation. It does not refer to a timeless relationship. "It is for this very reason that the Creator cannot be changed into a world-cause, a supreme or first cause or a principle of being."<sup>19</sup> In contrast to the concepts of origination and causation, creation refers to a divine action for which the only proper analogy is found within the life of God: the eternal generation of the Son. There is no parallel analogy found for creation within the life of creatures for the act that 'Creator' speaks of is not comparable with any other.<sup>20</sup> God created "under no other inward constraint than that of the freedom of His love ... in an act of the overflowing of His inward glory."<sup>21</sup> This relationship "corresponds externally to the inner life of the Father,

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<sup>17</sup> In other words, "From faith's certainty of the creator to the affirmation of the creature, and not the other way round." Webster, *Barth*, 97.

<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 11.

<sup>19</sup> 3/1, 13. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 53.

<sup>20</sup> 2/1, 76, 77; Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 78-80.

<sup>21</sup> 3/1, 15.



the Son and the Holy Ghost.”<sup>22</sup> The objects of the affirmation of creation, ‘heaven and earth,’ refer to all reality that is distinct from God, both the visible and the invisible. Creation is more than just what man knows.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, ontologically heaven and earth are homogeneous. Their “distinction is relative in view of their common distinction from God.”<sup>24</sup> God has created all things distinct from himself, including matter and spirit. All of these concepts referred to in the doctrine of creation can, again, only be known through the self-positing of God.

b) *Source of the Article of Faith*

Barth proclaims one reason in positive terms of why the doctrine of creation is an article of faith: the doctrine is found true in the revelation of Jesus Christ.<sup>25</sup> It is not enough to just say, “it is the first thing the Bible teaches.” Rather, it is significant that it is in the Bible at all because the whole Bible witnesses to Christ. Accordingly, Barth states, when the Bible speaks of creation, it speaks of Christ. It is this basis of the doctrine of creation that presents it “in such a way that the whole [of the Church’s confessional knowledge] necessarily stands or falls with the dogmas of creation as with every other constituent element.”<sup>26</sup> In Jesus Christ one learns that God became man, thus, that God is not alone, and that there truly is a reality distinct from God. Likewise, in this same unity of God and man one learns that humans are not alone. In Christ we come to know the subject, ‘God,’ as His eternal Father. We come to know that the

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<sup>22</sup> 3/1, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 50, 52.

<sup>24</sup> 3/1, 18.

<sup>25</sup> 3/1, 22-28; 2/1, 515.

creation was a once and for all act of divine love. Furthermore, we see in Christ the object of God's creation: 'heaven and earth.' When Barth says that we learn of creation in Christ, he means that the doctrine is found "in the perception, comprehension, understanding and estimation of the reality of the living person of Jesus Christ as attested by Holy Scripture, in attentiveness to the range and significance of His existence, in openness to His self-disclosure, in consistency in following Him as is demanded."<sup>27</sup>

The above reasons that the doctrine of creation is an affirmation of faith present only the noetic connections between Jesus Christ and creation. However, there are also ontological connections because Jesus Christ the divinely incarnate Mediator is the basis for the act and existence of creation. In fact, the former is only so because of this ontological connection. "Jesus Christ is the Word by which the knowledge of creation is mediated to us because He is the Word by which God has fulfilled creation and continually maintains and rules it."<sup>28</sup> Earlier theology, from Origen to the Reformers, noted the ontic relation but neglected the noetic connection.

### c) *Position in 'Church Dogmatics'*

The placement of the doctrine of creation within *Church Dogmatics* also reveals something of Barth's belief that the doctrine of creation is an affirmation of faith. Barth places the doctrine of creation after the doctrines of Revelation and God, which includes his doctrine of election. Why is this? John Godsey notes,

The Doctrine of Creation can properly come only *after* the Doctrine of God, the heart of which is God's Gracious Election. This structural arrangement signifies

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<sup>26</sup> 3/1, 22.

<sup>27</sup> 4/3, 174.

<sup>28</sup> 3/1, 28.

Professor Barth's conviction that God is not known first of all in His creation, but in the revelation of his Lordship in Jesus Christ. Only from the prior viewpoint of God's election or reconciliation, that is, only for the eyes of faith, does the world become a creation instead of a cosmos, does nature take on glory.<sup>29</sup>

Jesus Christ has accomplished salvation and in doing so is the revelation of God. It is through Christ, who is God, that we learn of creation, not the other way around. Accordingly, Barth affirms the existence of God before considering creation in depth. The placement of the doctrine of creation in *Church Dogmatics* confirms that Barth considers the doctrine an article of the Christian faith.

#### d) *The Significance of Faith for the Doctrine of Creation*

All of Barth's arguments expressed above have displayed that Jesus is the key to the secret of creation. This means that knowledge of creation, of the Creator and creature, is knowledge of faith.<sup>30</sup> However, one might ask, what kind of faith is this? Barth does provide an answer.<sup>31</sup> Faith is an attitude and decision.

It consists in the personal recognition that this reality is at the disposal of God as the theatre, instrument and object of His activity. It consists, therefore, in recognition of the fact that God has controlled and does and will control it. ...[it is] a serious acceptance of God as Creator, a recognition of His right and power to control, a genuine reckoning with His control over past, present and future.<sup>32</sup>

It is to live in the presence of the Creator in recognition of His power. Barth notes, "Those who believe in Jesus Christ have to do *ipso facto* with the Lord of heaven and

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<sup>29</sup> John D. Godsey, "The Architecture of Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*," in *Karl Barth's Table Talk*, ed. John D. Godsey, *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers* 10 (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1963), 7 (author's emphasis).

<sup>30</sup> Aung has wisely cautioned that this does not indicate that Barth is fideist, in *The Doctrine of Creation*, 56.

<sup>31</sup> 3/1, 31-41.

<sup>32</sup> 3/1, 32.

earth.”<sup>33</sup> It is recognition that Jesus Christ is the one who, as He is Creator, is able to make all things new in a new creation. Only He, the Christ, has such power to transform. Here Barth follows an analogy between God’s action in the original creation of saying “let there be light” to God’s action in Jesus Christ who shines light in our hearts (2 Cor. 4:6). It is also recognition that all of creation belongs to God and will belong to God. The creation belongs to the Creator not by acquisition but original possession. Accordingly, believers in Him will submit to Him and worship Him. Lastly, faith, as life in the presence of the Creator, is a life in recognition and experience of His benevolence. “There has entered in in Jesus Christ the Bearer and Proclaimer of the benevolence of the One who willed and created the world and themselves.”<sup>34</sup> In Christ we see that the Creator has always desired good for the creation. John Webster clarifies this aspect of Barth’s thought: “The created order can be understood only in the light of God’s purposes for creation enacted in Jesus Christ and made real in the power of the Holy Spirit. The creation *is* (and therefore is known as) that reality which God destines for fellowship with Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> From this point of view, Barth understands creation as a grace of God. Faith is central to the doctrine of creation, as it is faith in the Creator.

Knowledge of creation is believing knowledge. It starts with faith in God. One might inadequately say that this knowledge begins with the assumption of God’s being and attributes. Barth clearly does not want the Christian doctrine of creation to be shaped in any way by any other discipline. Barth’s method does not, however, hinder him from

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<sup>33</sup> 3/1, 35.

<sup>34</sup> 3/1, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 98 (author’s emphasis). Cf. Aung who writes, “Without faith, as it appears in Barth’s work, the nature and meaning of creation will always remain blurred,” in *The Doctrine of Creation*, 51.

interacting with other disciplines, such as the natural sciences. He is keeping the doctrine from being contaminated by unrelated sources during its formation. Although Barth was only occasionally involved with inter-disciplinary dialogue, he laid a theological foundation that allowed for and encouraged such exploration.<sup>36</sup> Barth is not of the opinion that nothing at all can be learned about creation outside of Jesus Christ. Rather, throughout his doctrine of creation Barth is simply stating that one can only properly affirm and comprehend the knowledge of creation in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is noteworthy that although Barth opened his doctrine of creation observing that “there can be no scientific problems, objections or aids” in understanding a Christian doctrine of creation, he also remarked that “future workers in the field of the Christian doctrine of creation will find many problems worth pondering” in the area of science and theology.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Salai Hla Aung, Barth is not “anti-dialogue,” and it is questionable if one could even say, as Ian Barbour does, that Barth finds science and religion as absolutely independent from one another.<sup>38</sup> Barth certainly develops his theology from this starting point, and he has noted limits of science, but, as Jürgen Moltmann notes, Barth does not present a precise definition of these limits.<sup>39</sup> Barth develops his doctrine excluding all sources outside of believing knowledge, but other sources may be considered after the doctrine has been formed.

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<sup>36</sup> Both Webster (*Barth*, 111) and Aung (*The Doctrine of Creation*, 273) agree.

<sup>37</sup> 3/1, p. ix, x.

<sup>38</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 261. However Aung elsewhere curiously writes that “Both structurally and methodologically there is nothing in the structure of Barth’s view of creation that would hinder him from entering into dialogue with science,” page 73; Ian G. Barbour, *When Science Meets Religion: Enemies, Strangers or Partners?* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2000), 17-22.

<sup>39</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1985), 36.

e) *Summary*

Barth's doctrine of creation shows how the true and only certain doctrine of creation is the Christian doctrine of creation and is thus an article of faith. In other words, the doctrine of creation belongs in Christian dogmatics. Outside of Christian doctrine one can only speculate on the origin or purpose of creation and end in uncertainty.<sup>40</sup> The content of the doctrine of creation can only be found within the Christian faith. Here one meets Jesus Christ and learns of the secret of creation. The revelation of salvation and creation belong together.<sup>41</sup> In making this affirmation, Barth turns against the historical majority position the Christian Church (as has been noted in the introduction) and stands in conformity to those of the early church. In fact, "Barth's fundamental affirmation is a repetition of that of Irenaeus. The doctrine of creation is not a piece of natural theology, but the first article of the church's confession of faith."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Herbert Hartwell also notes this in, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 112.

<sup>41</sup> 3/1, 414.

<sup>42</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 157.

## CHAPTER 6

### GOD'S ASEITY AND CREATION

The doctrine of creation, Barth notes, has first of all to say something about God. After all, "the Confession does not speak of the world, nor even, I believe in the work of creation. But it says, I believe in God the Creator." The Christian doctrine of creation is God focused. "Fundamentally what is involved here is the knowledge of the Creator."<sup>1</sup> For Barth, the doctrine of creation speaks of two criterion of true deity: freedom and love.<sup>2</sup>

#### a) *The Freedom of the Creator*

Barth affirms that Creation has come about as a result of the will of God. This is indeed foundational for his doctrine of creation.<sup>3</sup> This is a statement about the aseity and freedom of God<sup>4</sup> and implies that everything that exists, other than God, is dependent upon God for its existence. God was free to create. It was not an emanation of his being that he could not control, nor was it necessary. There was nothing intrinsic, nor extrinsic, that made creation necessary. It was God, and God alone, who determined to create.

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 41, 42.

<sup>2</sup> 3/1, 215.

<sup>3</sup> "It is the divine will and accomplishment in relation to man – and nothing else – which really stands as the beginning of all things" (3/1, 99). Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 56.

Barth founds the insight that it was God's will to create, of course, from Jesus Christ. "In that God became man, it has also become manifest and worthy of belief that He does not wish to exist for Himself only and therefore to be alone."<sup>5</sup>

As far as intrinsic necessity is concerned, Barth argues that God has no need of creation, or humans as part of that creation. "God has no need of us, He has no need of the world and heaven and earth at all. He is rich in Himself. He has fullness of life; all glory, all beauty, all goodness and holiness reside in Him. He is sufficient unto Himself, He is God, blessed in Himself."<sup>6</sup> God is complete in himself and he is self-sufficient. God experienced love within his eternal life *ad intra*. Since God already has relationality within himself, he did not need a creation to relate to.<sup>7</sup> If God had not created there would have been no lack in him. This does not mean, however, that he cannot relate with creation. In fact, his freedom allows him to do just this.<sup>8</sup>

With regards to extrinsic necessity, God did not require the cooperation of anything – not another agent or reality – to create.<sup>9</sup> Barth emphasizes here the difference between the Church dogma of creation and the creation doctrines of other ancient

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<sup>4</sup> Barth equates the freedom of God with the *aseitas Dei* in *Church Dogmatics*, 2/1, 202.

<sup>5</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 41.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 44–45. Cf. 3/1, 7. Also, Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 62; and Dan L. Deegan, "The Christological Determinant in Barth's Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 14 (1961): 121.

<sup>7</sup> Barth speaks of the world not being a necessary fellow-worker or a playmate in 2/1, 499. Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 43.

<sup>8</sup> Deegan notes how the concept of aseity had been criticized for portraying God as so independent and disconnected from the world that he was unable to relate to it, but that Barth overcomes this, in "Christological Determinant," 122.

<sup>9</sup> 3/1, 99.



religions where the origin of the world was portrayed with images of sexual processes, spitting or struggle.<sup>10</sup>

By asserting that creation was the will of God, Barth identifies creation as having a personal origin. The concept 'creator' can not be equated with 'first cause,' which would denote a timeless relationship.<sup>11</sup> Rather, the Creator is God, who interacts with that which he creates in the covenant of grace.<sup>12</sup> The Creator has a goal or direction for creation. More specifically, Barth identifies this work with the will of God the Father. "It is as this Eternal Father [of Jesus Christ], determined in the act of His free expression and therefore not from without but from within, determining Himself in His Son by the Holy Spirit and Himself positing everything else, that He is also the Creator."<sup>13</sup>

The fact that creation is grounded upon the will of God implies that creation is limited. God did not will all possibilities in creation. Here is where Barth's doctrine of Nothingness enters the picture. Barth writes,

If we ask further why being is limited by non-being or why creation has to be obstructed and contradicted by sin and death and the devil, again the only answer we can give is that by the same free will of God by which it was created creation has to have this limitation by what is not created, by non-being, and even non-being must also have this definite place and therefore its peculiar being.<sup>14</sup>

God willed certain things and that which exists is by his will. That which does not have being is only recognized because God limited that which he willed.

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<sup>10</sup> 3/1, 112, 243 and *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> 3/1, 13.

<sup>12</sup> 3/1, 44.

<sup>13</sup> 3/1, 11, cf. 50.

<sup>14</sup> 2/1, 561.

The fact that the original creation is a result of the will of God is illustrated by the fact that God completed the work. That is, God was in control and was able to stop creation. Barth recognizes this in God's rest on the seventh day of creation according to the Genesis creation narrative. "It is precisely this rest which distinguished God from a world-principle self-developing and self-evolving in infinite sequence."<sup>15</sup> God was free to limit his creative activity.

b) *The Love of the Creator*

Barth affirms that creation is grounded in the eternal love of God.<sup>16</sup> This assertion is made to exhibit that God's will is not arbitrary. This is especially important for the doctrine of creation where the above affirmation regarding the freedom of God declares that God has no need of a creation. Barth writes, "How can there be something alongside God, of which He has no need? This is the riddle of creation?"<sup>17</sup> Barth's answer is that God has always had loving intentions toward creation. The Creator's love is seen in his grace toward humans. For example, God graciously keeps chaos from overtaking man (Gen. 1:6-8)<sup>18</sup> and provides for all of humanity's needs in creation.

By affirming the love of God in creation Barth draws together the works of creation and salvation. In this context Iain Torrance has observed, "God does not have

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<sup>15</sup> 3/1, 215.

<sup>16</sup> Where Aung (*The Doctrine of Creation*, 38-41) and Berkouwer (*Triumph of Grace*) have preferred to speak of the grace of God in Barth's doctrine of creation, I have, following Barth's emphasis, preferred the concept of love (cf. Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* [New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1963], 22-25). Grace seems to imply simply that that which is given (here, existence) is unmerited by the receiver (although Barth also speaks of grace as equal to gift in 2/1, 354). Grace focuses on the merit (i.e. lack of merit) of the receiver. In contrast, love focuses on the action and attitude of the giver, here the Creator. It is because of the love of the Creator that he is gracious. Love is the ground of grace.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 45.

two loves.”<sup>19</sup> Barth notes that it was the same God who is the Creator that is the Savior. It was the Creator who “willed to call them as men His own dear sons.”<sup>20</sup> God loves creation in respect of his Son who was to assume human nature because “Jesus Christ stood eternally before Him as the Elected and Resurrected.”<sup>21</sup> From this point of view one may say that Jesus Christ is the basis of God’s love for creation. “His being and activity *ad extra* is merely an overflowing of His inward activity and being, of the inward vitality which He has in Himself.”<sup>22</sup>

According to Barth, although creation is not eternal, it was eternally the object of God’s love. By ‘eternal’ Barth means that it was always God’s intention to create. Barth speaks of God loving “man and man’s whole world from all eternity, even before it was created.”<sup>23</sup> The problem with affirming this view of God’s love is that it seems to introduce a necessity to God’s act of creation. In this respect, Colin Gunton asks of Barth, “If God loves the creature from eternity, is he not in effect bound to create it?”<sup>24</sup> Indeed Barth even affirms that God created “under no other inward constraint than that of

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<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 134.

<sup>19</sup> Iain Torrance, “The Trinity in Relation to Creation and Incarnation,” *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 38 (1996): 37. Cf. Aung, who writes, “For Barth to consider creation apart from the election of Christ is to impose a change of attitude and scheme in the mind of God temporally, and is therefore unbiblical. It is unbiblical because God is the One who in His freedom loves eternally and never changes His love at random,” in *The Doctrine of Creation*, 75.

<sup>20</sup> 3/1, 39.

<sup>21</sup> 3/1, 51; 2/2, 104.

<sup>22</sup> 2/2, 175.

<sup>23</sup> 3/1, 50.

<sup>24</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 163. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann who argues that God must create because he wishes to love his ‘other’ in, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 106.

the freedom of His love.”<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that creation proceeds not only from the love of God, but also from the will of God. It comes from the *freedom* of His love. Accordingly, Barth is also able to speak of God’s “eternal decision regarding creaturely history.”<sup>26</sup> That is, God was free to choose to create. Although God loved creation from all eternity, the fact remains that God created out of his will and freedom. When keeping both aspects in mind one can see that the affirmation of the love of God harmonizes with the above affirmation of God’s will. Barth expresses it this way: “He [God] wants in His freedom actually not to be without man but *with* him and in the same freedom not against him but *for* him, and that apart from or even counter to what man deserves. He wants in fact to be man’s partner, his almighty and compassionate Savior.”<sup>27</sup> God, in his freedom, wills to love man, his creature. In Barth’s words, “God is the One who loves in freedom.”<sup>28</sup>

### c) *Creation Out of Nothing*

From the outset of his doctrine of creation Barth affirms that God created out of nothing.<sup>29</sup> Barth maintains that “Creator means: *creator ex nihilo*.”<sup>30</sup> The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is one way of affirming that the creation is exclusively the result of the

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<sup>25</sup> 3/1, 15. Cf. “We can see how far it was not only appropriate and worthy but necessary that God should be the Creator,” and “To be sure there was no other necessity than that of His own free love” (3/1, 51). Gunton’s critique of Barth focuses on and begins with God’s love that leads God to create freely. His critique is overcome if one goes prior to God’s love for creation, which originates in God’s love for his Son, which he willed to elect in freedom. As Moltmann has recognized, freedom is primary for Barth.

<sup>26</sup> 3/1, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. John Newton Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1960), 50.

<sup>28</sup> 2/1, 257-321; 3/1, 50 and *passim*.

<sup>29</sup> 3/1, 4.

will of God. However, Barth presents the doctrine primarily by considering the love of God as expressed in the resurrection. Combining the insights of freedom and love, Barth's doctrine of creation out of nothing again affirms that God is the basis of all being distinct from himself.<sup>31</sup>

In affirming this doctrine Barth conforms to the historic formulations of the Church.<sup>32</sup> He explains that creation out of nothing means, firstly, that creation was not out of some pre-existent non-being thing which was brought into being.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, creation was not formed from pre-existent material since there was no reality that existed eternally other than God. Thirdly, God knew creation before he created it. God's ideas shaped and preceded his creation, but the ideas were not something existing externally to God. Fourthly, although God uses materials in creation, for example, to create humans, this is not divine emanation but the use of materials that were created out of nothing. Lastly, the doctrine means that there was no possibility of things being created or existing outside of God's creative activity. All of these affirmations are important because, as Barth notes, they oppose the heresies of emanation (monism) and an eternal co-existent with God (dualism). Rather, all creation derives from God's will and love.

As Barth finds grounds for creation out of nothing, he is inconsistent when he considers Old Testament passages that refer to creation. First he notes the unique use of

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<sup>30</sup> 2/1, 76.

<sup>31</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> 3/2, 155.

<sup>33</sup> Aung believes that Barth presents a two-stage process in creation. First God creates a no-thing (*me on*) (Gen. 1:1) out of absolutely nothing (*ouk on*) then continues to create something out of this no-thing (Gen 1:2). Aung wrongly states that the first (*ouk on*) "is a situation to which God's Word has not spoken." See Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 47, 48. Actually, Barth rejects a two-stage process and views the state of chaos in Genesis 1:2 as a personification of that which is abhorrent. There is nothing created to which God's Word has not spoken. See 3/1, 108. Cf. Berkouwer, *Triumph of Grace*, 58.

*bara'* in Genesis 1:1. He states that it "is lexicographically unequivocal" and that it "can denote only the divine creation in contrast to all other: the creation which does not work on an existing object or material which can be made by the Creator into something else; the *creatio ex nihilo* whose Subject can only be God and no one apart from Him – no creature."<sup>34</sup> He also notes that the Old Testament uses other words, such as fashion, to speak of God's creation. The conflicting interpretation comes later in the same volume. Barth, being more conservative in his interpretation, writes, "It may well be that the concept of a *creatio ex nihilo*, of which there is no actual hint in Gen. 1-2, is the construct of later attempts at more precise formulation. But its antithesis – the mythological acceptance of a primeval reality independent of God – is excluded in practice by the general tenor of the passage as well as its position within the biblical context."<sup>35</sup>

In contrast, Barth is consistent and clear in his position that *creatio ex nihilo* is a christological insight. Barth draws the parallel between creation and resurrection, while recognizing that creation does not involve matter while resurrection does. He finds that the New Testament took this parallel for granted (cf. Rom. 4:17; Heb. 11:3).<sup>36</sup> Just as God is the one who calls humanity into a new life at the resurrection, God is the one who calls humanity, and all of creation, into existence at creation.<sup>37</sup>

Barth draws five insights from *creatio ex nihilo* in light of the above connection. Firstly, he notes that it implies that humanity is given direction: "As there stands behind it

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<sup>34</sup> 3/1, 16.

<sup>35</sup> 3/1, 103 (emphasis mine).

<sup>36</sup> 3/2, 152-153.

<sup>37</sup> "As creation is *creatio ex nihilo*, so reconciliation is the raising of the dead. As we owe life to God the Creator, so we owe eternal life to God the Reconciler," in 1/1, 413.

[humanity] God and His Word, it is not *ex nihilo* but very much *ex aliquo*.”<sup>38</sup> Secondly, Barth points out that the void, nothingness or chaos is not the origin of humanity. Rather, it is God. Thirdly, the Son of God, who is the prototype of humanity, provides a pre-existence of humanity. Fourthly, humanity’s “being summoned includes and therefore has as a presupposition his constitution, his existence as a natural and spiritual being.”<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the actual form of humanity has no presupposition and is not shaped by this presupposed summons. Lastly, the only possibility of the existence of humanity comes from God, whom humanity can stand before only by faith.

Behind all of these points stands Barth’s insight that faith is believing for things not seen, which God brings into existence. In the New Testament this includes creation and the resurrection. Although this insight is in the context of humanity (i.e. resurrection), and accordingly points only to the creation of humanity, Barth clearly extends the implications to the whole of creation.<sup>40</sup> Barth concludes his discussion of creation out of nothing saying, “The theology of the ancient Church failed to base the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* on this biblical insight. ...Once it is understood in this light, it is not mere theologoumenon, but what is intended to be in Heb. 11:3 and unquestionably in the context of Heb. 11 and Rom. 4, namely, an article of faith which is necessary in its own place.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 3/2, 155.

<sup>39</sup> 3/2, 155-156.

<sup>40</sup> The majority of Barth’s discussion on *creatio ex nihilo* falls within his doctrine of man. Nevertheless, Barth applies this discussion to the whole of creation. For example, he uses it to defeat dualism and monism and makes such statements as, “the doctrine of the *creatio ex nihilo* makes the same affirmation of all creatures ...” (3/2, 156. Cf. 1/1, 413).

<sup>41</sup> 3/2, 157.

d) *Summary*

Barth's doctrine of creation presents God the Creator as the one who freely and lovingly created. Nothing forced God to create. Only God stands behind creation, which means that creation is made with purpose. This is further expressed in the doctrine of creation out of nothing. God summons the creature into existence as he does in resurrection.



## CHAPTER 7

### CREATION AS THE WORK OF THE TRIUNE GOD

All Christian theology should be trinitarian. That is, it should be shaped by and conform to the doctrine of the trinity. The place of this doctrine will determine the outcome of every other doctrine, including creation.<sup>1</sup> Has Barth successfully employed his doctrine of the Trinity? Herbert Hartwell has written that in Barth's doctrine of creation, creation is "intrinsically trinitarian in its ontology."<sup>2</sup> Barth affirms that the identity of the Creator is the triune God. However, as Salai Hla Aung has pointed out, Barth neglects the divine activity of the Holy Spirit in creation. This is not because Barth presents the Trinity in a modalistic fashion.<sup>3</sup> Rather, this is the result of Barth holding to the bestowal model of the Trinity. Barth portrays the Holy Spirit as the unity of the Father and Son, rather than as a person in his own right. This model keeps Barth from attributing divine creative activity to the person of the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 53. John Webster, *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2000), 95; Thomas A. Idinopulos, "The Critical Weakness of Creation in Barth's Theology," *Encounter* (1972): 161.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 114.

<sup>3</sup> This is another one of Aung's critiques. See chapter four.

a) *The Father*

As there are three temporal phases of creation, reconciliation, and redemption, Barth appropriates the first, the role of Creator, to God the Father.<sup>4</sup> That is, the Father is seen to have the dominant role in the work of creation, which makes it most appropriate to identify him as the Creator. This does not deny the existence or the roles of the Son and Spirit in creation. Creation is not exclusive to the Father because there are not three gods.<sup>5</sup> The works of the trinity are indivisible externally – “*opera trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*.”<sup>6</sup> According to Barth, “the particular stress on one of God’s modes of being never implies its separation from the others.” The doctrine of *perichoresis* “states that the divine modes of being mutually condition and permeate one another so completely that one is always in the other two and the other two in the one.” This “implies both a confirmation of the distinction in the modes of being, for none would be what it is (not even the Father) without its co-existence with the others, and also a relativisation of this distinction, for none exists as a special individual, but all three ‘in-exist’ or exist only in concert as modes of being of the one God and Lord who posits Himself from eternity to eternity.”<sup>7</sup> Hence, when Barth speaks of God the Father as the Creator, he means God the Father with the Son and Holy Spirit. This appropriation speaks of both the intercommunity of the divine persons and their distinctions.

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<sup>4</sup> 1/1, 398; 3/1, 11, 49, and *passim*.

<sup>5</sup> 3/1, 49.

<sup>6</sup> 1/1, 442; 3/1, 49.

<sup>7</sup> 1/1, 370. Cf. 394, 442.

Barth concedes that he does not find the equation of 'Father' and 'Creator' in scripture,<sup>8</sup> but he wishes to conform to the creed which first speaks of the act of creation in context of the Almighty Father. Barth justifies and affirms the appropriation of creation to the Father by means of an analogy of relations. "Creation is the temporal analogue, taking place outside God, of that event in God Himself by which God is the Father of the Son."<sup>9</sup> The Father is the eternally unoriginate origin, as he is temporally the uncreated Creator. This is not just a similarity, but an analogy of roles or relations. It is "a reflection, a shadowing forth of this inner divine relationship between God the Father and the Son."<sup>10</sup> Creation is the Father's "originative activity *ad extra*."<sup>11</sup> Already we begin to see that the role of the Holy Spirit is missing for it is only the relationship of the Father with the Son that has been considered.<sup>12</sup>

#### b) *The Son*

In accordance with Barth's doctrine of the Trinity, God the Son participated in the work of creation. "Jesus Christ is the Word by which God created the world out of nothing."<sup>13</sup> Creation was in (ἐν) and through (διὰ) Christ. This does not mean that

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<sup>8</sup> 3/1, 49. This is interesting because in 1/1 he refers to Deut. 32:6 and Is. 64:7 which speaks of the creative work of the Father (p. 389).

<sup>9</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 43. Cf. 3/1, 49. Walter A. Whitehouse notes in Barth, creation "has some analogy to the eternal begetting of the Son by the Father whilst differing from this in its contingency and history," in, "Karl Barth on 'The Work of Creation': A Reading of *Church Dogmatics*, III/1," in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Niger Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 46-47.

<sup>10</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 43. Cf. 1/1, 397; 3/1, 49.

<sup>11</sup> 3/1, 49.

<sup>12</sup> When Barth argues that creation is not necessary because of relationality within God he also focuses only on the relationships of the Father and Son. See 2/1, 667; 3/1, 50, 183.

<sup>13</sup> 1/1, 442.

Christ was just an administrator or helper doing the will of the Father. Nor was Christ an intermediate being. Rather, Barth interprets this to be an affirmation that Christ was the partner or associate of the Father in creation.<sup>14</sup> Jesus Christ is not an intermediate being between God and creation, but “He is the Mediator between God and man, like the ‘wisdom’ of the Old Testament.”<sup>15</sup> Proclamation of the Son’s role in creation is an indirect affirmation of the ὁμοούσιος. Following Athanasius, if Christ had a part in creation, he must be one essence with the Father.<sup>16</sup> To describe Jesus Christ as Creator is to proclaim him as Lord.

When Barth speaks of the Son as Creator, he means Jesus Christ. He states outright, “the world came into being, it was created and sustained by the little child that was born in Bethlehem.”<sup>17</sup> Barth believes that the New Testament writers and the Christian faith proclaims not simply the eternal Son, or *logos asarkos*, as the Creator, but Jesus Christ, the *logos ensarkos*.<sup>18</sup> This is so because Jesus Christ is the elected one, and this election is the beginning of all of God’s works. As the elected one, Jesus Christ “is the eternal archetype and prototype of God’s glory in His externalisation, the archetype and prototype of God’s co-existence with another.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 3/1, 52. This interpretation stands in contrast to Wolfhart Pannenberg’s who suggests that according to Barth “the Son’s part is simply that it was with a view to the Son that the Father created us humans and our world” and that “Barth says nothing about the Son’s own subjectivity” in the act of creation, in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 30.

<sup>15</sup> 3/1, 53.

<sup>16</sup> 1/1, 442, 447.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 48.

<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 56-58.

<sup>19</sup> 2/1, 667.

c) *The Holy Spirit*

Clearly Barth should not deny that the Holy Spirit is involved in creation. This follows from his doctrine of the Trinity. He is explicit in including the Holy Spirit when speaking of the identity of the Creator, that is, the Holy Spirit in God's being *ad intra*. Barth writes,

The God who created heaven and earth is God 'the Father,' i.e., the Father of Jesus Christ, who as such in eternal generation posits Himself in the Son by the Holy Spirit, and is not therefore in any sense posited from without or elsewhere. It is as this Eternal Father, determined in the act of His free expression and therefore not from without but from within, determining Himself in His Son by the Holy Spirit and Himself positing everything else, that He is also the Creator.<sup>20</sup>

Although this is in the context of creation, it only speaks of the Holy Spirit as the identity of the Creator.

As with the Son, the creedal affirmation that the Holy Spirit is "the giver of life" likewise teaches the deity of the Holy Spirit. He is the breath of God by which things were made (Ps. 33:6).<sup>21</sup> As part of the triunity of God, "without Him God could not partake of the name of Father and Creator."<sup>22</sup> In the New Testament, the life-giving work of the Holy Spirit is seen as soterio-eschatological. However, Barth remarks, this is only so in light of the original life-giving work of the Holy Spirit. It presupposes the original creative work of the Spirit that is in fact found in the Old Testament. Here the Spirit, the breath of God, is seen as the giver and preserver of life.

It sounds as though Barth is attributing creative work to the Holy Spirit, however when Barth turns from exposition to dogmatics he fails to explicitly state that the Holy

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<sup>20</sup> 3/1, 11. Cf. 3/1, 49.

<sup>21</sup> 1/1, 427.

<sup>22</sup> 3/1, 49.

Spirit participates in the act of creation. In the context of creation, Barth speaks of the role of the Holy Spirit in terms of the relation of the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the fundamental condition for the ground of creation,<sup>23</sup> which is “the incarnate Word of God as the content and object of the eternal divine decree of grace.”<sup>24</sup> This decree of grace, and the resultant creative will of God, presupposes that “the unity, love and peace between God the Father and Son are not unsettled or disturbed but transcendently glorified by the fact that the Word of God becomes flesh, that in His Son God takes to Himself man’s misery...”<sup>25</sup> It is here that Barth finds the role of the Spirit. The Spirit is the unity of the Father and the Son, and glorifies their fellowship. This, and only this, is the work of the Holy Spirit in creation.<sup>26</sup> Only as the communion of the Father and Son does there exist in Him “the whole order of the relation between God the Creator and His creatures.”<sup>27</sup> Barth affirms that “There could be no creature, nor any creation, if God were not also the Holy spirit and active as such, just as He is also the Father and the Son and active as such.”<sup>28</sup> The Holy Spirit is the foundation of the unity between the Father and Son and thus the condition of the creative will and work of the Father and Son.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> “It is God the Holy Spirit who makes the existence of the creature as such possible, permitting it to exist, maintaining it in its existence, and forming the point of reference of its existence. For it is He who in that counsel anticipates and guarantees its reconciliation with God and redemption by Him in the union of the Father and the Son.” 3/1, 56.

<sup>24</sup> 3/1, 58.

<sup>25</sup> 3/1, 58. Cf. Walter A. Whitehouse, who summarizes Barth: “The will of the Father and Son is made explicit by the Holy Spirit, and He is thus the intra-divine guarantee of the creature’s existence. The communion of Father and Son is not disturbed but rather glorified by the existence of creatures,” in *Creation Science and Theology: Essays in Response to Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 13.

<sup>26</sup> “That this agreement exists and is valid is the work of the Holy Spirit in creation.” 3/1, 57.

<sup>27</sup> 3/1, 56.

<sup>28</sup> 3/1, 58.

d) *Summary*

We see that for Barth the role of the Holy Spirit in creation is actually passive. The Holy Spirit is a condition for original creation. Barth does not directly attribute divine creative activity to the Holy Spirit. At the chance in Genesis 1:2, Barth posits that the Spirit brooding over the waters is not something that actually happened, but rather simply a caricature of myth.<sup>30</sup> Barth also does not work out the implications of the Old Testament passages that he referred to regarding the Holy Spirit as giver and preserver of life. Rather, he points to these as confirmation of his view that the Holy Spirit is the foundation for the existence of creation.

Aung was correct to note the binary character of divine creative activity in Barth's work. Nevertheless, Barth does not explicitly deny this activity of the Holy Spirit, and its affirmation is certainly implied in his doctrine of the Trinity. There is no hint of modalism in Barth's doctrine of creation. The Creator is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. However, it is this same doctrine of the Trinity that keeps Barth from explicitly stating the divine creative activity of the Spirit. Barth follows the Augustinian model of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is viewed as the love or unity between the Father and the Son rather than as a divine person in his own right. It is this view of the personhood of the Holy Spirit that hinders Barth. Barth is able to speak of Jesus Christ, but not the Holy Spirit, as the co-creator with the Father. The Holy Spirit appears only as the foundation of this unified work. For Barth to consistently hold to the doctrine that works of the

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<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, as John Thompson interprets Barth's understanding of the Holy Spirit's work in creation he is only able to speak of the Spirit as the condition, confirmation and guarantor of creation – "God the Father is the Creator, God the Son, the means and goal of creation, God the Holy Spirit, the one who particularly guarantees its existence," in *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Karl Barth*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series 23 (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications, 1991), 160.

<sup>30</sup> 3/1, 108.

trinity are indivisible externally he should have affirmed the creative activity of the Holy Spirit. Jürgen Moltmann was correct to say, "Barth's doctrine of the Trinity is the blueprint of his doctrine of creation, which can be recognized everywhere. Anyone who thinks that this or that part of the structure of his doctrine of creation has to be changed must therefore be in a position to change his doctrine of the Trinity."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991), 130.



## CHAPTER 8

### GROUND AND GOAL OF CREATION

One of key questions asked in a doctrine of creation is “why is there a creation?” For Barth the answer is the covenant. If Barth’s doctrine of creation is prized for anything, it is his uniting together of the doctrines of creation and reconciliation.<sup>1</sup> This is indeed the center of Barth’s doctrine of creation. As seen above, Barth has recognized that the identity of the Creator is also the Savior. It is the doctrine of the Trinity that leads Barth to unite the two works.<sup>2</sup> When Barth turns to expound the Genesis creation narratives he writes, “They do not speak of the work of any creator of the world, but – like all that follows – of words and acts of the very One who later made Himself known and attached Himself to the people of Israel as *Yahweh-Elohim*.”<sup>3</sup> The same God that saves, creates. In fact, Barth argues that the ground and goal of creation is the covenant.<sup>4</sup> “The creature is no more its own goal and purpose than it is its own ground and

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 162.

<sup>2</sup> 3/1, 50, 64; John Webster, *Barth, Outstanding Christian Thinkers* (London: Continuum, 2000), 98.

<sup>3</sup> 3/1, 65.

<sup>4</sup> He writes, “The covenant between God and man is the meaning and the glory, the ground and goal of heaven and earth and the whole creation,” in *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 50.

beginning.”<sup>5</sup> These tenets are expressed in Barth’s axiom that creation is the external basis of the covenant and the covenant is the internal basis of creation.

a) *Creation Allows for Actualization of the Covenant*

Barth argues that creation allows for the actualization of the covenant. This is what Barth means by ‘external basis.’ There must be a creation, and at the center of that creation, humanity, the covenant partner, in order for there to be a covenant. Election of humanity to the covenant presupposes or includes what one could call the election of creation to existence. There must be an arena for and an object for his love. Creation is not the ground or cause of the covenant, rather creation is implied or presupposed by the covenant. “In the purpose of creation as such we are concerned only with the making possible and not the actualisation of this other divine work.”<sup>6</sup> In this sense creation is the ‘technical possibility’ for, the ‘stage’ for, or the ‘way’ to the covenant. Creation is not the covenant, but leads to it. The goal of creation is the covenant. Creation is, to some extent, a means to an end. God creates a covenant partner, in humanity, and humans need the remainder of creation as their home and to provide for their needs. As we have seen in part I, this causes Barth’s doctrine of creation to have an anthropocentric character. It is focused on the God-human relationship.

However, creation is more than simply a means to an end because it also points forward to the covenant. That is, there is a reason behind creation. Hans Urs von Balthasar has observed that for Barth “The nature of creation is its preparation for

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<sup>5</sup> 3/1, 94.

<sup>6</sup> 3/1, 47.

grace.”<sup>7</sup> John Webster states that the covenant is “in view.”<sup>8</sup> In Barth’s words, creation is the “equipment for grace.”<sup>9</sup> This is how Barth speaks of the ‘external basis’ as the prophetic view of creation.<sup>10</sup> Within this context, that is, because the creation leads to grace in the covenant, creation may itself even be considered grace. Indeed the grace of the covenant is prefigured in creation.

Barth finds the ‘external’ statement reflected in Genesis 1:1-2:4a.<sup>11</sup> As Kathryn Tanner notes, “Creation becomes an act of separation or division like that found in the cross of Christ. ...More fully stated, the unmerited acceptance of human being and the rejection of chaos, sin, and death on the cross of Christ – the Yes and No of God’s act in Christ – are mirrored by God’s acceptance of only some things for creation and the rejection of others.”<sup>12</sup> God creates the world by his word but does not allow chaos to exist. He rejects this possibility and leads creation to his grace. God, in his mercy, will not allow the primal floodwaters to threaten creation nor the sea to flood the dry earth. All that opposes God and his salvation is overcome. God provides food for humans by creating plants and trees even before humans existed to ensure the continuance of humanity. The creation of animals before humans serves as a sign that the earth is safe to

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<sup>7</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. John Drury (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 111. Cf. 3/1, 97.

<sup>8</sup> John Webster, *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 63.

<sup>9</sup> 3/1, 231.

<sup>10</sup> 3/1, 233.

<sup>11</sup> 3/1, 98-228.

<sup>12</sup> Kathryn Tanner, “Creation and Providence,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 122.

live in. "Creation means peace – peace between the Creator and creatures, and peace among creatures themselves."<sup>13</sup>

The external basis, that is creation, is finally reached with the creation of humanity. Humans are created in the image of God. Barth suggests that this should only be interpreted in a relational fashion. The image of God is found in differentiation and relationship. Barth presents an analogy of relations: as God is uniquely and originally relational being, humans are made relational beings. This is seen in male and female relationships. This is no more than analogously the case, however because "the differentiation and relationship between the I and the Thou in the divine being, in the sphere of the *Elohim*, are not identical with the differentiation and relationship between male and female." That is, sexuality and individuality are creaturely. Analogy is simply correspondence of the unlike. God created and wills<sup>14</sup> a being capable of being God's and its own (viz. other humans) counterpart. Humans are free for relationship with other humans and for relationship with God (but only as God is for them). Upon the creation of humanity, creation is ready for the covenant.

Upon the seventh day of creation God rests. This illustrates that the creation is complete and ready for the covenant. Barth asks, "Could God have rested if He had not done all these things with a view to Christ?"<sup>15</sup> God knows the future and his rest is justified and explained in view of Jesus Christ as the form of the creature. It is to this rest that God invites humanity in the covenant.

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<sup>13</sup> 3/1, 209.

<sup>14</sup> That is, Barth believes that the image of God is not a possession but something God continually wills (3/1, 197, 199-201).

<sup>15</sup> 3/1, 222 quoting H. F. Kohlbrügge.

b) *Covenant as the Impulse for Creation*

The second half of Barth's axiom that the covenant is the internal basis of creation means that the covenant is the impulse for creation.<sup>16</sup> This does not contradict the 'external' statement, but qualifies it.<sup>17</sup> Covenant is not an implication of creation, but is rather that which is the ground of the existence of creation. God wills the covenant and therefore he creates. The covenant exists before creation and is not just an afterthought. "Before the world was, before heaven and earth were, the resolve or decree of God exists in view of this event in which God willed to hold communion with man."<sup>18</sup> This means that creation has meaning and purpose. It did not come about simply by chance.

Creation comes from the same free love that desired the covenant, or, as Tanner expresses it, creation is "in some strong sense the expression of the *same* grace of Christ."<sup>19</sup> Creation must be viewed "not as an accident but as a sign and witness of this necessity."<sup>20</sup> Hence, Barth refers to the internal statement as the sacramental view of creation.<sup>21</sup> By this he means that creation reflects the covenant which is its ground. Creation is a sign of the covenant because it is shaped according to this purpose and goal. Barth writes,

Hence what God has created was not just any reality – however perfect or wonderful – but that which is intrinsically determined as the exponent of His glory and for the corresponding service. What God created when He created the

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<sup>16</sup> 3/1, 228-329.

<sup>17</sup> Syd Hielema argues that Barth's internal statement comes close to contradicting his external statement in "Searching for 'Disconnected Wires': Karl Barth's Doctrine of Creation Revisited," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995): 78.

<sup>18</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, "Creation and Providence," 118.

<sup>20</sup> 3/1, 229.

<sup>21</sup> 3/1, 233.

world and man was not just any place, but that which was foreordained for the establishment and the history of the covenant... The fact that the covenant is the goal of creation is not something which is added later to the reality of the creature, as though the history of creation might equally have been succeeded by any other history. It already characterises creation itself and as such, and therefore the being and existence of the creature. The covenant whose history had still to commence was the covenant which, as the goal appointed for creation and the creature, made creation necessary and possible, and determined and limited the creature.<sup>22</sup>

G. C. Berkouwer correctly notes that this eliminates the 'states-theory' regarding creation and reconciliation.<sup>23</sup> Barth writes, "If creation takes precedence historically, the covenant does so in substance."<sup>24</sup>

Barth finds the 'internal' statement reflected in Genesis 2:4b-25 which is a saga independent from 1:1-2:4a. In this creation narrative God is referred to as Yahweh Elohim: the God who reveals his name to and saves Israel. The second Genesis creation narrative is interpreted to reflect not the general beginnings of the world, but rather the creation of the people of Israel. In creation, God makes humans living souls, "a soul quickened and established and sustained by God in a direct and personal and special encounter of His breath with this frame of dust."<sup>25</sup> God is the one who gives life and is able to take it away. This implication is presented in light of the fall of humans after which God confirmed his faithfulness to humanity by continuing to give life. Here, Barth suggests, already in creation God has covenanted with humans. "The second creation saga embraces both the history of creation and that of the covenant, both the establishment of the law of God and the revelation of His mercy, both the foundation of

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<sup>22</sup> 3/1, 231.

<sup>23</sup> G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 251.

<sup>24</sup> 3/1, 232.

the world and that of Israel, both man as such and man elected and called. This is the theological explanation of its peculiarity.”<sup>26</sup> Yet it does this without confusing the two elements of creation and covenant. It “understands creation in the light of the covenant.”<sup>27</sup>

The internal basis of the covenant is also seen in light of the Garden of Eden. God made man and then placed him in the garden. It was not necessary for God to do so. God created man for this special place. It is not man’s possession however, but God’s. It is a sanctuary for man. In this respect the garden is analogous to Israel and the promised land of Canaan. Furthermore, a river originates in this garden which miraculously divides to cover the whole earth. This represents the divine favor, of which man gets to partake first. There are also two trees in the garden. The tree of life serves as a sign that man may truly live for God is with him and has given him rest. It serves a role analogous to the tabernacle in the life of Israel. The second tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is only a sign of a possibility. It is not the tree of death, but it points to this possibility because only the Creator can bear this knowledge. Humans will necessarily be crushed under this weight (and indeed Israel does suffer). However, it is not a snare for humans because humans are only free to accept the direction of God, not to reject God. “If the creature could on its own judgment reject what on God’s judgment it ought to accept, it would be like God, Creator as well as creatures.”<sup>28</sup> Each tree says, one positively, one negatively, that man should live by the will of God. The freedom humans

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<sup>25</sup> 3/1, 237.

<sup>26</sup> 3/1, 240.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> 3/1, 258.

have is “the sign of the fellowship already established between God and man at his creation.”<sup>29</sup> As this whole story is analogous to the salvation history of Israel, Barth notes that this salvation history is being perceived as the meaning of creation: covenant is the internal basis of creation. Barth also suggests that these passages truly point to Jesus Christ, who fulfils the freedom given to humans and confirms the election of humans to fellowship.

The creation of woman, says Barth, also displays that the covenant is the internal basis of creation. It was not good for man to be alone. In this second narrative the emphasis is on the woman being brought to man to fulfill his need. The resulting marriage relationship completes the creation of humans. This relationship corresponds to and prefigures the covenant. It is analogous to the covenant of God with Israel, which only God (Israel’s husband) keeps, and of Jesus Christ and the Church.

Syd Hielema sums up quite well what has been expressed in the internal statement and the second Genesis creation narrative: “creation itself is thoroughly covenantal in character, a reality grounded in its relationship with its Creator.”<sup>30</sup>

c) *What is this Covenant?*

The concept of ‘covenant’ is central for Barth’s doctrine of creation and its meaning must be considered in this context if one is to understand Barth. What is the covenant?

i) Many of the critiques of Barth’s doctrine of creation in the area of history have resulted from a misunderstanding of what Barth means by covenant. It is not an ideal

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<sup>29</sup> 3/1, 265.

<sup>30</sup> Hielema, “Disconnected Wires,” 80.



concept that exists with only the possibility of becoming actual. Covenant is history, that is, a sequence of events. Therefore, in answering this question we will first answer the question, when is the covenant? Covenant history is distinct from creation history. According to Barth, the covenant takes place temporally after creation history, but also before and in creation.

Firstly, Barth speaks of covenant history “commencing immediately after creation.”<sup>31</sup> Barth is a little uncertain of exactly when this is however. He speaks of covenant history “commencing with the fall”<sup>32</sup> but he also speaks of God’s rest beginning the history of the covenant.<sup>33</sup> Regardless, following this sense, creation is the way to the covenant. This is expressed in the above exposition of the external statement.

Secondly, Barth speaks of the covenant as existing before creation. “The covenant is not only quite as old as creation; it is older than it.”<sup>34</sup> It existed before the world. Here again we find the connection between covenant and election as expressed above in chapter three. Covenant is the actualization of election in history. Covenant is not simply the equivalent of election, however, otherwise Barth would not have bothered to differentiate. Election is in pre-temporal eternity.<sup>35</sup> This election happens before creation and the love that is expressed in it overflows into creation. Covenant is more than this.

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<sup>31</sup> 3/1, 75, 190.

<sup>32</sup> 3/1, 241; cf. 109, 289.

<sup>33</sup> 3/1, 98, 217, 218. He also says that the covenant “commences with Abraham” but then, in a seemingly intentional manner he immediately corrects himself and says “or rather is revealed in Abraham as the history of God with man, as the execution of God’s covenant...,” in 3/1, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 46; 3/4, 39-40.

<sup>35</sup> 2/2, 104.

Thirdly, resulting from the above, Barth is also able to and does speak of God covenanting with man during the history of creation.<sup>36</sup> As we saw in chapter three, Barth even speaks of the blessing of animals as an aspect of covenant history.<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, as Jürgen Moltmann notes, creation is not only the enabling of the covenant.<sup>38</sup> This aspect of Barth's thought is reflected in his discussion of the internal statement. "The second creation saga embraces both the history of creation and that of the covenant."<sup>39</sup>

According to Barth, the covenant takes place temporally after creation history, but also before and in creation. A few points may be noted here. Although Barth speaks of covenant history existing before, in, and after creation history, he only speaks of a temporal beginning after creation history. Barth is saying that temporally covenant history begins after the creation history, however, its effects exist in and before this history. How this is possible may be understood by considering Barth's doctrine of time.<sup>40</sup> Aung comes close to understanding this: "Temporally, creation precedes the beginning of the covenant of grace, but the covenant of grace precedes and is the presupposition of creation in the mind of God... Thus, in this sense, the covenant of grace has principally preceded the actualization of creation."<sup>41</sup> Aung falters however by saying that the covenant only precedes creation 'principally.' Rather, the inner basis of

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<sup>36</sup> 1/1, 142; 3/1, 42, 47, 237; 4/1, 36.

<sup>37</sup> 3/1, 170.

<sup>38</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991), 129.

<sup>39</sup> 3/1, 240.

<sup>40</sup> See chapter two part c).

<sup>41</sup> Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 42.

creation is actually “*the eternal covenant* which God has decreed in Himself as the covenant of the Father with His Son.”<sup>42</sup>

That the covenant effects and is present to all of history is also seen in Barth’s discussion of the various ages of time.<sup>43</sup> Along with the history of creation, created time, there also exists ‘our’ time as a fallen creation. Barth also refers to this as ‘fallen’ or ‘lost’ time. Barth speaks of it, however, as though it were not real. “It is the time in which there is no real present and therefore no real past and future, no centre and therefore no beginning and no end.”<sup>44</sup> This is because fallen time has no grounds. There also exists the history of the covenant, which is the time of grace. “With the commencement of this time, our lost time as such is both condemned to perish but also transformed and renewed. This time is constituted by God’s own presence in Jesus Christ in the world created by Him.”<sup>45</sup> This is the time of the incarnate Word, who “normalizes time”<sup>46</sup> and makes possible all time to be ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ time. “Really to have time is – *simul peccator et iustus* – to live in this transition (*transitus*), and to go with Him from the one to the other. This real time which we are privileged to have in and with Jesus Christ is God’s time of grace – the time of the old and new covenants.”<sup>47</sup> Accordingly, Barth reasons that there was never a time when there was only the ‘empty’ or ‘fallen’ time. “When man lost the time loaned to him, he received it back again in

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<sup>42</sup> 3/1, 97 (emphasis mine).

<sup>43</sup> 3/1, 71-76.

<sup>44</sup> 3/1, 72.

<sup>45</sup> 3/1, 74.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

Jesus Christ.”<sup>48</sup> For Barth, the covenant effects all of time. Since this is so, covenant is also the internal basis of creation.

ii) The covenant refers to a relationship between God and man, and, as we have seen, to some extent a relationship between God and all of creation. It is expressed in God’s pronouncement, “I will be your God, and you will be my people.” Hielema has noted the aspect of ‘ordered creatureliness’ within Barth, which is existing in right relationship, between creatures and creature, under the relation of creatures and Creator.<sup>49</sup> This relationality is a central idea of covenant, which is at the center of Barth’s doctrine of creation. Webster notes that the intention of covenant is “for free responsive life with God, for partnership with the divine Counterpart.”<sup>50</sup> Accordingly, when Barth discusses the relationship of Adam and Eve to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he notes that God does not stop them from partaking of the tree’s fruit because he wills fellowship. That is, he wishes for humans to confirm his election.<sup>51</sup> The covenant originates before creation in God’s desire “to hold communion with man.”<sup>52</sup> It is “partnership in which He has predestined and called man.”<sup>53</sup>

This covenant relationship is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Barth says, “For by covenant we mean Jesus Christ” and that the covenant “became inconceivably true and

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<sup>48</sup> 3/1, 75.

<sup>49</sup> Hielema, “Disconnected Wires,” 84; cf. “Creation means peace – peace between the Creator and creatures, and peace among creatures themselves,” in 3/1, 209.

<sup>50</sup> Webster, *Barth*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> 3/1, 272.

<sup>52</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 54. Cf. 1/1, 273-274.

<sup>53</sup> 3/1, 43.

real in Jesus Christ.”<sup>54</sup> This is not just an ideal Christ that exists before creation. It is the incarnation and atonement work of Jesus Christ that “is the affirmation and consummation of the institution of the covenant between Himself and man.”<sup>55</sup> Accordingly Barth equates Jesus Christ with the covenant. Jesus Christ is the beginning and the goal of creation.<sup>56</sup> However, I can not agree with Robert Jenson who says that Christ and Christ alone is the reason God created. He writes, “All else is willed as the means to this end.”<sup>57</sup> This interpretation seems too limiting. Even Jenson notes that such an assertion removes a sense of meaning from the particular lives of human beings. Rather, since Jesus Christ fulfils the covenant Barth can even say that “Jesus Christ and His Church are the internal basis of creation.”<sup>58</sup> The covenant is God with us and for us.

The covenant relationship as fulfilled in Jesus Christ takes place in the salvation history in which God is for us. The covenant is the “covenant of grace.” Barth notes that in the second Genesis creation narrative the salvation history of Israel is perceived as the meaning of creation.<sup>59</sup> He writes that the covenant is the content of the divine work of reconciliation.<sup>60</sup> John Thompson notes the connection and calls reconciliation the

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<sup>54</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 54. Cf. 2/2, 8.

<sup>55</sup> 4/1, 36, 37.

<sup>56</sup> 3/1, 42, 90, 232, 376. Cf. 2/1, 667.

<sup>57</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 169. Cf. Colin Brown who writes, “...the union of divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. To this union he gave the biblical name of the *covenant*,” in *Karl Barth and the Christian Message* (London: Tyndale Press, 1967), 150.

<sup>58</sup> 3/1, 322. Cf. 111.

<sup>59</sup> 3/1, 268.

<sup>60</sup> 3/1, 47.

purpose of creation.<sup>61</sup> This is, however, not something Barth wishes to say explicitly as he feels this implies that creation is the cause of reconciliation.<sup>62</sup> Rather, the covenant is the presupposition of reconciliation.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, in 'salvation' terms Barth writes,

The ordaining of salvation for man and of man for salvation is the original and basic will of God, the ground and purpose of His will as Creator. It is not that He first wills and works the being of the world and man, and then ordains it to salvation. But God creates, preserves and over-rules man for this prior end and with this prior purpose, that there may be a being distinct from Himself ordained for salvation, for perfect being, for participation in His own being, because as the One who loves in freedom He has determined to exercise redemptive grace – and that there may be an object of this His redemptive grace, a partner to receive it.<sup>64</sup>

Barth is not quite as explicit of the relation of covenant and salvation in volume 3/1 but the relation is still expressed.<sup>65</sup> If 'covenant' includes the idea of 'salvation' then it must also include, to some extent God's reaction to sin. As God creates, sin is not an unforeseen incident.<sup>66</sup> Barth is clear however that "It is not God's will that elected man should fall into sin. But it is His will that sin, that which God does not will, should be repudiated and rejected and excluded by him."<sup>67</sup> God's plan for creation includes the overcoming of sin. "He cannot tolerate that this covenant should be broken... He does

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<sup>61</sup> John Thompson, *Christ in Perspective: Christological Perspectives in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 118.

<sup>62</sup> See again 3/1, 47.

<sup>63</sup> 4/1, 22-66.

<sup>64</sup> 4/1, 9-10; 4/2, 760.

<sup>65</sup> 3/1, 46, 59. There still remains however a distinction between salvation and covenant. See 3/1, 71.

<sup>66</sup> 2/2, 90.

<sup>67</sup> 2/1, 141.

not permit that that which He willed as Creator – the inner meaning and purpose and basis of the creation – should be perverted or arrested by the transgression of man.”<sup>68</sup>

d) *Summary*

At the center of Barth’s doctrine of creation is the affirmation that the covenant is the ground and goal of creation. This is expressed in Barth’s twofold thesis that creation is the external basis of the covenant and covenant is the internal basis of creation. This essentially means that God creates because of the covenant.

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<sup>68</sup> 4/1, 36.

## CHAPTER 9

### ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS AND EMPHASES

Although the heart of Barth's theology has been investigated, certain significant points have not yet received due attention. One finds Barth affirming throughout his doctrine of creation that creation is distinct from God and that creation is good. Creation is seen as distinct primarily in light of its relationship to the Creator. It is a relationship of freedom and dependence. Creation is also understood to be good in light of the relationship between the Creator and his creation – Creation is good because the benevolent God is its Creator and creates with purpose and direction.

#### a) *Creation as Distinct from God*

Even though Barth's Christology might cause one to question the distinct nature of created reality,<sup>1</sup> Barth constantly affirms that creation is distinct from God. It is in fact part of his definition of creation. This is primarily recognized in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the God-man. However, it is also recognized, one might say confirmed, from other viewpoints.

The concept of covenant expresses the distinct nature of creation. That is, there is a relationship between distinct beings.<sup>2</sup> This relationship presupposes that the creation is

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter two regarding this issue.

<sup>2</sup> 3/1, 184.



distinct from God because only a distinct being could be a real covenant partner. For both God and creatures, this is a relationship of freedom. The Creator is free for the creature and, subsequently, the creature has freedom for the Creator. Norman Young notes that emphasizing the freedom of God is to emphasize the distinction between God and creation.<sup>3</sup> Gordon Watson essentially repeats this observation by saying that Barth asserts the Creator/creature distinction as he emphasizes the Lordship of God in relation to creation.<sup>4</sup> This relationship and distinction will continue to exist in the future. Barth writes,

And as it did not proceed from God's own being, but was freely created by God, so it cannot return to God, nor can it or should it in any way forfeit or surrender its autonomy in face of Him. God is to be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), but this does not really mean that the 'all' will no longer be, that God will be alone again. It means rather that in the final revelation of His ways He will be seen by the creature to have attained His ultimate goal in all things with the creature, the creature not ceasing to be distinct from Himself.<sup>5</sup>

This relationship is also seen in God's current presence in the world. One might conclude following the doctrine of God's omnipresence that God is all things. Rather, Barth notes, for God to be omnipresent means that he is to be present to something other than himself.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 87. Cf. the above discussion on the will of God in chapter six. Cf. Barth who says that creation by the will of God excludes pantheistic and panentheistic systems in 2/1, 562.

<sup>4</sup> Gordon Watson, *God and the Creature: The Trinity and Creation in Karl Barth* (Brisbane: Uniting Church Print, 1995), 95. Jürgen Moltmann has noted that the freedom of God, according to Barth, is in fact God's Lordship in *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 52-56.

<sup>5</sup> 3/1, 86. Robert Jenson explicates this idea by emphasizing that it is God's action of preventing the creation from returning into him that exemplifies the Creator/creature distinction in "Creator and Creature," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2.4 (July 2002): 219-221.

<sup>6</sup> 2/1, 462-463. Cf. Barth's discussion of the tree of life which represents the presence of the Creator with the creature in 3/1, 282.

The Creator/creature distinction is expressed in Barth's emphasis on the dependent character of creation.<sup>7</sup> Creation is dependent upon the grace of God for its existence and sustenance. This is seen, for example, in the breath of God that is imparted and necessary for the existence of humanity.<sup>8</sup> It is also symbolized in the tree of life within the Garden of Eden.<sup>9</sup>

The dependence and distinction of creation is also displayed in Barth's use of analogy. The work of creation is analogous to the relationship of God the Father and Son. Also, humans, made in the image of God, are analogous to God's relationality. These analogies are limited, however. They are not equations and imply a distinction between God and creation. So, for example, there is not an analogy within creation of the act of creation.<sup>10</sup> This is an act distinct to the Creator. Barth rejects the concept of an *analogia entis*. God and creation are not in the same category of being. Thus, God is hidden and can not be known until he reveals himself.<sup>11</sup> Barth's uses analogies that are based, or dependent, upon God and not creation. They only work in one direction. Barth's use of analogy takes the form of *analogia attributionis extrinseca*. That is, "this similarity consists in the fact that what is common to them [God and creation] exists primarily and properly in the first one, and then in the second because the second is

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<sup>7</sup> 3/1, 207, 344. One might say that creation is 'contingent,' but such a term seems impersonal, like 'cause.' This is probably the reason Barth himself avoided the term. While contingency connotes the uncertainty and non-necessity of an occurrence, dependence speaks of the actual relationship between the Creator and his creation.

<sup>8</sup> 3/1, 382.

<sup>9</sup> 3/1, 283.

<sup>10</sup> 2/1, 76.

<sup>11</sup> 1/1, 320. Salai Hla Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation in the Theology of Barth, Moltmann and Pannenberg: Creation in Theological, Ecological and Philosophical-Scientific Perspective* (Regensburg: Roderer Verlag, 1998), 64; Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith*, 87-88.

dependent upon the first.”<sup>12</sup> So, for example, Barth stresses that the image of God in humans is “God-likeness... It is not a quality of man.”<sup>13</sup> That God is not to be found in creation and that all theological analogies start with God means that he is distinct from creation.

Barth’s understanding of ethics displays the Creator/creature distinction. Ethics particularly belong within Church Dogmatics because they follow the command of God.<sup>14</sup> Barth exhibits this belief within his doctrine of creation as he discusses the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The tree signifies that humans are to live by the will of God, who properly possesses the knowledge of good and evil. “The one who can do this bears the supreme attribute and function of deity.”<sup>15</sup> In contrast, humans can not bear the weight of this knowledge and were not meant to. “Unlike God’s, man’s decision will be a decision for evil, destruction and death: not because he is man, but because he is only man and not God.”<sup>16</sup> Creatures are distinct from God in that they have differing abilities and roles from God.

The Creator/creature distinction is clearly affirmed by Barth in his demythologization of creation. Barth notes in his exposition of Genesis 1 that light is not identified with the luminaries in order to correct any idea of astral deities. Rather the luminaries are given the demythologized role marking time. Likewise, the self-

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<sup>12</sup> Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 63.

<sup>13</sup> 3/1, 184.

<sup>14</sup> 1/1, xiv. John Webster argues that Ethics is central to Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*, in *Barth’s Ethics of Reconciliation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>15</sup> 3/1, 258.

<sup>16</sup> 3/1, 261.

perpetuating life of vegetation (God says 'bring forth') demythologizes the deity of earth.<sup>17</sup>

Lastly, creation is also distinct from God with regards to time. Creation is confined to time. It is creatures' living space.<sup>18</sup> God is not limited to time. Barth confirms that time, or more precisely, created time, had a beginning. He generally does not speak of it as a creature of God, but he bows to this affirmation because time began with God's creation.<sup>19</sup> In fact, creation is a historical work in time. Created time began, according to Barth, with God's "word which summoned light and called and made it day."<sup>20</sup> This time is necessary for history – time being the sphere of history – and history is necessary for the covenant.<sup>21</sup> Created time is, however, distinct from God's time. God is in eternity. This is not to be understood, however, as the antithesis of created time. Eternity is not timelessness, it is pure duration.<sup>22</sup> The chief characteristic of created time is that it is a one-way sequence. God's 'time,' or eternal 'time,' on the other hand, is the immediate unity of past, present and future. God is before time, over time, and after time – pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality.

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<sup>17</sup> Walter A. Whitehouse notes this demythologization in Barth in "Karl Barth on 'The Work of Creation': A Reading of *Church Dogmatics*, III/1," in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed. Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 49-50.

<sup>18</sup> 3/1, 130.

<sup>19</sup> 3/1, 15, 42, 60, 68; Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 46. Cf. Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 70.

<sup>20</sup> 3/1, 129.

<sup>21</sup> 3/1, 72.

<sup>22</sup> 3/1, 67; 3/2, 519; Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 46-47; 2/1, 608-677

## b) *Goodness of Creation*

One might suppose that this emphasis on the Creator/creation distinction would lead to a negative view of creation. This is, however, not the case. For Barth creation is good. Creation's existence not just neutral. It does not 'just' exist. Nor is it ungodly or anti-godly. God saw creation and said that it was good. Its goodness is not something that is intrinsic to it however. There is nothing in creation that makes itself good. As with Irenaeus, Barth does not see creation as originally perfect (this suggests Barth does not understand eschatology as an eschatology of return).<sup>23</sup> Rather, it is good because the Creator identifies it as such. Creation is good not just in the fact that it is, but that it has a goal. Creation's goodness is teleological.<sup>24</sup> The goal of creation is, as we have seen, the covenant. The Creator has made creation suitable for the covenant and directs creation towards it, therefore creation is good. This creation is the creation that God wanted. "God does not grudge the existence of the reality distinct from Himself."<sup>25</sup> From this perspective Barth can even say that this is a perfect creation.

Creation is good because creation is the result of God's 'Yes.' God does not create that which he rejects and therefore creation corresponds with his will. Creation is limited in this sense. Barth writes that "this whole realm that we term evil – death, sin, the Devil and hell – is *not* God's creation, but rather what was excluded by God's

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion on Irenaeus see H. Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 167; and Colin E. Gunton, *The Triune Creator: A Historical and Systematic Study* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 55-56, 164.

<sup>24</sup> 3/1, 413, 215, 245; 3/3, 42; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 91, 94; Hugo A. Meynell, *Grace versus Nature: Studies in Karl Barth's "Church Dogmatics"* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 83; Webster, *Barth's Ethics of Reconciliation*, 63. Cf. Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 45.

creation, that to which God has said 'No'."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, God calls the light, which he creates, 'good,' but not the darkness, which is simply the antithesis of light.<sup>27</sup> The forces of evil are however, not beyond God's rule and control.<sup>28</sup> Barth is not teaching dualism. Evil forces are not another god that God contends with.

Creation is also good in the sense that it is a good work of God. Barth says "creation is benefit."<sup>29</sup> In Herbert Hartwell's words, creation is "divine blessing."<sup>30</sup> The goodness of creation is no mere assertion. It is good because it originates with the Creator, who only creates that which is good. This is so because all of God's works are necessarily good. This is God's nature. To neglect this is to neglect that the Creator is also the Savior. All of God's works are united in the covenant. If one separates creation and the covenant one will conclude, with Marcion and Arthur Schopenhauer, that creation is evil. The identity of the Creator and his divine benevolence distinguishes the doctrine of creation from all other concepts, be they mythical, religious, or philosophical. The Christian doctrine of creation presents a unique origin and course for creation.

If God affirms creation as good, then creation has been actualized.<sup>31</sup> The work of creation brings the creature into existence and sets the creature into its own mode of existence, which is determined by its Creator. Creatures are compelled to affirm that they themselves exist by God's self-communication of his own existence. Only after, and on

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<sup>26</sup> Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, 48 (author's emphasis); 2/1, 560.

<sup>27</sup> 3/1, 120.

<sup>28</sup> Herbert Hartwell, *The Theology of Karl Barth: An Introduction* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1964), 119.

<sup>29</sup> 3/1, 330-414.

<sup>30</sup> Hartwell, *Theology of Karl Barth*, 118.

<sup>31</sup> 3/1, 213, 344-365.

account of the fact that the Creator is, creatures may say that they are. By actualizing the creature God has brought himself into relationship with it. He creates a sphere to love and act in and on. "To be a creation means to be determined to this end, to be affirmed, elected and accepted by God."<sup>32</sup> God commits himself to creation. This is the meaning of the covenant. Creation, being actualized for this purpose, is good.

That creation is good implies that its existence is justified.<sup>33</sup> It is Jesus Christ who justifies creation, for he fulfills the covenant. God says 'Yes' and accepts creation in Jesus Christ. We see God's 'Yes' being confirmed in the bright side of creation (though not proven by it), that is, all that would conventionally be labelled 'good'; the joys of life. Creation's 'yes' confirms the Creator's 'Yes'.

The revelation in Jesus Christ confirms the shadow side of creation because it reveals that creation is being liberated from an actual darker side of creation. Nevertheless, this darker side is absolutely transcended. In saying 'Yes' God is defeating the shadow side, even though God's 'Yes' includes his 'No.' "It can be seen at once that there can be no question here of an end in itself. The No is not said for the sake of the No but for the sake of the Yes. We cannot stop at the suffering death and burial of Jesus Christ. This is not a final word."<sup>34</sup> The existence of this darker side does not disqualify the justification of creation. Jesus Christ's "action, His own participation in light and darkness, life and death, implies either way the justification of creation."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the fulfillment of the covenant shows that creation is perfect. That is, creation is perfect

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<sup>32</sup> 3/1, 364; 2/1, 117.

<sup>33</sup> 3/1, 366-414.

<sup>34</sup> 3/1, 384.

<sup>35</sup> 3/1, 383.

for the covenant. It is the best creation because it is the creation made according to the will and plan of God. God created a creation that was in need and capable of being exalted to covenant relationship.<sup>36</sup> In this sense even the shadow side or imperfection of creation is part of its perfection. The fact that God overcomes our imperfection justifies creation. God's 'Yes' is ultimate and creation begins with and aims at this 'Yes'. Even its future glorification adds nothing to the perfection of creation because its glorification "presupposes that it is already perfectly justified by the mere fact of its creation."<sup>37</sup>

Barth is not advocating philosophical optimism. A Christian doctrine of creation differs from optimism because it focuses on Jesus Christ. "The meaning and truth of Christian optimism consist in His [Jesus Christ's] lowliness and exaltation, in His death and resurrection as the secret of the divine will in creation and the divine good-pleasure in the created world. It is the fulfilment of the covenant in Him which shows us that the two opposites of life both have their necessity and seriousness since they are both grounded in an eternal dimension."<sup>38</sup> By focusing on Jesus Christ Christian 'optimism' does not eliminate, but assimilates the shadow side of creation. It affirms that creation has an imperfection. Unlike optimism, it does not base its positive judgement on the world. Such a judgement has no authority and wrongly supposes goodness intrinsic to creation. Christian 'optimism' affirms that the world has imperfections. "Divine

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Robert W. Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963), 28 n.5; Aung, *The Doctrine of Creation*, 94.

<sup>37</sup> 3/1, 366.

<sup>38</sup> 3/1, 412-413. Cf. G. C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (London: Paternoster, 1956), 65-69; Meynell, *Grace versus Nature*, 90.



revelation manifests both the sorrow and joy of life, and therefore not only permits but commands us to laugh and weep.”<sup>39</sup>

c) *Summary*

In addition to those points considered in other chapters Barth emphasizes two points throughout his doctrine of creation. Creation is distinct from God and creation is good. Both of these emphases are made in light of the relationship between the Creator and his creation.

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<sup>39</sup> 3/1, 375.

## CHAPTER 10

### CONCLUSIONS

Barth has successfully presented a doctrine of creation from within the Christian Church, taking account of the trinitarian salvation found therein as revealed in Jesus Christ. He has moved beyond the expository history of the doctrine and uncovered the profound relation between creation and salvation. It is difficult to criticize Barth's doctrine of creation when it is so dependent and interrelated with the whole of Christian doctrine. Nevertheless, certain difficulties have become apparent.

Barth has been critiqued for neglecting the significance of history in forming his doctrine of creation. It has been said that he focuses on the eternal and pre-temporal Jesus Christ rather than upon the created reality which God and humanity face. A problem is detected because Barth asserts that a *logos ensarkos* pre-existed creation. How could this be the case? Barth's answer would seemingly be found in his understanding of God's relation to time. God is not timeless, but is rather present to all created time, which follows a one-way sequence. In this way the *logos ensarkos* is an eternal reality for God. For George Hunsinger Barth's understanding of God's relation to time answers the question of whether or not Barth is a-historical. For Hunsinger the answer is no. He seems satisfied by providing clarification of Barth's understanding of God's eternity. However, what if Barth's understanding of God's relation to time is

incorrect? If this is so, then Barth again seems to be a-historical. God's relation to time is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it must be noted that a number of scholars have questioned this aspect of Barth's theology.<sup>1</sup> What is clear is that the incarnation must, in some way, be thought of as new – even for God – in time.

When one considers the core of Barth's doctrine of creation one can not be lead to the conclusion that Barth is a-historical. As was found in part II, he clearly has emphasized a historical relationship which takes place between God and humanity in the covenant. Covenant is not a question of a static relationship in eternity but a historical relationship in which God freely loves his creation.

Furthermore, where some have suggested that Barth's a-historicity must lead him to surrender the Creator/creature distinction, Barth has actually emphasized it. He follows the lines of orthodox Christianity in affirming that, although God has no need of creation, the Creator lovingly and freely willed to create a relationship, out of nothing, with a creation (necessarily) distinct from himself. The distinction between the Creator and creation is primarily recognized in Jesus Christ. It is confirmed by Barth's insistence that there is a true covenant partner outside of God, that the covenant relationship is one in which creation is dependent upon God, by Barth's understanding of ethics, his demythologization of creation, and by his understanding that God is not limited to created time.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Jürgen Moltmann questions Barth's understanding of the "three-dimensional unfolding of eternity in the modes of time – pre-temporality, supra-temporality and post-temporality," in *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1991), 127. With regards to Barth, Ted Peters questions "why we need to maintain simultaneity of past, present, and future? What does this add? It is nowhere implied in the doxological descriptions of God's steadfastness found in the Psalms. It contributes nothing to the notion of God's victory over the ravages of time," in *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 149. See also, Thomas A. Idinopulos, "The Critical Weakness of Creation in Barth's Theology," *Encounter* (1972): 166, 167.

Barth's critics are correct to label his doctrine of creation as anthropocentric. Barth does neglect nature. This might be just as much a result of his attitude as it is a result of his theology. With regards to the latter, Barth's christocentrism brings a focus upon humanity from the start. That is, Jesus Christ is human, not just any part of creation. Barth presents the remainder of creation as a means to an end. Beyond this, Barth is anthropocentric because his central concern is the relation of creation to the covenant, a concept which Barth generally limits to the God/human relationship. He does not however completely neglect nature. Barth does assert that the whole of creation is that which God wanted, and hence good, and that it all participates in the covenant in some way. In addition, as Hilema has noted, Barth describes a creation that is ordered toward right relationships, including relationships with nature. Those who critique Barth have suggested that the whole of creation should be viewed as the covenant partner of God rather than just humanity, but partnership with inanimate objects does not seem intelligible. Jürgen Moltmann has suggested that Barth focus on the future kingdom of glory rather than on the covenant, but this move would only neglect the present historical reality. At the end of the discussion one is left wondering if there is any clear theological reason that Barth's anthropocentrism needs to be corrected. Perhaps Barth should be simply be applauded for the insights he has made regarding nature. Barth understands that the covenant includes God's loving and free relationship and lordship over the whole of his creation – after all God is also God of nature – though he emphasized God's relationship with humanity.

It has also been suggested that Barth, who would be ironically hailed as the father of contemporary trinitarian theology, is inconsistently trinitarian in his doctrine of

creation. It has been suggested that Barth should have proposed a threefold understanding of the image of God. Rather, Barth has correctly interpreted – although perhaps incorrectly as an exclusive interpretation – the image of God in humans as relational. It has also been suggested that Barth presents God as separated from the sphere of creation, in particular in a different sphere from the earth (in contrast to heaven). This is an unjust critique however, for Barth speaks of God outside creation only to emphasize the Creator/creature distinction. Furthermore, Barth speaks of creation being in God's space and constantly reminds his readers that God is present with (and for) creation in Jesus Christ. This becomes clear as Barth argues that the covenant is the internal basis of creation: God creates relationship. A third and fourth critique of Barth is that he has modalistic tendencies and presents divine creativity in a binary fashion. These latter critiques stem from Salai Hla Aung's preference for a social doctrine of the Trinity. Barth is concerned with safeguarding the unity of God, but he is not modalistic. His doctrine of creation is assuredly trinitarian. Barth confesses that the identity of the Creator is the triune God. On the other hand, Barth does present the divine action of creation in a binary fashion, though he does not deny the role of the Holy Spirit in creation. Barth is limited to this binary presentation to divine creative activity due to his adherence to the bestowal model of the Trinity. Accordingly, Barth speaks of the Father and Son as creating, but not the Holy Spirit. As the unoriginate divine person, creation is attributed to God the Father; and as the Son – Jesus Christ – is of the same substance with the Father, creative work is ascribed to the Son; but Barth neglects speaking of the Spirit's activity in creation. The Spirit is viewed as the unity between the Father and Son, and therefore as a fundamental condition of creation. Could Barth, following the

bestowal model of the Trinity, have presented the Holy Spirit as a divine 'person' and active *ad extra* in the act of creation?

Two outstanding strengths and achievements may be noted of Barth's doctrine of creation. The first is his insistence that the doctrine of creation is none other than an article of the Christian faith. Barth insists that the "secret of creation" – that there is a Creator and creation – can only properly be known as certain on account of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Any other method of gaining knowledge of creation can only be speculative. The second is Barth's relating of creation to the trinitarian salvation reality. As Barth has recognized – following his doctrine of the Trinity – that the Creator is also the Savior, he draws these two works together. This is expressed in his central thesis that creation is the external basis of the covenant and that the covenant is the internal basis of creation – the covenant is the ground and goal of creation, but creation must occur for the covenant to be actualized. This emphasis on the covenant means that the Creator creates for a relationship that he is committed to. God creates for the covenant, which is fulfilled in Jesus Christ,<sup>2</sup> who is eternally Mediator. One might say that according to Barth God creates in order to save in a historical relationship. It is this insight that leads Barth to affirm that creation is good. Creation is good because of its end, which is the covenant. It is created and directed by the benevolent Creator, who, as we have seen, eternally loves the creation and in his freedom, creates the creation just as he has desired it to be, including both its imperfections and joys.

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<sup>2</sup> Where Barth focused mainly on the work of Jesus Christ in the covenant, perhaps Barth also could have considered the role of the Holy Spirit in the covenant as the Spirit convicts, sanctifies and empowers. Nevertheless, we have clearly seen in Barth the relationship of salvation and reconciliation to creation.

Many of the criticisms against Barth's doctrine of creation stem from various misunderstandings. These critiques include that Barth is a-historical, that he is anthropocentric and that he is inconsistently trinitarian. The critique that Barth is a-historical seems overturned when one considers that knowledge of creation is found in the historical Jesus Christ and when one considers the relational meaning of covenant in Barth's theology. However, Barth's rejection of the *logos asarkos* does present him as a-historical and leads some to question the distinct nature of creation, which Barth himself asserts. Barth is anthropocentric, yet this problem is unfairly represented. Barth has neglected nature, but, in his doctrine, he has not presented anything that might inhibit a discussion of nature. Lastly, Barth is not inconsistently trinitarian, rather his bestowal model of the Trinity causes some to misinterpret him. In conclusion it must be restated that Barth has superbly presented a Christian doctrine of creation by expanding on what it means that creation was by, for and in Christ: "The covenant between God and man is the meaning and the glory, the ground and goal of heaven and earth and the whole creation."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: SCM Press, 1949), 50.

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