

THEOLOGIES OF ISRAEL AND JUDAISM
AFTER BARTH

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Lay Abstract

This thesis examines three students of Karl Barth's work, all of whom articulate Christian theologies of Israel and Judaism under the influence of his thought and thus the wording of the title, after him. Paul M. van Buren, John Howard Yoder, and Robert Jenson studied with or were supervised by Barth in the 1950s. Each of them would later make significant contributions to post-Holocaust theologies of Israel and Judaism. In this thesis, I seek to elucidate the conceptual relationship between these two elements—each theologian's early engagement with Barth and their later contributions to post-Holocaust theology. My analysis reveals that these three theologians all critique Barth's doctrine of God's self-determination as the pre-determination of the identity of Israel and Judaism to be witnesses of God's judgment. This critique enables each of the three to articulate a more positive account of Israel's and rabbinic Judaism's witness.

Abstract

This thesis examines three students of Karl Barth's work, all of whom articulate Christian theologies of Israel and Judaism under the influence of his thought and thus the wording of the title, after him. The three theologians are Paul M. van Buren (1924-1998), John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), and Robert Jenson (1930-2017). All three studied with or were supervised by Barth during the 1950s. Later, each of them would make significant contributions to post-Holocaust theologies of Israel and Judaism. In this thesis, I seek to elucidate the conceptual relationship between these two elements—each theologian's early engagement with Barth and their later contributions to post-Holocaust theology—and argue that by examining the former, one can better understand the theological bases for the latter. I begin with an analysis of Barth's doctrine of Israel. Barth claims that Israel and rabbinic Judaism are eternally determined to be witnesses to God's own self-determination in Jesus Christ to be the God whose mercy rules in God's judgment. A close comparative reading of van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson then follows. I begin by outlining the ways these three theologians appropriate and depart from Barth during or shortly after their time studying with him. I then trace the way each theologian's early appropriation of and departure from Barth relates fundamentally to the development of their theologies of Israel and Judaism. My analysis reveals that each of the three critique Barth's doctrine of God's self-determination as the pre-determination of the identity of Israel and Judaism to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. This common critique enables each of the three to articulate a more positive account of Israel's and rabbinic Judaism's witness.

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Introduction

Karl Barth is widely recognized as having brought biblical Israel to a place of prominence in Christian theology.¹ There are at least two reasons for this. First, in the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth gave considerable emphasis to God’s covenant relationship with Israel with the result that the history of Israel was afforded a special position within the theological narration of the Christian story. Second, Barth wrote of the election of Israel in the second part volume of his doctrine of God (*CD II/2*), thus including Israel’s election within his account of God’s own self-election. Interpreting the legacies of theological giants such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin, Barth argued that the traditional account of divine election suffered from a tendency to write of God’s act of election by way of an “abstract and neutral theorem” in which it was argued that before all-time God predestined individuals for either salvation or perdition.² By contrast, Barth articulated a doctrine of election that was included within the doctrine of God, making Jesus Christ both the subject and object of divine election. In the eternal election of Jesus, Barth claimed, God determined Godself to be the recipient of divine judgment and determined humanity in Jesus to be the recipient of divine mercy. Barth’s monumental modification of the doctrine of election in this regard had direct consequences for his doctrine of Israel (his *Israellehre*), for his understanding of the history of Israel, and, indeed, even later rabbinic Judaism, was determined in the eternal election of Jesus Christ. Whatever else might be

¹ Both Jewish and Christian thinkers have noted Barth’s contribution in this regard while also acknowledging their misgivings about the full scope of Barth’s doctrine of Israel. Cf. Friedrich Marquardt, *Die Entdeckung des Judentums für die christliche Theologie: Israel im Denken Karl Barths* [*The discovery of Judaism for Christian theology: Israel in the thought of Karl Barth*] (Munich: Kaiser, 1967), hereafter *EDJ*; Michael Wyschogrod, “Why Was and Is the Theology of Karl Barth of Interest to a Jewish Theologian?” in *Abraham’s Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): 214-215; Peter Ochs, “Judaism and Christian Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians*, ed. D.F. Ford (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1997): 648-649; George Hunsinger, “After Barth: A Christian Appreciation of Jews and Judaism,” *Pro Ecclesia* 24, no.3 (2015): 392-393.

² *CD II/2*, 13-18.

said about the long and diverse history of Israel, for Barth what is crucial is that its history is determined first and foremost by inclusion in Christ's election.

This last claim, of course, raises the question: "how is Israel included in the election of Jesus Christ?" Barth argues that the eternal election of Jesus of Nazareth is simultaneously the election of Israel and the church as the twofold form of the one community of God. For Barth, the one community of God has a particular role to play in the redemptive action of God. Israel and the church mediate and condition the relation "between the election of Jesus Christ and that of all believers" in that they function as the environment of and representative witnesses to Jesus Christ in history.³ Notoriously, Barth described Israel's role in history as witnessing to and serving the representation of divine judgment in history, while he described the church's role in history as witnessing to and serving the representation of divine mercy. Israel's and the church's respective witnesses to divine judgment and mercy, however, correspond to the very reality of judgment and mercy manifested in history through God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Israel and the church are thus elected as representative witnesses of Jesus Christ, whose eternal election is God's own self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*).⁴ In Christ, God eternally determines Godself to be the recipient of divine judgment and Israel witnesses to this throughout its history of suffering and failure. The definitive revelation and actualization of God's judgment, however, is manifested in Christ's death on the cross. In that moment, old Israel passes away. This, of course, is not the end of the story for Barth; indeed, it is not even the main storyline. The main storyline, for Barth, is one in which God's mercy rules in his judgment. In Christ, God eternally determined humanity to be the recipient of divine mercy and the church of Jews and Gentiles

³ *CD* II/2, 196.

⁴ *KD* II/2, 108; *CD* II/2, 100. Occasionally, when quoting Barth, I will provide the German words for important terms. In those instances, I will provide references to both the *Kirchliche Dogmatik* and the *CD* with the format used in this footnote.

witnesses to this in its proclamation of the risen Lord. Christ, raised from the dead, is revealed as the basis for the “coming” form of the community, the new Israel founded on the mercy of God.

In this description of Barth’s doctrine of Israel—of which a full description is the subject of chapter one—it is important to recognize that Barth refuses to divide Israel and the church into two communities, but rather describes them as one community that takes two forms in history: a passing form and a coming form. Barth associated Israel with the passing form of the community, and the church with the coming form of the community. He thus saw the church as the “revealed determination” of Israel. This meant, for him, that the ongoing existence of the Jewish “synagogue”⁵ in separation from the church could only be viewed as a form of rebellion that creates a “schism” or a “gulf” in the one community of God.⁶ Despite its rejection of Christ, however, Barth claimed that the election of Israel was not revoked and so the Judaism of the synagogue continues to witness to Jesus Christ in continuity with biblical Israel by witnessing only to the judgment of God. It is this latter aspect to Barth’s doctrine of Israel that makes it also a doctrine of post-biblical Judaism.

The last fifty years has seen a critical reception of Barth’s doctrine of Israel, particularly by scholars whose work assesses the theological legacy of Christian anti-Judaism in the wake of the Holocaust.⁷ For these scholars the root of theologically justified anti-Judaism is found in a scriptural hermeneutic, which they see evident throughout most of Christian history, that reads

⁵ Katherine Sonderegger (*That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew: Karl Barth’s “Doctrine of Israel”* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992], 82) has pointed out that Barth’s use of the term “Synagogue” (*die Synagoge*) is, for him, reserved for “post-biblical Judaism” but that in his discussion of post-biblical Judaism, he “rarely refers to the terms of higher historical or biblical criticism, ‘rabbinic’ or ‘pharisaic Judaism,’ modern schools of ‘orthodoxy,’ the *haskalah*, or ‘radical Reform.’” Sonderegger’s comments make it clear that Barth’s theological framing of “Jews,” “Judaism,” and “the Synagogue” was typological and not developed on the basis of concrete historical engagement with Jews or Jewish communities.

⁶ CD II/2, 208.

⁷ Friedrich Marquardt, *EDJ*; Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*; Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996).

God's covenant with Israel as only a preparation for the coming of Christ, after which God is said to have repudiated his covenant relationship with a disobedient Israel, punished them for rejecting Jesus, and chosen the church as the new covenant people (a teaching that is often captured by the terms "supersessionism" or "replacement theology"). Jewish and Christian scholars who evaluate Barth's doctrine of Israel in relation to the questions of anti-Judaism and supersessionism note the ways in which Barth's doctrine of Israel moves beyond many of the most insidious aspects of anti-Judaism and supersessionism in its insistence on the central and enduring importance of God's covenant history with Israel in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures and in his insistence that Israel cannot be considered "rejected." Eberhard Busch, Karl Barth's personal assistant for several years before his death, has noted, for example, the radicality of Barth's theological claims regarding the indissoluble unity of Israel and the church given that he wrote this section of the *CD* in 1940.⁸ Many scholars also note, however, how Barth's doctrine of Israel nonetheless replays anti-Judaic tropes in depicting Israel and "the synagogue" typologically as the exclusive representation of the rebellious, disobedient, lifeless community.⁹ Late in life Barth himself acknowledged problematic aspects of his understanding of Israel and Judaism both as it related to his dogmatic work and to his own personal life.¹⁰

⁸ See, for example, Busch's essay "The Covenant of Grace Fulfilled in Christ as the Foundation of the Indissoluble Solidarity of the Church with Israel: Barth's Position on the Jews During the Hitler Era," 33-54 in *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

⁹ Wyschogrod, "Why Was and Is the Theology of Karl Barth of Interest to a Jewish Theologian?," 211-224; Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 81-94; Derek Woodard-Lehman, "Saying 'Yes' to Israel's 'No'" in *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian?*. Above in fn5 I noted Barth's use of the term "Synagogue." Of course, the use of the term "the Synagogue" in Christian theology has a long history, one that is often steeped in anti-Jewish sentiment. Clearly the typological use of the term does not capture the full diversity of Jewish reality through history. It is worth noting here that throughout their writings, two of the "after Barth" theologians, namely van Buren and Jenson, also use this term, at times employing it as a collective term for Judaism. Van Buren uses the term in Barth's negative, typological sense early in his career (see pages 60-61 below) only to abandon it later. Jenson understands the term positively to refer to an institution used by God to perpetuate Jewish identity through history (see page 294 below).

¹⁰ Karl Barth, *Letters, 1961-1968*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981): 261-263.

There are several works that examine Barth's doctrine of Israel in detail as well as works that treat Barth's relationship to Jews of his own day.¹¹ My project, however, aims to fill a gap in the scholarly literature on this topic through an examination of three of the most theologically productive students of Barth's thought, all of whom have taken up this topic—a Christian theology of Israel and Judaism—under the influence of his thought; thus the wording of my title, *After Barth*. The three theologians are Paul M. van Buren (1924-1998), an Episcopalian, John Howard Yoder (1927-1997), a Mennonite,¹² and Robert Jenson (1930-2017), a Lutheran. During the 1950s, all three engaged substantially with Barth during their doctoral work. Van Buren was the only one to have had Barth as a *Doktorvater*, writing a dissertation on John Calvin under his supervision.¹³ Yoder studied in Basel with Barth, taking numerous courses from him and engaging with him in colloquia and through correspondence, especially on the question of Barth's theological justification of war. Yoder wrote his dissertation not in theology, however, but in church history under Basel faculty member Ernst Staehlin.¹⁴ Jenson did not study full-time in Basel but in Heidelberg. However, towards the end of his degree, he lived for a summer in Basel, attending Barth's seminars and colloquia and consulting with Barth about his dissertation which was on Barth's doctrine of election.¹⁵ Later in their careers, each of these three

¹¹ For the former, see Marquardt, *EDJ*; Sonderegger's *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*; and more recently Mark Lindsay, *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (New York: Ashgate, 2007). For the latter, see Busch, *Under the Bow of One Covenant: Karl Barth and the Jews 1933-1945* which is available only in the German. See *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes. Karl Barth und die Juden 1933-1945* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1996); and more recently, Mark Lindsay, *Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth's Opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and the Holocaust* (New York: Lang, 2001).

¹² See my personal note on page 16 of this introduction for my comments regarding Yoder's abuse of women.

¹³ Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place: The Substitutionary Character of Calvin's Doctrine of Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957).

¹⁴ Yoder, *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder, trans. David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004). German: *Täuferium und Reformation in der Schweiz, I: Die Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523-1538* (Karlsruhe: Verlag H. Schneider, 1962).

¹⁵ Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York, NY: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963).

theologians would make significant contributions to post-Holocaust theologies of Israel and Judaism.¹⁶ In this thesis, I seek to elucidate the conceptual relationship between these two elements—each theologian’s early engagement with Barth and their later contributions to post-Holocaust theology—and argue that by examining the former, one can better understand the theological bases for the latter.

My thesis begins with a detailed analysis of Barth’s doctrine of Israel and Judaism as found primarily in *CD* II/2, §33-§34, in order to frame the project. I start with §33, “The Election of Jesus Christ” because Barth’s revolutionary reorientation of the doctrine of election in that section lays the groundwork for his doctrine of Israel and Judaism in §34, “The Election of the Community.”¹⁷ A close comparative reading of Van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson then follows. I devote two chapters to each theologian, and the ordering of the chapters is chronological according to the years each student studied under Barth: Van Buren (1951-1954); Yoder (1954-1957); Jenson studied in Heidelberg from 1957-1959, at which point he moved to Basel to consult with Barth during the summer of 1959 prior to the defense of his dissertation. The first chapter on each outlines their early relationship to Barth, including the key areas in which each appropriates and departs from him during or shortly after their time studying with him. The second chapter on each then traces the way each theologian’s early appropriation and departure from Barth relate conceptually to the development of their theologies of Israel and Judaism.

The first chapter on van Buren, “From the Word of God to the ‘Way’ of God,” shows that, of the three, he is unique in starting off in step with Barth’s dogmatic endeavours during his

¹⁶ None of these three theologian’s contributions to post-Holocaust theologies of Israel and Judaism takes up Messianic Judaism in any significant measure. When they do engage Messianic Judaism, I will make note of this.

¹⁷ Throughout my analysis of Barth’s theology, I occasionally refer to material from the later volumes of the *CD*. While Derek Alan Woodard-Lehman (“Saying ‘Yes’ to Israel’s ‘No,’” 80-81) is right to note that in volume 4 Barth turned some of his critical remarks about “disobedient Israel” into an indictment also of the Church’s disobedience, Barth changed neither the basic structure nor the principal content of his doctrine of Israel and Judaism in the later volumes.

time in Basel and in the first few years after returning to America. This is evidenced by van Buren’s Barthian styled *Austin Dogmatics* (hereafter *AD*), a collection of lectures that he delivered soon after returning to America from studying under Barth.¹⁸ This volume reflects van Buren’s adoption of Barth’s approach to dogmatics, including Barth’s doctrine of Israel and Judaism, which he largely reproduces. In that same chapter I then chart van Buren’s departure from a ‘Barthian’ approach to dogmatics as he becomes concerned with the limits of theological language and the “secular meaning of the Gospel.” Finally, I end the first chapter with the first volume of his mid-to-late-career three-volume systematics called *The Jewish-Christian Reality* (hereafter *TJCR*).¹⁹ In *TJCR*, van Buren sought to respond to ecclesial reforms with respect to common understandings of the Jewish people—such as those present in the decisions of the second Vatican Council—by “improving” and “correcting” Barth’s doctrine of Israel.²⁰ In a 1976 letter to Franklin Littell, van Buren described the scope and difficulty of his task:

I’m deep into Barth’s *Israellehre*, and it goes so centrally into his doctrine of God, election, Christology, etc. that I am staggered at the task which I have set myself. Reworking all those interlocking and deep problems is going to be quite a job! The real difficulty in Barth’s thought is that he clearly never seems to have been thinking about or talking to living Jews. His *Israellehre* is dialectical when it needed to be dialogical. Yet for all that, he is the first to have tackled the problem, and for all its shortcomings, he did make Judaism a crucial item right within the agenda of serious theology. That was surely an absolute *novum* in the whole history of the Christian theological tradition and one that has still not been sufficiently appreciated.²¹

¹⁸ Van Buren, *The Austin Dogmatics*, ed. Ellen T. Charry (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

¹⁹ Van Buren, *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York: Seabury, 1980), hereafter *DW*; *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury, 1983), hereafter *CTPI*; *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality: Christ in Context* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), hereafter *CC*. When referring to the trilogy as a whole, I will use the abbreviation *TJCR*.

²⁰ *AD*, 363. The language of “improve” and “correct” comes from van Buren’s essay “Probing the Jewish-Christian Reality,” *Christian Century*, June 17-24, 1981, 665-68 cited in *AD*, 363. In that essay, van Buren recalls his “last conversation with Karl Barth,” noting that Barth had admonished him to improve “every page of his *Dogmatics*.” Van Buren described his work in the late 1970s as a return to “the task that Barth had asked of me,” and he stated then that “Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*...is indeed in need of serious correction on every page.”

²¹ *AD*, 362.

Of particular import in the above letter is van Buren's recognition that conceptual alternatives to Barth's *Israellehre* will involve significant reflection also on the doctrines of God, election, and Christology. Indeed, despite the diversity of approaches van Buren, Jenson, and Yoder take with respect to their theologies of Israel and Judaism (on which I will say more below), all three seek to justify their positions through claims regarding the doctrine of God and the doctrine of election, often in contrast with Barth's stated position on those same doctrines. This is nowhere clearer than in the first volume of van Buren's *TJCR, Discerning the Way*, where he sets the stage for his alternative theology of Israel and Judaism by departing from Barth's understanding of the relationship between revelation and history. In *DW*, revelation is not, for van Buren, fundamentally God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ as it is for Barth. Rather, when Jews and Christians talk about revelation, what they in fact are doing is referring to communally acknowledged reinterpretations of their traditions in response to significant events in Jewish history. The primal events van Buren has in mind are Sinai (for Jews) and the resurrection of Jesus Christ (for Gentile Christians);²² however, van Buren makes it clear that these events, while fundamental, are not the only events worthy of the title "revelation." Other events might also warrant such a title and indeed, van Buren claims that the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the church's changing attitudes towards the Jewish people are such events. Given the revelatory status of these events, the church must reinterpret its tradition, and for van Buren this means all of the tradition including the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology.

²² Van Buren's view of Jewish-Christians is mixed. On the one hand, he states positively that they are a "proleptic" sign of the redeemed creation (*DW*, 24) in which "God will be all in all" (*DW*, 200). Somewhat less positively, he argues that given the historical fact that the church is an "almost purely Gentile enterprise," Jewish-Christians are "an unnecessary but welcome 'extra'" in the church. For him, "[o]nly one Jew is essential to the church, and that is the Jew Jesus" (*DW*, 155).

In the second chapter on van Buren, “Witnesses to the Creator and Redeemer,” I turn to volume two of his systematics, namely, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel*. There he engages in a theological interpretation of several themes that resonate with Barth’s analysis of Israel and Judaism in *CD II/2*: God’s self-determination, Israel as elected by God to witness to the divine intention; Israel as the mediating community that provides the “essential context” of Jesus’ mission; and Israel’s “No” to the church’s claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Having departed from Barth’s understanding of revelation in volume one, however, van Buren frames these themes in such a way as to grant biblical Israel and rabbinic Judaism full integrity apart from Christianity. God’s self-determination is not described as God’s eternal decision to be gracious to all in Jesus Christ but rather the God of Israel’s resolve to create and redeem reality with the cooperation of Israel and the Gentile church. From this articulation of God’s self-determination, van Buren argues that Israel is not elected to witness to Jesus Christ, rather Jesus is the representative Israelite who witnesses to the God of Israel by inviting the Gentiles into Israel’s covenant. Israel’s “No,” in light of this, is not a no to Jesus as much as it is a “No” to a Gentile church who calls Israel to abandon Torah for worship of Jesus.

Since the publication of the last volume of van Buren’s *TJCR* in 1988, the scholarship on his work has been sparse. James Wallis’s *Post-Holocaust Christianity: Paul van Buren’s Theology of the Jewish-Christianity Reality* is the only English language monograph on van Buren’s thought.²³ While Wallis charts van Buren’s theological development in broad terms, my analysis of van Buren examines his theology of Israel and Judaism through a much more focused comparative analysis with Barth’s doctrine of Israel and Judaism.

²³ James H. Wallis, *Post-Holocaust Christianity: Paul van Buren’s Theology of the Jewish-Christianity Reality* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998).

In the first chapter on Yoder, “A Threefold Witness,” I begin with archival material and early writings from his time studying in Basel, showing how Yoder disapproved of Barth’s understanding of divine and human freedom, as well as of aspects of Barth’s doctrine of election and his concept of revelation. Yoder moves with Barth in his understanding of election as the calling of Israel and the church to be witnesses of Jesus Christ but departs from him in denying his account of predestination as a predetermination of all in Christ that is mediated in a twofold manner by Israel and the church. In place of Barth’s claim that the one community of God witnesses only to God’s judgment and mercy, Yoder adds a third element to the witness of the elect community, namely, “human justice” as defined by the norm of Jesus’ life, which took the form of non-resistance to evil. If Israel was to witness to Jesus Christ, for Yoder, it would have to witness to more than the judgment that God had eternally determined to take upon Godself. That “more” was Israel’s revealed social ethic, which Yoder would later call “Jewish pacifism.”

In the second chapter on Yoder, “One Foundational Corrective,” I focus upon his posthumously published work, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*,²⁴ demonstrating how the above areas of departure from Barth reappear as Yoder develops his own, albeit fragmented, alternative theology of Israel and Judaism. Unlike van Buren, Yoder never framed his work on the Jewish-Christian schism as a direct response to or a “correction” of Barth’s doctrine. Nonetheless, I show how Yoder’s early engagement with Barth on questions of divine and human freedom, election, and revelation all relate conceptually to what he does later in *JCSR*.

Challenging idealistic and regnant definitions of Judaism and Christianity alike, in *JCSR* Yoder argues that the historic schism between Jews and Christians “did not have to be” because Jesus and Paul preached a Jewish message. Jesus of Nazareth was the “Jewish Pacifist” who, as

²⁴ Yoder, *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright and Peter Ochs (London: SCM Press, 2003). The 2008 re-print by Herald Press (Waterloo, ON) will be cited throughout the thesis.

God's Messiah and through his free obedience, defeated the cosmic powers that had enslaved creation. By doing so, Jesus revealed God's intention for the elect in the messianic age, empowering them for obedient witness to God through the abandonment of violence and the pursuit of reconciliation with enemies (a witness already present, if incomplete, in the Old Testament). The revealed form of Israel's witness is thus framed as the "Jewish Pacifism" of Jesus, for Yoder. Paul was the "Judaizer" of the Gentiles, inviting them into Israel's covenant to form a new people in the messianic age as a sign of God's in-breaking kingdom. The schism between so-called 'Judaism' and so-called 'Christianity,' according to Yoder, occurred in large part because the Gentile church began to turn Jesus and Paul's message into something anti-Jewish in order to gain credibility with the Roman establishment. The church's pursuit of worldly credibility amounted to the loss, according to Yoder, of its distinction from the world; a loss that was coterminous with the abandonment of the Jews. Yoder thus locates the schism not, as does Barth, with the Jewish rejection of Christ as Messiah, but rather with the Gentile rejection of the Jews. Precisely by becoming anti-Jewish in this way, Yoder claimed, the church abandoned its mission as witness to Jesus the Jewish Messiah. Conversely, despite rejecting the Gentile church's confession of Christ, diasporic rabbinic Judaism largely maintained its witness to God in its history of powerlessness and in its trust that God was in control of history. Thus, Yoder claims that much of the history of rabbinic Judaism was in its own way a witness, however incomplete, to Jesus the Messiah. With this claim, Yoder departs from Barth's account of rabbinic Judaism's witness as exclusively a witness to the judgment of God.

There are two works of substance which engage Yoder's theology of Israel and Judaism that merit mention in the present context.²⁵ Peter Ochs's "The Limits of Postliberalism: John Howard Yoder's American Mennonite Church"²⁶ offers a critical account of Yoder's theology of Israel and Judaism by subjecting his thought on the topic to the criteria of postliberal Christian theology and its rejection of supersessionism. While many of the self-professed post-liberal theologians examined in Ochs's book claim to be indebted to Barth's thought, Ochs's chapter on Yoder is not concerned with the relationship between Barth's doctrine of Israel and Judaism and Yoder's theological reflection on the Jewish-Christian schism, as my thesis is. Tommy Givens's book, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus*,²⁷ is much more closely related to the analysis in my thesis in that it compares Yoder's account of the Jews in *JCSR* with Barth's doctrine of Israel in *CD II/2*. Givens argues that Yoder and Barth offer different accounts of the constitution of the people of God, with Yoder supposedly advocating a "voluntarist" account of Christian peoplehood and Barth offering an account of Christian peoplehood established and upheld through divine election. While there is much in Givens's analysis that I find convincing, I believe the above contrast between Yoder and Barth lacks important details. Givens's account of Yoder's understanding of the constitution of the people of God does not offer a robust enough analysis of Yoder's understanding of Jesus's messianic inauguration of the new age, which I see as the more basic point of difference between Yoder and Barth.

In the first chapter on Jenson, I begin with two of his earliest texts on Barth, his 1959 doctoral dissertation which was published in 1963 under the title *Alpha and Omega* (hereafter

²⁵ While there are many other essays and chapters that address Yoder's theology of Israel and Judaism which could be mentioned here, for the purposes of this thesis, I have worked with those that seem to me the most closely related to a comparison of Barth's and Yoder's theologies of Israel and Judaism.

²⁶ Peter Ochs, "The Limits of Postliberalism: John Howard Yoder's American Mennonite Church," in *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 127-163.

²⁷ Tommy Givens, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2014).

AO)²⁸ and his 1969 work *God after God* (hereafter *GG*).²⁹ The key areas of Jenson’s engagement with and departure from Barth in these works are in his understanding of the relationship between time and eternity and the confession of God’s triunity. Barth famously declared that “the concept of eternity must be set free from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time.”³⁰ Barth thus proposed that God’s eternity is not “timeless,” but rather that the triune life is the prototype of our time, embraces our time, and thus in its own way can be said to bear the characteristic of “past, present, and future” but without any of the problematic disjunctions between each term as is the case for us in creaturely time. Jenson appreciated Barth’s attempt, but critiqued him for falling prey nonetheless to what he believed to be a “timeless” conception of eternity. Jenson develops his critique into an alternative concept of eternity. Keeping Barth’s understanding of the temporal character of God’s eternity, Jenson departs from Barth by describing God’s transcendence as God’s futurity both to Godself and to created reality in the person of the Spirit.

In the subsequent chapter on Jenson, “From Witness to Participant,” I show how Jenson’s proposed alternative to Barth’s conception of the being of God, God’s eternity and God’s relationship to human history relates conceptually to his later theological account of Israel and Judaism. Jenson came to articulate a post-Holocaust theology of Israel and Judaism much later than both van Buren and Yoder and unlike van Buren (but like Yoder) he did not do so with the express intent of correcting Barth’s doctrine of Israel. Beginning in the late 1990s and into the 2000s, Jenson began to formulate his theology of Israel and Judaism, with his most comprehensive statement on it appearing in his two-volume *Systematic Theology* (hereafter *ST*)

²⁸ Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963).

²⁹ Jenson, *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

³⁰ *CD* II/1, 611.

of 1999. Throughout this two-volume work, Barth continually appears as a crucial interlocutor, as he already had been throughout many of Jenson’s earlier works. Jenson includes his theology of Israel in his doctrine of the Trinity as Israel’s history is said to belong to God’s own story as Father, Son, and Spirit. Israel does not just witness to God, as with Barth, but rather is identified with God’s own history. After laying this out, I then examine his theology of Judaism and the church as Spirit empowered ‘detours’ on the road to the future kingdom, which he presents in the second volume of *ST*. Abandoning Barth’s exposition of God’s self-determination in terms of Christ’s pre-existence, Jenson shows more concern for the role of the Spirit as God’s future, and frames the Spirit’s ongoing action post-resurrection as the basis for a divinely ordained, temporary division between the church and the Jews to be overcome in the future.

Jenson would continue to develop his theology of Israel and Judaism through several essays prior to his death in September 2017: “Toward a Theology of Israel” (2000), “Toward a Christian Theology of Judaism” (2003), “What Kind of God Can Make a Covenant” (2012), and “The Prophets Double Vision of Return to Zion” (2015). There are two recent monographs on Jenson’s theology of Israel and Judaism worth noting: Sang Hoon Lee’s *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel in Robert W. Jenson’s Theology* and Andrew W. Nicol’s *Exodus and Resurrection: The God of Israel in the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*.³¹ There are some similarities between Lee’s and Nicol’s accounts of Jenson’s theology of Israel and Judaism and my own in that both offer analyses of Jenson’s theological development, at times specifically as it relates to Barth’s theology. The primary difference between Lee’s and Nicol’s analyses and my own, however, is

³¹ Sang Hoon Lee, *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel in Robert W. Jenson’s Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016); Andrew W. Nicol, *Exodus and Resurrection: The God of Israel in the Theology of Robert W. Jenson* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2016).

the extent to which I frame my engagement with Jenson's theology of Israel and Judaism around Barth's account in *CD II/2*.

In my conclusion, I explore the common theological convictions and areas of overlap that were operative in the three theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth. There, I note that at the foundation of van Buren's, Yoder's, and Jenson's diverse theologies of Israel and Judaism is a critique of Barth's doctrine of God, specifically his account of God's self-determination and the understanding of the relationship between the reality of God and the reality of human history that follows from that account. I summarize the specific ways that van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson all questioned Barth's strong focus on God's self-determination as the pre-determination of all reality. Given that Barth's doctrine of God's eternal self-determination as the pre-determination of all other reality in Jesus Christ funded his understanding of the determination of Israel and rabbinic Judaism to be the witness to God's judgment, I then summarize further how this critique of Barth's doctrine of God opened up other possibilities with respect to the status of Israel and rabbinic Judaism for each of the three.

Finally, in the conclusion I contend that reading these figures in light of Barth is important, since it can help contextualize the significance of their proposals within the broader discourse concerning Christian supersessionism, showing how figures influenced by Barth have sought to ameliorate problematic theologies of Israel and Judaism, especially in the era of post-Holocaust theological reflection. I argue that the analysis performed in this thesis is important for how it brings into sharp relief the enduring challenge facing Christian accounts like van Buren's, Yoder's and Jenson's, namely, the challenge of theologically justifying a non-supersessionist interpretation of scripture without abandoning or undermining teachings of central importance to either tradition. Judgments regarding success or failure are important in this area of discourse not

least in light of statements such as this by David Novak: “Christianity must be generically supersessionist. In fact, I question the Christian orthodoxy of any Christian who claims he or she is not a supersessionist at all.”³²

Author’s Personal Note

As is already clear, my thesis engages the theological works of John Howard Yoder. It is by now a well-documented fact that Yoder sexually abused many women throughout much of his career as a teacher. From the available witness testimony and archival material concerning Yoder’s abuse, it is clear that he was enabled by systems of sexism and patriarchy. These are systems that, speaking as a man myself, I must continually aim to identify and struggle against in my own life and work. My thesis is neither a study of the nature and extent of Yoder’s abuse nor a study of the relationship between Yoder’s theology and his abuse of women. With this in mind, I encourage the reader to wrestle with the four following scholarly articles that examine these aspects to Yoder’s life and work:

1. Ruth Elizabeth Krall, *The Elephant in God’s Living Room, Volume Three: The Mennonite Church and John Howard Yoder, Collected Essays* (N.p.: Enduring Space, 2013), <https://ruthkrall.com/downloadable-books/the-elephants-in-gods-living-room-series/volume-three-the-mennonite-church-and-john-howard-yoder-collected-essays/The-Elephants-in-God’s-Living-Room-Vol-3-©.pdf>
2. Rachel Waltner Goossen, “‘Defanging the Beast’: Mennonite Responses to John Howard Yoder’s Sexual Abuse,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 89, no. 1 (January 2015): 7-80.
3. Hilary Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, “Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies and Responsibilities,” *Religion Compass* 13, no. 9 (September 2019): 1-13.
4. Isaac Villegas, “The Ecclesial Ethics of John Howard Yoder’s Abuse,” *Modern Theology* (May 2020).

³² David Novak, “The Covenant In Rabbinic Thought,” in *Two Faiths, One Covenant?: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, eds. Eugene B. Korn, John T. Pawlikowski (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 67.

Chapter One

Witnesses of Jesus Christ: Barth's Theology of Israel and Judaism

This chapter's principal concern is to provide an exegesis of Barth's theology of Israel and Judaism within §34 of his doctrine of election in order to set up a comparative analysis with van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson in the following chapters. Barth reflects theologically on the significance of the people of Israel within scripture throughout the *CD*. It is in his doctrine of the election of the community in *CD* II/2 that Barth provides his most formal and programmatic statement regarding biblical Israel and post-biblical Judaism, however, and so while my analysis will occasionally appeal to passages from earlier and later volumes of the *CD*, I will focus my attention primarily on Barth's doctrine of the election of the community in §34. To start there, however, would be misleading if I did not first acknowledge that Barth does not begin his doctrine of election with the people of Israel. Instead, Barth's theology of Israel and Judaism gains its foundational structure from his novel account of the eternal election of Jesus Christ in §33 and for that reason I begin there.

The Context of Barth's *Israellehre*: The Election of Jesus Christ as the Self-Determination of God

Barth's doctrine of election is well-known for several reasons, but principle among them is the fact that he included it within his doctrine of God. Barth understood why his readers might wonder why the question of election, or of predestination as it is also called in the Christian tradition, should be considered within the doctrine of God. In the early pages of his doctrine of

election, Barth points out that in much of the history of Christian thought this doctrine was not considered in relation to the doctrine of God, and he notes several other ways the doctrine of election has been approached within the broad Christian tradition, covering figures ranging from Augustine to Thomas Aquinas, to Zwingli, Calvin, and Melanchthon.¹ More often than not, Barth points out, the doctrine of predestination has been severed from the doctrine of God and covered instead under the doctrines of creation and providence, or in relation to the doctrines of sin or reconciliation and consummation. According to Barth, the net effect of including the doctrine of election or predestination as an element under these other doctrines is that they make the divine decision an after-thought that follows upon creation and the sin of the creature. No, says Barth, rather than being a doctrine that concerns divine decisions that follow on the creation and fall, the doctrine of election concerns “a single act of divine rule” established in the unity and omnipotence of God that, unstoppable, “fulfils itself step by step.”² However, if the divine decision does not follow after the creation or fall of humanity, then what doctrine must it fall under? For Barth, the divine decision finds its proper place in the divine life itself and for this reason it must be placed within the doctrine of God.

But what is this single act of divine rule? What is this decision? If Barth calls the single act of divine rule a decision without qualifying such an attribution, he risks describing a God who is naked will, deciding here for one thing and there for another. Such a decision is, for Barth, not the decision of the God who has revealed Godself. For Barth, Jesus Christ is “the decision of God” (*die Entscheidung Gottes*) and crucially this decision not only anticipates the human history of Jesus but is, according to Barth, itself “primal history” (*Urgeschichte*) or event in the very being of the eternal God in which God determines Godself to be the partner of “the

¹ CD II/2, 76-93.

² CD II/2, 90.

one man Jesus and the people represented in Him.”³ Here Barth makes clear that this decision of God is a free act of self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) to love that which is outside of Godself and reveal Godself.⁴

The above account of God’s self-determination sets the stage for Barth’s now well-known formulation that he introduces in §33: As the decision of God, Jesus Christ is both the electing God and the elected human in one person. Or, put differently, Jesus Christ is both the subject and the object of the divine election. Barth points out how much of the Christian tradition had been willing to admit that Jesus was “one of the elect” in his humanity (ie. as an object of the divine election), even as “Lord and Head of all others,” but none had ever declared Jesus Christ as the subject of divine election.⁵ Barth notes that while the “older theologians” often taught a strict identity between the Word of God and the person of Jesus Christ, this strict identity would often disappear when explaining predestination, thus severing the link between predestination and Christology.⁶ According to Barth, the issue in the older accounts was thus an exegetical one: where the older theologians should have read the passages concerning predestination as concerning the incarnate Word of God, they instead made “a...general hermeneutical decision” to posit an “eternity” and “mystery” to the divine decision that was detached from the eternity and mystery revealed in the incarnate Word.⁷ The exegetical task that faces Barth, therefore, is to

³ *KD II/2*, 6-7; *CD II/2*, 7-8. Barth employs variations of the word *Entscheidung* to make his point throughout *CD II/2*. Examples are: *Urentscheidung*, *Vorentscheidung*, *Grundentscheidung*, *göttlichen Willensentscheidung*. *Urgeschichte*, on the other hand, is a concept derived from Barth’s reading of Franz Overbeck. On Barth’s use of Overbeck’s concept, see Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 226-235.

⁴ *KD II/2*, 57; *CD II/2*, 54. In *CD II/1*, when talking about “The Perfections of the Divine Freedom,” Barth notes: “In His [God’s] relation to us, therefore, He is not fulfilling a kind of function necessary to Himself... We do not deserve that He should raise us up to share His knowledge. If He does this, it is an act of His own free self-determination [*Selbstbestimmung*], His decision [*Entscheidung*] and disposing, and therefore of His resolve and His will” (*KD II/1*, 616; *CD II/1*, 547).

⁵ *CD II/2*, 116.

⁶ *CD II/2*, 149-153.

⁷ *CD II/2*, 150-151.

read the scriptural references to predestination and election within the context of the whole Bible as the witness to the Word of God revealed in Jesus Christ, the subject and the object of divine election. While Barth admits that considered in their entirety, the scriptural texts which witness to predestination “are not very numerous,”⁸ he also argues that even this small collection of texts together present divine election as a “comprehensive concept” that must be considered in the reading of the whole of the scriptures.⁹ Two passages that Barth appeals to in this regard are especially instructive for understanding his exegetical approach to predestination, namely John 1:1ff¹⁰ and Ephesians 1:4ff.

John 1:1ff is crucial for Barth to back up his formulation that Jesus is both the subject and object of the divine election is John 1ff. He argues that the *logos tou theou* concept that John uses is a “placeholder” (*Platzhalter*) for Jesus.¹¹ Thus, the declarative predicates of John 1:1 that state that “the Word was in the beginning” and “the Word was with God” refer not to the Word as an unknown identity, but to the name Jesus Christ. Thus, says Barth, Jesus “is the Word which partakes of the divine essence” and Jesus “was in the beginning.”¹² To be clear, Barth does not argue that the flesh-and-blood human person named Jesus of Nazareth existed eternally in the Godhead in his creaturely body. What he does argue is that before any created reality existed, “God anticipated and determined within Himself...that the goal and meaning of all His dealings with the as yet non-existent universe should be the fact that in His Son He would be gracious towards man, uniting Himself with him” and that “as the subject and object of this

⁸ *CD* II/2, 148.

⁹ *CD* II/2, 148-149.

¹⁰ For a parallel account that appears later in the *CD*, see §64.2, 33ff.

¹¹ *KD* II/2, 103; *CD*, II/2, 96. The Bromiley translation renders *Platzhalter* as “stop-gap.” I have chosen the more literal translation.

¹² *CD* II/2, 98.

choice, Jesus Christ was at the beginning.”¹³ This is not so much a declaration of human flesh abiding in pre-temporal eternity, as it is a declaration of a definitive anticipation and determination for that particular flesh in eternity such that there is, strictly speaking, no way of talking about the will of God, Word of God, or eternal Son without speaking the name of Jesus Christ. Barth’s exegetical argument here is used to address what he sees as a problem with previous accounts of predestination that posit a God of an absolute and inscrutable decree or word that lies behind the concrete decision of God, which could present both the electing God and the elected human as “an unknown quantity.”¹⁴ For Barth, however, there is strictly speaking only the one electing God and one elect human, both of whom are known in the name Jesus Christ. This is not to say that no other human beings are elect. What it is to say is that for human beings who are elect, they are by necessity elect “in Christ.” Since for Barth there can be no other decision or election of God that is not conditioned by the decision that Jesus Christ is, to be elect means to be elect “in Christ.”

Ephesians 1:4ff is yet another important passage that Barth uses to back up his formulation that Jesus is both the subject and object of the divine election. In that passage the church is said to have been chosen “in him [Jesus Christ] before the foundation of the world...according to the good pleasure of his will.”¹⁵ Barth points back to several Old Testament texts that express “the concept of predestination” under the concepts of “covenant” and

¹³ CD II/2, 101-102. Barth, van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson frequently employ the male-pronoun with reference to God and corporate humanity while using the female pronoun with reference to Israel, the synagogue, and the church. I have retained each author’s usage in quotations only. Also, I have chosen to translate Barth’s use of *Mensch* and *Menschen* variously as “person” and “human being.”

¹⁴ CD II/2, 146.

¹⁵ CD II/2, 102ff. Barth’s appeal to Ephesians here is indebted to the work of Pierre Maury, who was a significant influence in Barth’s decision to break from the reformed tradition on predestination. For an account of Maury’s influence on Barth, see Simeon Hattrell, ed., *Election, Barth and The French Connection: How Pierre Maury Gave a ‘Decisive Impetus’ to Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Election* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016). Later in CD II/2, Barth mentions Maury’s important contributions in this regard. See CD II/2, 154-155.

“testament,” in which the blessing of God for the world is presented as grounded in God’s definite intention and purpose.¹⁶ Barth claims that God’s plan and purpose to bless the world is picked up in the New Testament in “express connection with the name and person of Jesus.”¹⁷ For Barth, Ephesians makes it clear that when the Old and New Testaments speak of the covenant, testament, plan, and purpose of God, it is the name Jesus Christ to which they ultimately refer. For Barth, these and other passages that speak of God’s predestinating activity all refer to election as within the “sphere of the name of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

The fact that all are elect “in Christ” comes to bear on yet another problem Barth has with previous accounts of predestination. Barth thought that those accounts made the divine decision an arbitrary act of divine will in which a “fixed” and “balanced” system of election and reprobation was set up to determine the fate of individual created human beings rather than an act of God’s grace towards created reality in Jesus Christ.¹⁹ “Double predestination,” as it is often called, traditionally asserted just this kind of balanced system. Under the pressure of his exegetical convictions, Barth criticizes the scheme of double predestination, but rather than dispensing with it, transforms it. No longer does the “double” refer to two different “wills” of God concerning individuals, a “Yes” for some and a “No” for others, mercy for some and judgment for others. “How,” we might imagine Barth asking, “can such a scheme assist in the presentation of the Word of God that turns towards the creature and therefore redeems the creature?” Rather than there being two different wills in God, Barth argues that the one will of God in Jesus Christ is twofold in form, and that it is so “from all eternity.”²⁰ In Jesus Christ, God

¹⁶ *CD* II/2, 102ff.

¹⁷ *CD* II/2, 102.

¹⁸ *CD* II/2, 60.

¹⁹ *CD* II/2, 140.

²⁰ *CD* II/2, 161, 162.

has elected fellowship with humanity for Godself and fellowship with Godself for humanity. Barth notes that “[b]oth things together are the divine election.”²¹ However, Barth also notes that, given the fact that these statements refer, on the one hand, first to what God elects “above all” for Godself and, on the other hand, what God elects for human beings, the “content” of this twofold election, is different in each case.²² In this sense, and only in this sense, says Barth, is predestination “double.” But this raises the question, then, as to the specific “content” of this twofold will. What is the content of divine predestination with respect to God? And, on the other hand, what is the content with respect to humanity if Jesus Christ is the subject and the object of the divine predestination? As will become clear below, Barth’s reflections on the twofold content of the will of God will map directly onto his reading of Israel and Judaism as witnesses. For now, however, in order to unpack Barth’s convictions regarding the twofold content of divine predestination as it concerns the eternal election of Jesus Christ, it is helpful to attend briefly to Barth’s treatment of the infralapsarian and supralapsarian debate of the Reformed church in the seventeenth century.²³ Barth articulates the key question of this debate thus:

What do we mean when we say that from all eternity man was elected by God, or, as we should have to say with equal emphasis according to the presuppositions of their theology, rejected by God? Is it that in His eternal election God was thinking simply of man, man as not yet created but still to be created, man as not yet fallen but still to fall by divine permission and human action? Or is it that He was thinking of man as already created and already fallen in virtue of this divine permission and human action? In other words, is the one elected or rejected *homo creabilis et labilis* [the human being to be created and fallible], or is he *homo creatus et lapsus* [the human being created and fallen]?²⁴

Barth notes that the first option, that in the act of eternal election God was thinking of “man as not yet created” and “not yet fallen,” is the position of the supralapsarians and that the latter

²¹ *CD* II/2, 162.

²² *CD* II/2, 162.

²³ Barth’s summary can be found in *CD* II/2, 127-145.

²⁴ *CD* II/2, 127.

option, that God was thinking of humanity already created and fallen, is the position of the Infralapsarians. To clarify these positions, one need only unpack the literal sense of the words “supra-lapsarian” and “infra-lapsarian,” the former asserting that the decree of predestination preceded (supra) that of the decree concerning creation and the fall (lapsus), where the latter asserts that the decree of predestination was subsequent (infra) to the decree of creation and the fall.²⁵

Space does not permit a full account of Barth’s sympathetic treatment of both sides of this Reformed debate. What is important to note here, however, is that Barth ultimately decides more in favor of the merits of the supralapsarian position, although not without “purifying” the position with certain key modifications.²⁶ These modifications are required of the supralapsarian position, according to Barth, since several dangers follow in its wake. He states that the dangers of the supralapsarian scheme lie in its potential to relativize “the problem of evil” and resolve “the whole relationship between God and man into a kind of natural process which admits of no contradictions.”²⁷ What Barth means here is that if the object of predestination is understood to be humanity not yet created or fallen, the potential implication is that God willed evil and the fall as “instruments” for the salvation and damnation of human beings, all as a demonstration of God’s “glory.”²⁸ In this case, Barth notes, “the Supralapsarian God threatens to take on the appearance of a demon.”²⁹ However, Barth argues that this danger only poses a threat if and when two presuppositions are assumed to hold true: first, that the object of predestination is “the individual abstractly understood,” and second, that the subject of predestination [God] decides

²⁵ CD II/2, 127-139.

²⁶ On the question Barth’s use and appropriation of “Supralapsarian” and “Infralapsarian” frameworks in his theology, see Shao Kai Tseng, *Karl Barth's Infralapsarian Theology: Origins and Development, 1920-1953* (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).

²⁷ CD II/2, 140.

²⁸ CD II/2, 131.

²⁹ CD II/2, 140.

through an absolute decree which “consists in the eternal setting up of that fixed system which governs all temporal reality” and in which the fall and evil are somehow balanced equally with the “good purpose” of God.³⁰ Barth claims, however, that once these presuppositions are rejected, the relative advantage of the supralapsarian position becomes apparent when considered in conjunction with his own modification of the doctrine of election.

First, the supralapsarian position helpfully emphasizes the extent to which God’s “primal and basic purpose...in relation to the world is to impart and reveal Himself—and with Himself His glory.”³¹ This primal purpose is also “the beginning of all things” and thus the determination of everything future, including the creation. However, God determines and wills human beings concretely, not in the abstract. It is not humanity in general, not the “idea” (*Idee*) of humanity, that is predestined. Rather, it is the human being elected “as the witness [*der Zeuge*] to His [God’s] glory and the object of His love, that is predestined.”³² Barth then adds that for this human being to really witness to God’s glory, it must “testify in a twofold manner” to both God’s “Yes” and God’s “No.” Now why is this the case? Why is there a “Yes” and a “No” in God’s self-giving to the creature that God’s elect witness must testify to? In order to answer this question, it is helpful again to return to Barth’s claim that divine election is first and primarily God’s act of self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*).

For Barth, the fact that God is self-determined means that God lives in “eternal self-differentiation [*Selbstunterscheidung*] from all that is not God and is not willed by God.”³³ It is important to attend concretely to the two different things that God is self-differentiated from in the above statement: “all that is not God” and all that “is not willed by God.” Barth affirms that

³⁰ *CD* II/2, 140.

³¹ *CD* II/2, 140.

³² *KD* II/2, 152; *CD* II/2, 141.

³³ *KD* II/2, 152; *CD* II/2, 141.

in the eternal election of Jesus Christ, God wills the overflowing of his life *ad intra* (in Godself) to that which is “not God,” namely creation, his works *ad extra* (outside Godself). This is God’s supreme and ultimate “Yes” to the created order. In God willing that which is not God, however, God also differentiates Godself from what God “does not will.” Thus, for Barth, “[i]n this sense God is and is not; He wills and does not will.” This “negative” side to God’s self-differentiation is not to be in any way conceived of as somehow equal to the positive side but is only to be thought of as the “boundary” of God’s yes, a “marking off, a separating, a setting aside” of what does not correspond to God’s self-determination or to God’s self-willing.³⁴ Here one can see the literal dimension to the German noun *Scheidung* coming to bear in Barth’s exposition. To decide, *Entscheidung*, is to involve a separation, *Scheidung*. Evil, for Barth, is just this: that which is not willed by God, what God says “No” to. The elect of God, therefore, as the witness to this God, is to witness both to what God wills (God’s Yes, which is primary) and what God does not will (God’s No, which is subordinate to the Yes). Here, to avoid the potential misunderstanding that the witness is to testify to God’s No by giving into evil and sinning, Barth clarifies that God does not will that human beings should embrace evil and sin but that human beings should reject sin and so testify, in human history, to the No of God, to what God has set aside. Barth notes, however, that while with God the rejection of evil is “a simple and immediate victory of light over darkness,” for creatures who are not God, it necessarily entails a “confrontation” with evil in which evil is defeated. Human beings in themselves, however, have no power to win the battle against evil. In fact, Barth notes, human beings will fail to testify to God’s rejection of evil. Instead, human creatures will be overcome by evil. Nonetheless, in spite of the fact that God knows that this will happen, God wills that they be “subjected to it.” The defeat of evil is assured

³⁴ *KD*, II/2, 152; *CD* II/2, 141.

by virtue of God’s definitive Yes but, notes Barth, this defeat “must become the content of a history,” and it is this human history that will ultimately correspond (*entsprechen*), and so witness, to the eternal self-determination of God.³⁵

According to Barth’s modification of the doctrine of election as outlined above, a number of implications need to be considered. None of the above reflections on God’s self-differentiation from what is not God and what is not willed by God are to be taken as statements about an unknown divine subject and neither are the reflections on the elect human to be taken as statements about an unknown human object. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, is the elect, the subject and the object of predestination, the witness who, in one person, at once offers the self-testimony of God regarding God’s eternal self-differentiation, God’s Yes and No, and at the same time offers the human being’s testimony to this same self-differentiated God in the form of history, “the history of a death and a resurrection,” in which evil and sin are rejected and defeated in his person.³⁶ This twofold testimony, says Barth, is “a Word, a Word which is spoken [*gesprochen*], and can be heard [*gehört*] and received and learned. It is not silent but speaks [*redet*]. It is not formless but has form [*Gestalt*].”³⁷ At this point it is helpful to return to the question of the specific “content” of the twofold will of God in predestination.

In light of this excursus on Barth’s “purified” supralapsarianism, what content does Barth say divine predestination has with respect to God? And, on the other hand, what content does it have with respect to humanity if Jesus Christ is the subject and the object of the divine predestination? The first thing to point out is that although Barth rejects a “dual” will of God, he does retain the older categories of “perdition” (*Verdammnis*) and “salvation” (*Seligkeit*) as they

³⁵ *CD* II/2, 141.

³⁶ *CD* II/2, 141-143.

³⁷ *KD* II/2, 175; *CD* II/2, 160. I have rendered *redet* in the above passage as “speaks” rather than “vocal” as in the Bromiley translation.

relate to the content of divine predestination.³⁸ The key difference, however, for Barth, is that these categories apply not to two groups of human beings, some who are predestined to death and some for life, but rather to God on the one hand and human beings on the other hand. In the eternal election of Jesus Christ, says Barth, God has “ascribed” (*zugedacht*) salvation for human beings and perdition for Godself.³⁹ From all eternity, in Jesus Christ, God “elected our rejection” and “made it His own.”⁴⁰ Earlier, citing Phil. 2:6ff, Barth stated that the Son of God, in electing Godself for the man Jesus, predestined Godself “even unto the death of the cross.”⁴¹ It is this crucified “form,” says Barth, that the grace of God takes “from the very first.” The threat of evil and death is, then, in advance of any actual “fall of man,” defeated in the divine decree in which God “accepted it as his own portion and burden, removing it from us and refusing to let it be our foreordination in any form.”⁴² This defeat means that from the very beginning divine predestination takes the form of a Yes to the creature, a salvation and restoration. This Yes is the true determination (*Bestimmung*) of the creature of God that is included in the divine election. Nonetheless, as was stated above, the defeat of evil and the restoration and salvation of the creature, assured as it already is in the “primal history” of the divine decision, must nonetheless become the content of a history, and so it does, for Barth. The “No” of God, which is testified to in the death of Jesus Christ, is God’s “just” (*Gerecht*) condemnation of evil, sin, and death; it is the form of God’s work in history that is “perishing” (*vergehende*). Conversely, the “Yes” of God to the creature, which is testified to in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is God’s “mercy”

³⁸ *KD* II/2, 177; *CD*, 163.

³⁹ *KD* II/2, 177; *CD* II/2, 163. While the current English translation of *CD* II/2 renders “zugedacht” here as “ascribed,” other options could be possible such as: “intended,” or “destined.”

⁴⁰ *CD* II/2, 164.

⁴¹ *CD* II/2, 122.

⁴² *CD* II/2, 172.

(*Barmherzigkeit*), grace, and love; the form of God’s work in history that is “coming” (*kommende*).⁴³

Israel as Witness of Jesus Christ

In light of the above account of the twofold will of God in the eternal election of Jesus Christ, it is now possible to address Barth’s account of the election of Israel in §34. Given that in §33 Barth has laid out an account of the “reality of the Word of God who turns to man” in the divine election of grace prior even to creation, what now remains is an account of how that election becomes “the content of a history” in the history of the people Israel. Barth always begins new sections in the *CD* with a helpful synopsis of the entire section. Since the following account of Barth’s theology of Israel will attend concretely to Barth’s key terms within §34 and their relationship to §33, beginning with the full text of the synopsis is a good point to enter this topic:

The election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God [*der einen Gemeinde Gottes*] by the existence of which Jesus Christ is to be attested [*bezeugt*] to the whole world and the whole world summoned to faith in Jesus Christ. This one community of God in its form as Israel has to serve the representation [*der Darstellung*] of the divine judgment [*göttlichen Gerichtes*], in its form as the Church the representation of the divine mercy [*göttlichen Erbarmens*]. In its form as Israel it is determined [*bestimmt*] for hearing [*zum Hören*], and in its form as the Church for believing the promise sent forth to man. To the one elected community of God is given in the one case its passing [*vergehende*], and in the other its coming form [*kommende Gestalt*].⁴⁴

⁴³ *KD II/2*, 182, 188; *CD II/2*, 167, 172.

⁴⁴ The original text reads: “Die Gnadenwahl ist als Erwählung Jesu Christi zugleich die ewige Erwählung der einen Gemeinde Gottes, durch deren Existenz Jesus Christus der ganzen Welt bezeugt, die ganze Welt zum Glauben an Jesus Christus aufgerufen werden soll. Diese eine Gemeinde Gottes hat in ihrer Gestalt als Israel der Darstellung des göttlichen Gerichtes, in ihrer Gestalt als Kirche der Darstellung des göttlichen Erbarmens zu dienen. Sie ist in ihrer Gestalt als Israel zum Hören, in ihrer Gestalt als Kirche zum Glauben der an den Menschen ergangenen Verheißung bestimmt. Es ist der einen erwählten Gemeinde Gottes dort ihre vergehende, hier ihre kommende Gestalt gegeben” (*KD II/2*, 215).

Immediately striking in this passage, especially when considered in light of the analysis in the preceding section of this study, is the emphasis Barth gives to the “twofold” aspect of the elect community.⁴⁵ Although the present chapter is concerned with Barth’s theology of Israel in particular, it is clear from the above synopsis that to treat Barth’s theology of Israel on its own would be fundamentally to misrepresent his thought. For Barth, the community of God can only be described in its twofold form as Israel and the church. What will become clear below is exactly how this twofold aspect of Barth’s account of Israel and the church is, as he states, “the ecclesiological form” of his christological reading of divine election already laid in §33.⁴⁶ Indeed, all four sub-sections of §34 take up the election of grace in its “twofold form,” or put differently, in its form as “double predestination,” and apply it to the election of the community. The material implications of this application must now be unpacked in the form of an analysis of each sentence in the synopsis, as each of the four sentences correspond exactly to the content of each sub-section.⁴⁷ Since Barth accompanies each subsection with a running exegesis of Romans 9-11 (and “all of Holy Scripture as well”),⁴⁸ where appropriate I will also note the relevant exegetical arguments Barth makes.

The Oneness of the Community of God

Barth states that the community of God is the one community elected for the task of “attesting” Jesus Christ to the whole world. There can be no question, for Barth, of conceiving of two elect communities of God who witness independently one from the other, but rather of one

⁴⁵ Already in CD I/2, Barth had anticipated this “twofold” aspect to the community in §14.2 The Time of Expectation and §14.3 The Time of Recollection.

⁴⁶ CD II/2, 198.

⁴⁷ As is quite characteristic of Barth’s style, each sub-section also, in its own way, includes the content of the others so that already in subsection 34.1 Barth says in summary form much of what he will go on to say in each of the subsequent sections.

⁴⁸ CD II/2, 202.

community in two forms. Why must this be the case? Why must the one community of God have the form of elected Israel and elected church and why must this one community witness to Jesus Christ? A rudimentary answer must be given with respect to the first part of the question: Israel and the church are the one community of God, for Barth, because in the Old Testament and then in the New Testament, these are the names given to the people of God. “Israel” corresponds to the Old Testament form of the people of God and “the Church,” the *ekklesia*, as those called-out and “gathered from among Jews and Gentiles,” corresponds to the New Testament form of the people of God.⁴⁹ Barth goes to great lengths to state that the church of the New Testament is not Israel’s replacement but rather Israel’s determined “goal” (*Ziel*).⁵⁰ The church is thus differentiated from Israel, but as a differentiation within the one community as it has lived over time. There is no transfer or transmission of election from one community to another, rather the way of God’s history with Israel “leads from Israel to the Church” as the fulfillment of Israel’s history.⁵¹ From the beginning of scripture to the end, one elect community is being presented as the elect of God. Barth’s emphasis on the unity and differentiation of the community is, as will become clearer below, ultimately grounded in his conviction regarding the unity and differentiation within God in God’s self-election. Barth notes:

Now just as the electing God is one and elected man is one, i.e., Jesus, so also the community as the primary object of the election which has taken place and takes place in Jesus Christ is one.⁵²

For Barth, conceiving of an elect community of God that is differentiated without being essentially one or one without being differentiated would imply an electing God and elected

⁴⁹ When Barth refers to the *ekklesia* as those “gathered from among Jews and Gentiles,” he has Romans 9:24 in mind. Cf. *CD* II/2, 205.

⁵⁰ *CD* II/2, 210.

⁵¹ *CD* II/2, 200.

⁵² *CD* II/2, 197.

human who are not one in differentiation, which Barth has already claimed to be the case in the unity of God and humanity achieved in the eternal election of Jesus Christ. But why must this implication follow? Why must there be this correspondence between Jesus Christ and his community?

The answer to the above question can be discerned by way of Barth's claim that elect Israel and the elect church are witnesses to Jesus Christ and that, as witnesses, their existence must represent (*darstellen*) or reflect (*spiegeln*) Christ's own election. For Barth, ultimately all human creatures are called to be witnesses to this divine decision. Barth notes at the outset, however, that in following scripture, one finds that individuals do not figure centrally as the witnesses to this divine decision, rather, a "fellowship" of people do. This fellowship is the community of God and Barth notes that it constitutes the "other election" which is included in the election of Jesus Christ. Election, as the divine decision concerning God's attitude of love and grace towards the creation, as well as God's just judgment of sin and evil, is thus at the same time or "simultaneously" (*zugleich*) the eternal election of the community which is enlisted in the service of witnessing to the divine decision. If Jesus Christ is to be attested to the world in a manner that is truly representative of him, there must be a correspondence between Jesus Christ and the elect community of witnesses with respect to their determination and form. This correspondence is not meant, for Barth, to mitigate the essential difference between Jesus Christ and the community, however. Barth will always maintain a sharp distinction between the existence of Jesus Christ and the community. The former is always the Lord and "Head" and the latter is always the servant and "body." The former is God as "His own representative [*Stellvertreter*] among men" whereas the latter only "signify" (*meinen*) Him as they "point

beyond themselves” (*selbst hinauszeigen*).⁵³ The former is the “incomparable majesty of God,” the latter, when obedient, only a “copy” (*Nachbild*) or a “repetition” (*Wiederholung*) of that majesty.⁵⁴

Barth draws this difference out sharply by noting two important characteristics of the elect community. First, the community is characterized by its “provisionality” (*Vorläufigkeit*) in that it is elected for a specific purpose and towards a specific end, namely, to attest or witness to Jesus Christ. This community can also be described, however, in terms of its “mediate” (*mittlere*) and “mediating” (*vermittelnde*) character in that, with respect to the former, the community “is the middle point between the election of Jesus Christ and...the election of those who have believed” and that, with respect to the latter, the community mediates and conditions “the relation between the election of Jesus Christ and that of all believers.”⁵⁵ Barth is at pains to note that there can be no concept of the elect community of God that is not characterized minimally in these two ways. If the community tries to live “independent” of its provisional role as mediate and mediating then “it has forgotten and forfeited its election.”⁵⁶ Barth, perhaps in his most Luther-tinged voice, does not hesitate to give examples of communities, namely the synagogue and Roman Catholicism, that he thinks have tried to live independent of their mediatorial role, noting that it can only be “Jewish or clerical phantasy and arrogance” that strives after such an

⁵³ *KD I/2*, 92; *CD I/2*, 84. In the context of this citation, Barth is speaking of “Abraham, Moses, and David and the kings, priests and prophets of the Old Testament.” Barth’s use of the German verb *meinen* here, translated as “signify,” could also be translated as “mean” or “intend.” In an important passage in *CD II/1*, 490, Barth expands upon this distinction with respect to the manner of God’s presence in Israel and the Church in contrast to the manner of God’s proper presence in Jesus: “The whole Jesus Christ is there at the right hand of God in one way, and the same whole Jesus Christ is here in Israel and the Church, but also in the world, in another way. We make a distinction (with the Reformed) and say: ‘He is there properly and originally and here symbolically, sacramentally, spiritually.’”

⁵⁴ *KD I/2*, 89; *CD I/2*, 81.

⁵⁵ *CD II/2*, 196.

⁵⁶ *CD II/2*, 197.

independent state of community existence.⁵⁷ One of the problems with this kind of independence is that it betrays the twofold form of the community and so betrays its witness to the twofold aspect of Christ's eternal election. Commenting on Romans 9:4-5, Barth notes that not only must there be no independent election of Israel, but neither can the church claim an election independent from Israel, since it is precisely by the "covenants," "lawgiving," "worship," and "promises" that the church lives. "The Church," says Barth, "leads no life of its own beside and against Israel."⁵⁸ Such independence in either of the above forms amounts to the abandonment of the one community of God as a provisional witness that mediates between the election of Jesus Christ and that of all believers. The question arises, now, however, as to how Israel and the church, as the two-fold form of the community, witness to and mediate the election of Jesus Christ, and this brings us to the second sentence of the synopsis.

The Community's Service

Israel and the church attest to Jesus Christ in that Israel has "to serve the representation [*der Darstellung*] of the divine judgment" and the church "the representation of the divine mercy" in history. Or, as Barth puts it with different emphasis later, Israel and the church are "elected to serve the presentation [*Darstellung*] (the self-presentation [*Selbstdarstellung*]!) of Jesus Christ and the act of God which took place in Him."⁵⁹ To understand what Barth is up to

⁵⁷ CD II/2, 196. In light of this and other jarring language that Barth uses, it is little surprise Sonderegger reads Barth's *Israellehre* as containing some of the same negative rhetoric about Jews found in Luther, in spite of radical differences between the two, not least of which being Barth's strong statements *against* antisemitism. Cf. *That Jesus Christ Was Born A Jew*, 63-65. Here there is, of course, a tension in Barth that has not gone unnoticed. I discuss this further below (50ff).

⁵⁸ CD II/2, 205.

⁵⁹ KD II/2, 226; CD II/2, 205. The reader may note the difference in the translation of *der Darstellung* (representation/presentation) in the synopsis and in this passage. Probably, the reason for the rendering "representation" in the synopsis and "presentation" here is because while in the former case what is being described is the re-presentation and witness of the community to revelation, in the latter case what is being described is the presentation or self-presentation of God in revelation. For more on the translation and interpretation of this term, see

here, it is instructive again to look back to what has already been indicated earlier in §33, namely that God’s “primal and basic purpose...in relation to the world is to impart and reveal Himself—and with Himself His glory.”⁶⁰ God’s self-impartation and self-revelation are, for Barth, to be understood also as God’s self-presentation to human beings in Jesus Christ – the fulfillment of God’s basic purpose from eternity. Israel and the church serve that self-presentation in their provisional role as mediators who re-present Jesus Christ in time. Israel does this before Christ was born (*ante Christum natum*), in the time of “expectation” (*der Erwartung*) and “prophecy.” The church does this after Christ’s resurrection, in the time of “recollection” (*der Erinnerung*) and faith.⁶¹ We already know from the account of divine election above, however, that God’s self-presentation in history is to be characterized by its “twofold content” in that what is presented is both what God has chosen for Godself (fellowship with humanity) and what God has chosen for humanity (fellowship with Godself) in the person of Jesus Christ. In the former case, Barth notes, God chooses “the endurance of judgment” and in the latter case “the glory of his mercy.”⁶² Israel’s service in the one community, for Barth, is thus to “represent” and “reflect” (*spiegeln*) what God has chosen for Godself (judgment) and the church’s service is to reflect what God has chosen for humanity (mercy). It is in this sense that Barth says that Israel and the church serve the “presentation of the judgment and mercy of God.”⁶³ Barth puts it thus with respect to Israel’s service in particular:

footnote 63 below. I have placed an exclamation point after the bracketed word “self-presentation” since Barth does so in the German.

⁶⁰ *CD* II/2, 140.

⁶¹ Again, for Barth’s account of these two forms of “time” corresponding to these two forms of witness, cf. *CD* I/2, §14.2-§14.3.

⁶² *CD* II/2, 197.

⁶³ *CD* II/2, 205-206. Much has been made of Barth’s use of the German noun *Darstellung* here and throughout his *Israellehre*. Marquardt has suggested that Barth’s usage of this term is best understood in light of its history and usage as a concept in German Idealism, having a “corresponding topos” in the Idealistic tradition from Schiller to Hegel. According to Marquardt, Israel, in this tradition, would “present” (*darstellen*) and “demonstrate” (*vorführen*) “all possible higher ideas” in relation to the philosophy of history. Israel, notes Marquardt, is for Barth a “mirror” (*Spiegel*) that “reflects” (*spiegelt*) a more substantial reality. See his *EDJ*, 60, 310-317. Sonderegger sees merit in

The specific service for which Israel is determined within the whole of the elected community is to be the reflection of the judgment [*der Spiegel des Gerichts...zu sein*] from which God has rescued man and which He wills to endure Himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.⁶⁴

For Barth, Israel makes visible (*macht sichtbar*) that God's eternal election of grace, his Yes, is directed to "an obdurate people," whose obduracy results in the "curse, and shame and death" from which it must be rescued.⁶⁵ This is evident, says Barth, throughout the whole history of Israel, but comes to a head in Israel "delivering up its Messiah to be put to death."⁶⁶ This "making visible" the judgment of God is, according to Barth, Israel's special commission within the one community of God and without it, the church "cannot voice its witness to Jesus Christ and its summons to faith in Him."⁶⁷ Israel's witness, for Barth, cannot be ignored in the church without losing the witness to "man's misery" and, says Barth, a "similar loss in its witness to the cross and saving passion of Jesus Christ."⁶⁸ And yet, for Barth, this witness can never be lost in the church even when "Israel as such and as a whole is not obedient but disobedient to its

Marquardt's claims, but attempts to chart a different approach, noting that while Barth no doubt knew the key issues of Idealism well, he did not use most of the "technical terms" of the Idealists in his *Israellehre*. Sonderegger is convinced that it is better to consider Barth's usage of *Darstellung* under the banner of a "dogmatic interpretation of history," wherein the representation of the Jews is a "representation of type, not an estrangement of essence" (Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ Was Born A Jew*, 62-63). There is much merit to this position, especially given the typological exegesis that Barth goes on to perform in §35. According to Sonderegger, conceiving of representation under the banner of typology allows the concept of *Darstellung*, as Barth uses it, to escape the potentially reductive aspects it could take on in Idealism, since typology allows for the historical reality of that which is typified to exceed "its image as a type." While I think Sonderegger might be underestimating the extent to which Barth employs, often eclectically, the technical terms of the Idealists, my own conclusion nonetheless lies closer to Sonderegger than Marquardt. I would argue that Barth's use of *Darstellung* and *Selbstdarstellung* belong thematically with a whole host of other related terms that Barth employs to make the basic point that he constantly returns to throughout the *CD*: it is God who finally and in every case reveals, determines, gives, and witnesses to Himself and in such a way that these are never *reducible to* or under the *control of* the particular witness through which it is attested, even *if* God really does reveal Himself by means of that witness. And so, *Selbstdarstellung* belongs within the family of these other terms of Barth's: Self-revelation (*Selbstoffenbarung*), Self-relation (*Sichverhalten*), Self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*), Self-offering (*Selbstdarbietung*), and Self-witness (*Selbstbezeugung*).

⁶⁴ *KD* II/2, 227; *CD* II/2, 206. The Bromiley translation reads "The specific service for which Israel is determined within the whole of the elected community is to reflect the judgment from which God has rescued man..." I have opted for a more literal translation of *zu sein* (to be).

⁶⁵ *CD* II/2, 206.

⁶⁶ *CD* II/2, 226.

⁶⁷ *CD* II/2, 206.

⁶⁸ *CD* II/2, 206.

election” for this service.⁶⁹ “God does not wait,” says Barth, “till Israel is obedient before employing it in His service. This is settled and completed in and with its election as such, so that Israel cannot in any way evade it, whether it is obedient or disobedient.”⁷⁰ Even in the formation and maintenance of “the Synagogue”—which Barth interprets as the “sectarian self-assertion” (*sektiererische Selbstbehauptung*) through which Israel creates a “schism, a gulf, in the midst of the community of God”—unbelieving Israel remains in the service of God, a witness to God’s judgment and so to God’s eternal “No” that was spoken as a consequence of God’s eternal “Yes” in divine election.⁷¹ Israel is, then, for Barth, the witness, however reluctant, to the “No” of God that is included subordinately under God’s “Yes.”

If Israel is the witness to the “No” of God, for Barth, then the church is the witness to God’s eternal “Yes,” the “mercy of God.” As the previous analysis of divine election indicates, however, God’s eternal “Yes” is the original and primary attitude God takes towards that which is outside of Godself. If the church reflects this divine attitude, what that means, for Barth, is that “the Church is older than its calling and gathering from among Jews and Gentiles which begins with the ascension or the miracle of Pentecost.”⁷² The church, for Barth, is thus not only the “goal” (*das Ziel*) of Israel, but “the foundation [*der Grund*] of the elect people of Israel too.”⁷³ Barth notes that the witness to divine mercy has been present throughout Israel’s history and in this sense “Israel too is already a witness to the divine mercy.”⁷⁴ Barth is careful, however, to point out that this in no way changes the fact that Israel is elect primarily to “serve the revelation of the divine judgment” since, according to him, those special elect people within Israel that have

⁶⁹ *CD II/2*, 208.

⁷⁰ *CD II/2*, 207.

⁷¹ *KD II/2*, 229-230; *CD II/2*, 208-209. See footnote 5 of the introduction for a discussion of Barth’s use of the word “Synagogue” (*die Synagoge*) throughout his *Israellehre*.

⁷² *CD II/2*, 211.

⁷³ *CD II/2*, 211.

⁷⁴ *CD II/2*, 212.

attested to the divine mercy “are exceptions which as such do not suspend the rule” of Israel’s special service in the one community.⁷⁵ Building on Paul’s phrase in Rom. 9:6b, “For they are not all Israel which are of Israel,” Barth argues that these exceptions are the “true Israel” – the Israel which “realizes Israel’s determination” as a witness to the divine mercy – in other words, the “pre-existent Church in Israel.”⁷⁶ Through all of Israel’s history, God’s “Yes” and “No” have thus been testified to, for Barth. God’s eternal self-differentiation (*Selbstunterscheidung*) in the eternal election of Jesus Christ has as its ecclesiological correlate the fact that God has “from the first chosen, differentiated [*unterschieden*] and divided [*gescheiden*] in Israel. He has from the very beginning separated the Church and Israel, Israel and the Church.”⁷⁷

Again, the above “differentiation” is not a differentiation of separate corporate fellowships, for Barth, but rather a differentiation within one community. More than this, however, Barth also argues that this differentiation is teleologically ordered: it has a goal within the one community, a goal that is fundamentally inclusive in orientation. Commenting on the “parable of the potter” in Rom. 9:20-21, Barth thus notes that the divine judgment, as reflected in the “vessel for dishonour,” is not to be played off against the divine mercy, as reflected in the “vessels for honour.” This would suggest that God arbitrarily moves between judgment and mercy—Barth uses the image of a “seesaw”—on the basis of an unknown will. Rather, “the relationship between the two sides of the one divine action is one of supreme incongruity, supreme a-symmetry, supreme disequilibrium.”⁷⁸ Instead of claiming that God rules in judgment and mercy understood as equal aspects to the divine action, Barth argues that God’s mercy rules

⁷⁵ *CD* II/2, 212.

⁷⁶ *CD* II/2, 214.

⁷⁷ *KD* II/2, 238; *CD* II/2, 216.

⁷⁸ *CD* II/2, 224.

in God's judgment.⁷⁹ Here again Barth is displaying the relationship between his doctrine of the eternal election of Jesus Christ and his doctrine of the election of the community. The election of Jesus Christ is fundamentally the merciful decision of God that, while necessarily entailing the speaking of a subordinate "No" (judgment), is nonetheless fundamentally and ultimately God's "Yes" (mercy) to the creature. Israel and the church must serve the presentation of this decision by their very existence as "representations" of this "No" moving decidedly towards the fulfillment of a primordial "Yes."

At this point it is important to recall yet again that God's decision, for Barth, is the decision to reveal and impart Godself. This is done ultimately through Jesus Christ, God's self-witness in person, who comes to his people to make Godself known as "the promise, pledge and assurance" of the covenant, God's "good will and work for man."⁸⁰ Barth notes that God wills that humanity should "hear" this self-witness and "believe" in it.⁸¹ The decision of God is thus fundamentally communicated to humanity as God's speech, God's Word spoken from eternity, directed outside of Godself so as to reach humanity.⁸² God, says Barth, "chooses for Himself the existence-form of the *Word* which reaches" God's people.⁸³ This Word, however, is not heard everywhere at once and neither is it manifest as God's definitive self-witness in all times and places. As was already shown above, for Barth, the community mediates between the election of Christ and all humanity elect in Him. The community exists for the purpose of attesting Christ to the whole world and summoning the whole world to faith in Jesus Christ. If the community is to be capable of attesting Christ and summoning the world to faith in Christ, then this implies that

⁷⁹ *CD II/2*, 234.

⁸⁰ *CD II/2*, 233.

⁸¹ *CD II/2*, 233.

⁸² Barth had already laid down this fundamental statement about the Word of God as the "speech" of God in *CD I/1*, §5.

⁸³ *CD II/2*, 234. Emphasis in original.

God's Word has both reached his community and that it has found faith there; it implies, in other words, that God's Word has already been heard and believed. To understand this aspect to the election of the community, we must turn to the third sentence of Barth's synopsis.

The Determination of the Community

God's Word does not come to human beings everywhere at once and neither does it become God's definitive self-witness in all times and places. Rather, it is heard first in Israel, the same place where it also becomes manifest definitively at the goal of Israel's history when the Word becomes flesh in Jesus Christ and where the church of Jews and Gentiles accepts that Word as the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. That God's decision to reveal and impart Godself involves both the hearing of the self-witness of God and belief or faith in that witness means, for Barth, that both of these aspects constitute the twofold determination of the one community of God. The community is determined to hear and believe in God's promise.

What does Barth mean when he speaks about the determination of the community? Above it was shown that Barth understood Christ's own election as God's free act of self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*) to love that which is outside of Godself and reveal Godself. It was also shown that this was a twofold determination involving what God wills for Godself (fellowship with humanity) and for humanity (fellowship with God) in Jesus Christ. As mediators of this twofold determination of God, Israel and the church receive a twofold determination in Christ which is, again, teleologically ordered. On the one hand, Israel is determined to hear the promise because God has elected fellowship with humanity for Godself. This fellowship has a particular character and, one could say, hierarchy to it. God has determined Godself to be in "the indestructible position of Leader, Disposer and Giver" of God's people

among whom God “chooses to make Himself heard” so as to guide and instruct them by God’s Word. Quoting the “Hear, O Israel” of the *Shema*, Barth states: “Israel *is* a hearer of the promise.”⁸⁴ But, according to Barth, when the fulfillment of the promise comes and “speaks through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,” then what happens is that “Israel hears—and does not believe.”⁸⁵ The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is, for Barth, precisely the revelation of the full content of the promise of God as “God’s mercy ruling in His judgment.”⁸⁶ By not believing in this revelation, Israel is left with a promise that has yet to pass from judgment to mercy and as a result acts as though it must “provide...the presuppositions for its fulfillment.”⁸⁷ Put differently, Israel acts as though the content of its history can lead to its own victory over evil and death, something only God can finally accomplish in his righteous judgment. This is how Barth reads Paul’s statement regarding unbelieving Israel in Romans 10:3. By “seeking to establish their own righteousness,” unbelieving Israel becomes the people who hear the promise but do so “inattentively and inaccurately,” who thus hear the promise that was spoken to Ezekiel over the “field full of dead bones” but refuse to believe its accomplishment in Christ.⁸⁸ For Barth, this refusal can mean nothing less than that Israel is disobedient to its election. Barth, however, will never tire of pointing out that it is precisely this disobedience which is part of Israel’s election: “The meaning of its election is that in the very act of becoming guilty towards God it must genuinely magnify His faithfulness.”⁸⁹ Inasmuch as Israel continues in unbelief, it is disobedient to its calling—to the goal of its election—in that it has not moved from its determination for “hearing” to its determination for “believing.” And yet, it is precisely

⁸⁴ *CD* II/2, 235. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁵ *CD* II/2, 235.

⁸⁶ *CD* II/2, 234.

⁸⁷ *CD* II/2, 236.

⁸⁸ *CD* II/2, 236, 243.

⁸⁹ *CD* II/2, 259.

Israel's unbelief, for Barth, that attests to what God has overcome in Jesus Christ. Thus, whether Israel believes and so is integrated into the church or does not believe and remains "independent" of the church, it confirms its election in Christ as determined for hearing the promise of God.

On the other hand, for Barth, the church is determined to believe in the promise because God has elected for humanity fellowship with Godself. This determination means the promotion of the human being "to the indestructible position of His child and brother, His intimate and friend."⁹⁰ By believing in the fulfilled promise, the church is the community that has reached its determination in history. It recognizes and acknowledges that, in Christ's death and resurrection, God's mercy rules in God's judgment. The church, then, does not presume to establish its own righteousness but trusts wholly on the promise as it is fulfilled "by the faith of the man Jesus rewarded and crowned according to the promise."⁹¹ Said differently, the church believes that in the history of Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled his promise to give the gift of fellowship with Godself to a creature that had been overcome by evil by raising Jesus from the dead. Precisely by believing in this fulfilled promise, as the offer and gift of divine mercy in Jesus Christ, the church is obedient since, according to Barth, obedience simply is living as "one to whom this offer and gift has been made."⁹² As the church believes, it also becomes the "centre and medium of communication between Jesus and the world" and so reaches the goal of the elect community's determination.⁹³ That the church has reached the goal of the one community does not mean, however, that it can turn the gift of divine mercy into a possession. Thus, although the

⁹⁰ *CD II/2*, 238. Barth will later repeat the same structure of God's movement towards humanity and his elevation of humanity to fellowship with Him in his doctrine of reconciliation. In §64.2, Barth will re-state the above theme this way: "The atonement as it took place in Jesus Christ is the one inclusive event of this going out of the Son of God and coming in of the Son of Man...It was God who went into the far country, and it is man who returns home. Both took place in the one Jesus Christ."

⁹¹ *CD II/2*, 238.

⁹² *CD II/2*, 239, 246.

⁹³ *CD II/2*, 239.

church is the believing community, it will never be in a position, for Barth, to leave behind the task of the hearing that is the necessary presupposition of belief. It is in this sense that Barth will affirm the importance of the witness of both unbelieving Israel and the Israel that believes (and lives on in the church) inasmuch as Israel under either determination always attests, in continuity with its history *ante Christum natum*, to the hearing of the Word of God that reaches humanity. Barth thus says, with respect to this “special contribution” of Israel in the church, that a “church that becomes antisemitic or even only a-semitic sooner or later suffers the loss of its faith by losing the object of it.”⁹⁴

Barth will also affirm that the scriptures portray figures within Israel’s history not only as hearing the promise but also as believing in it before Christ’s birth and the birth of the church. Barth qualifies this affirmation, however, by appealing again to the notion of the pre-existent church in Israel. Barth’s claim, then, that Israel’s determination is only to hear, remains basically in place. The fact that some in Israel believed before Christ does not nullify the rule that Israel’s determination is principally to be a hearer of the promise. That this is the case, says Barth, is only re-enforced by the fact that after Christ’s coming, when the promise is spoken in the form of God’s self-witness, “Israel hears—and does not believe.”⁹⁵ Those in Israel’s history before Christ who did believe were thus only the “prefiguration of the Church” (*das Vorbild der Kirche*) as that future form of the community which perceives, assents, and trusts in the promise in spite of having no capacity to do so, who did not do so by “human willing and running” (Rom.9:16) but were made capable by the mercy of God.⁹⁶ That the church is made up of those who have been “made capable” of believing is only possible, for Barth, because of Christ’s coming in person to

⁹⁴ CD II/2, 234.

⁹⁵ CD II/2, 235.

⁹⁶ CD II/2, 239-240.

confirm and fulfill the promise spoken to Israel. Christ's death and resurrection creates the church that believes, and in this sense, Barth argues that the church "does not have...the choice of understanding or refusing to understand."⁹⁷ Inasmuch as the church exists, it does so precisely because God's mercy has established faith where there was no capacity for it previously. That the faith of the church is established in Jesus' resurrection means, of course, that Israel does not have a goal that does not also pass from unbelief to belief which, for Barth, can be nothing less than a passage from death to life. Unbelieving Israel's movement from death to life, however, will only be accomplished by God. Barth makes this clear in his discussion of Paul's account of the mystery of the hardening of unbelieving Israel: "It is not the Church but God himself in the act of that admission and introduction, Jesus Christ in the glory of His second coming, who will convert the synagogue, as it is He alone who will awaken the dead."⁹⁸

The Form of the Community

Israel and the church stand under a determination that is teleologically ordered. The life of the community is history and because it is history, it entails movement and transformation directed towards a goal – the community's determined end. As the elect community of God, this determination, as has been repeated in the analysis above three times now, "corresponds" (*entsprechen*) to Christ's own twofold determination. In Christ, God elects fellowship with humanity and this means that God chooses for Godself the form of fallen humanity which is characterized by "the frailty of flesh, suffering, dying, death."⁹⁹ As the community which mediates between God's eternal election of Godself and all of humanity elect in him, Israel is the

⁹⁷ *CD* II/2, 240.

⁹⁸ *CD* II/2, 284.

⁹⁹ *CD* II/2, 261.

form of the community which puts on display in front of the world this frailty, “the death taken away by God from man.”¹⁰⁰ How does it do this? It does it throughout the form of its whole

history as a history of

continual abandonment, extermination and destruction from its suffering in Egypt to the final fall of Jerusalem and beyond that down to the present day, in the weakness, torment and sickness of this Job, this strangest of God’s servants among the peoples—it has to pay dearly for being God’s chosen people—there is mirrored [*spiegelt*] the radicalism in which God Himself makes real His mercy with man, the enigmatic [*die Rätselhaftigkeit*] character of His self-surrender.¹⁰¹

Israel’s service within the one community is to put the world’s misery, lostness, and subjection to death on display in the particularity of its own misery and, finally, in the singular misery of Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ. As Barth notes later in *CD* IV.3.1, §69.2, it is in just this sense that Israel “fore-tells” Christ as his “type,” and, Barth is at pains to note, “type” here must not be taken to mean that Israel “merely figuratively” (*nur figürlich*) fore-tells Christ.¹⁰² No, for Barth, the history of Israel is in its own way too the history of “the Word of God in the flesh,” even if the distinction between Israel’s history and the history of Jesus Christ must in all cases be finally upheld. For Barth, these two histories are to be seen as “comparable” (*vergleichbar*) but not finally “identical” (*identisch*).¹⁰³ Why? On the one hand, this is simply because whereas Israel’s history is a history of God’s Word enfleshed in his witnesses as “instruments of the covenant,” in the history of Jesus Christ the Word was made flesh in one person who thus was his own witness.¹⁰⁴ Barth’s claim that Israel’s history is “comparable” but not “identical” can also be understood within the context of the analysis of the fourth sentence of the synopsis now under discussion. In what sense does Israel, as that form of the community that is “passing,” enact in its

¹⁰⁰ *CD* II/2, 260.

¹⁰¹ *KD* II/2, 287; *CD* II/2, 261.

¹⁰² *KD* IV/3.1, 72; *CD* IV/3.1, 66.

¹⁰³ *KD* IV/3.1, 71; *CD* IV/3.1, 65.

¹⁰⁴ *CD* I/2, 104-105.

history the death of the old human? On the basis of Barth's distinction between Israel's history and Christ's history, one can only say that Israel enacts this death in a "comparable" but not "identical" way when compared with the death of the old human in the death of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. That this is the case becomes clear when considering Barth's claim that God chooses damnation for Godself and salvation for humanity in Jesus Christ. Israel's history of abandonment, as "fore-telling" Christ's abandonment, is not, finally, what God has chosen for Israel, but it is what God has chosen for Godself. And so, although Israel has experienced abandonment through history, the final abandonment, judgment, and rejection due to Israel (and all humanity) is precisely what God has taken away in God's eternal choice for fellowship with humanity in Jesus Christ. It is God in Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, whose death means the passing of the old humanity. Israel is the form of the community that is passing precisely because in Jesus Christ the person that Israel represented in its own abandonment *ante Christum natum* has passed away. Because this is the case, Barth notes, Israel's service *post Christum* is to "praise...the mercy of God in the passing, the death, the setting aside of the old man" within the one community of God.¹⁰⁵

Barth is quick to note, however, that although this is what Israel is called to do, "Israel as such and as a whole" does not do this. For Barth, this can only mean that Israel has refused to accept what is objectively the case: that "[a]ll things have become new."¹⁰⁶ What God has chosen for humanity is "fellowship with Himself," and this means new life for Israel and now also for the Gentiles. For Barth, Israel's refusal of this "fact" results in "a most unnatural severance in God's community," a severance in which the witness to the Gospel is now hindered because the

¹⁰⁵ *CD* II/2, 260.

¹⁰⁶ *CD* II/2, 263.

one community now includes some who are looking “backwards instead of forwards.”¹⁰⁷ If the form of Israel’s history, and indeed the history of the Jews “down to the present day,” witness to the death that has been taken away by God, then the church form of the community witnesses to God by narrating the story of that death as a divine movement in which God gives Israel new, resurrected life, the coming form of the community that now includes both Jews and Gentiles. That this task is not taken up by the whole Israelite community, however, does not mean, for Barth, that this witness is lost or fatally compromised and neither does it mean that unbelieving Israel must be perceived as lost or rejected either. For Barth, regardless of whether Israel as a whole believes or does not believe, they continue to witness to the “old” human and just so they continue to be the elect of God. Furthermore, Barth notes that on the basis of Rom. 11:1b, it is clear that at least a part of Israel has believed, the Apostle Paul being evidence of this fact.¹⁰⁸ The difference in the form of witness between unbelieving Israel and believing Israel is that one gives the witness cheerfully and willingly in light of the passing of the old human, while the other does it obstinately by refusing the grace and mercy of God in the passing of the old human. Either way, Israel’s service in the community will be accomplished.¹⁰⁹

It is here, in Barth’s claim about Israel’s inevitable witness to the passing form of the community, that some of his most jarring comments regarding unbelieving Israel appear and deserve comment: Unbelieving Israel, which Barth often associates with “the Synagogue,”

must be the personification of a half-venerable, half-gruesome relic, of a miraculously preserved antique, of human whimsicality. It must now live among the nations the pattern of a historical life which has absolutely no future—but without having its appointed time like other nations, being then allowed to take its leave and be merged into others.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ *CD* II/2, 262.

¹⁰⁸ *CD* II/2, 269.

¹⁰⁹ *CD* II/2, 261.

¹¹⁰ *CD* II/2, 263.

Passages like these, which Busch has noted were probably written in 1940,¹¹¹ have often been the basis for claims that Barth himself was an Anti-Semite.¹¹² Other scholars, however, while rightly condemning the use of such language, have also wondered how Barth could say things like this while also uttering such strong statements against antisemitism and for Christian solidarity with Jews in the same context. Busch is surely right that this conundrum can only begin to be solved on the basis of understanding Barth's commitment to upholding the entire biblical witness.¹¹³ In the present context, this is evident in the way that he is trying to follow the apostle Paul as closely as possible with respect to the relationship between unbelieving Israel and the church in the one elect community. Barth's desire to hold the Old and New Testaments together meant that there could be no account of an Old Testament community of God whose election was forfeited and transferred to a New Testament community. Barth advocated a reading of Paul, in other words, that rejected what Kendall Soulen calls "punitive supersessionism" (God rejects Israel as a punishment for their disobedience) and "economic supersessionism" (God rejects Israel and transfers their election to the church).¹¹⁴ Punitive supersessionism is ruled out precisely because Israel is not determined for punishment but for salvation. To state that in Christ's coming punishment and rejection came upon Israel would be to imply that Christ did not

¹¹¹ Busch, "The Covenant of Grace Fulfilled in Christ as the Foundation of the Indissoluble Solidarity of the Church with Israel: Barth's Position on the Jews During the Hitler Era," in *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian?* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2018), 38.

¹¹² Frank E. Talmage made such a claim. See his *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter* (New York: KTAV Publishing, 1975), 37-38. Eberhard Busch has made the opposite claim, however. See his "Indissoluble Unity: Barth's Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era," in *For the Sake of the World: Karl Barth and the Future of Ecclesial Theology*, 59. Busch's book *Unter dem Bogen des einen Bundes* is helpful here as well, outlining not only Barth's theological position on the Jews, but also his social and political activities in support of Jews in the Nazi era. See also Mark Lindsay's *Covenanted Solidarity: The Theological Basis of Karl Barth's Opposition to Nazi Antisemitism and The Holocaust* (New York: Lang, 2001): 213-240.

¹¹³ Eberhard Busch, "Indissoluble Unity: Barth's Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era," 62ff.

¹¹⁴ Kendall Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996). Although, Woodard-Lehman ("Saying 'Yes' to Israel's 'No'," 76) has argued that while Barth has not advocated "standard supersessionism, the ecclesiological formulation of Barth's doctrine of election is, *mutatis mutandis*, dialectically supersessionist."

take death upon himself and so that God had not elected fellowship with humanity for Godself. Economic supersessionism is ruled out because there is no transfer of election from one community to another, rather there is only movement from the passing to the coming humanity within the one community. In fact, on the basis of Barth's Christological grounding of election, to posit an economic supersessionism would amount to saying that the Jesus who died was a different person from the Jesus that rose again. For this reason, Gentile Christians "are not to regard the Synagogue as lost" and neither are they to conceive of their own witness as involving a "mission" to the Jews.¹¹⁵ There can be no "mission" to the Jews since the church's mission is precisely the "true Jewish mission."¹¹⁶ The "mission" (*Aufgabe*) of the one elect community of God, consisting of Israel and the church, calls the whole world to faith and there can be no embodiment of this mission that does not include Israel and the church together. Barth says it emphatically:

Whoever has Jesus Christ in faith cannot wish not to have the Jews. He must have them along with Jesus Christ as His ancestors and kinsmen. Otherwise he cannot have even the Jew Jesus Christ. Otherwise with the Jews he rejects Jesus Himself.¹¹⁷

On the other hand, however, there could be no reading of Paul's agonizing account in Romans 9-11 of God's providential work among Israel and the Gentiles that did not also have to account for the ongoing reality of Jewish unbelief and disobedience. For this reason, Barth did not abandon passages in Paul, or elsewhere in scripture, that have been used historically for

¹¹⁵ *CD II/2*, 282.

¹¹⁶ *CD II/2*, 284. Barth takes up the impossibility of a "Jewish mission" again in *CD IV.3.2*, 876-878.

¹¹⁷ *CD II/2*, 289. Barth strengthens the basic thrust of this statement later in *CD IV/1*, 671: "The decisive question is not what the Jewish Synagogue can be without Him [Jesus Christ], but what the Church is as long as it confronts an alien and hostile Israel?" Barth continues: "And what a dreadful thing when the Church itself has so little understood its own nature that it has not only withheld this knowledge [the knowledge of the unity of Israel and the Church] from its brethren but made it difficult if not impossible for them! *Credo unam ecclesiam?* This confession gives rise to other and very difficult questions. But here in the so-called Jewish question we face the deepest obscurity which surrounds it. The Jewish question? If Paul is right, then in the light and context of that confession it is really the Christian question."

antisemitic purposes.¹¹⁸ To take out or ignore Paul's account of Israel's unbelief and disobedience would do nothing less than compromise the witness within the one community to the death that God has taken upon Godself and so also the extent of God's mercy in electing fellowship with humanity for Godself and fellowship with Godself for humanity. In other words, neither blatant supersessionism nor a New Testament purged of anti-Judaic sounding passages, for Barth, would do justice to the vision of the Gospel as articulated by Paul in Romans 9-11. As Busch helpfully points out, had Barth chosen to ignore what are sometimes read as antisemitic passages in the New Testament, he would have "validated the German Christian insinuation that anti-Judaism was legitimated by the 'second' Testament."¹¹⁹ Of course, to say this is not to excuse Barth from language that remains deeply problematic, but it is to rule out any overt antisemitic motive on Barth's part. Barth's harsh language is a consequence of his theological conviction that the movement from the passing to the coming form of the community, from Israel to the church of Jews and Gentiles, is a microcosm of the macrocosmic movement that God ultimately intends for all human individuals in the passing of the old human being to the coming of the new.¹²⁰

Theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth?

With the above analysis of Barth's *Israellehre* complete, it is necessary to conclude this chapter by briefly considering the reception of Barth on this topic. *KD II/2* was published in 1942 (ET, 1957) and of course much has happened in the world since then. Barth's theology has

¹¹⁸ Barth's continued reference to anti-Semitism and his repeated statement that scripture, and especially Paul's analysis in Rom.9-11, completely rules out anti-Semitism, demonstrates that he was well aware of the "Gentile Christian Theory" in which the church has replaced Israel as its successor. Cf. *CD II/2*, 290.

¹¹⁹ Eberhard Busch, "Indissoluble Unity: Barth's Position on the Jews during the Hitler Era," 62.

¹²⁰ Cf. Barth's discussion of the "mediatorial character" of the history of Israel and its prophecy in *CD IV.3.1*, 62ff.

been and continues to be read, with varying degrees of appreciation, in light of that history, especially in light of the horrific events of the Holocaust.¹²¹ Unsurprisingly, the reception of Barth's doctrine of Israel post-Holocaust was mixed, ranging from accusations of blatant antisemitism¹²² to attempts at exegeting Barth on his own terms,¹²³ and finally to considerations of Barth's outspoken solidarity with the Jews during the years between 1935 and 1945.¹²⁴ Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod concluded that, while there is much to praise in Barth's radical statement concerning Israel's enduring election after Christ's crucifixion, nonetheless "Barth's position towards Jews is ambivalent" and for all of his statements against antisemitism, there remains in Barth "an anti-Semitism made up of two parts: the traditional anti-Semitism of European Christendom...and the anti-Semitism of Christian theology."¹²⁵ Wyschogrod wished that Barth had been able to see not only "the unfaithfulness of Israel," but also "Israel's faithfulness, its obedience and trust in God, its clinging to its election, identity, and mission against all odds."¹²⁶ Of course, with his comments regarding the pre-existent church within Israel, Barth did recognize faithfulness in Israel over against its unfaithfulness. While this might be seen to redress some of Wyschogrod's complaint, his concern remains nonetheless valid, especially because Barth said nothing concerning the possibility that the Judaism of the synagogue could be an obedient witness to Israel's God. While Israel's election indeed remains in effect, unbelieving Israel remains an essentially negative sign, for Barth.

¹²¹ Cf. Mark Lindsay, *Reading Auschwitz with Barth: The Holocaust as Problem and Promise for Barthian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014) and *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian?*, ed. George Hunsinger (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018).

¹²² Talmage, ed., *Disputation and Dialogue: Readings in the Jewish-Christian Encounter*, 37-38.

¹²³ Marquardt, *EDJ*.

¹²⁴ Busch, "The Covenant of Grace Fulfilled in Christ," in *Karl Barth: Post-Holocaust Theologian?*, 37.

¹²⁵ Wyschogrod, "Why Was and Is the Theology of Karl Barth of Interest to a Jewish Theologian?" in *Abraham's Promise: Judaism and Jewish-Christian Relations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 222.

¹²⁶ Wyschogrod, "Why Was and Is the Theology of Karl Barth," 223.

One of the other principle ways that Barth's *Israellehre* has been "received" is through students of his thought who went on in their own ways to articulate theologies of Israel and Judaism, often in the shadow of their teacher, Karl Barth. It is a consideration of three of these students that will occupy me in the next chapters. Prior to that, it is worth mentioning here that Barth saw the work of theology as a perpetual and so ever-unfinished task. Indeed, he is said to have told his students that "every page of his *Dogmatics* was in need of improvement."¹²⁷ Later in life, Barth certainly understood this to be the case with respect to his *Israellehre*. Recognizing within himself a deep seated "irrational aversion" to Jews, which he called a "reprehensible instinct," he admitted that this might have "had a retrogressive effect on [his] doctrine of Israel."¹²⁸ This "retrogressive effect" did not go unnoticed by many of Barth's students, especially in post-Holocaust reappraisals of Christian theology. Principle among Barth's European students in this respect was Friedrich Wilhelm Marquardt, whose book *The Discovery of Judaism for Christian Theology: Israel in the Thought of Karl Barth* Barth read with great interest. In a letter to Marquardt, Barth acknowledged the need to address problems in his *Israellehre*. Barth also saw, however, how Marquardt's endeavors to improve him on this topic, involved certain "dangers." Barth warned him, that he

need not point out to so clever a person as yourself what dangers might arise and affect this enterprise. *Incidit in Scyllam, qui vult vitare Charybdin* [He falls into Scylla in struggling to escape Charybdis]?! May this not happen to you in the projected improvement of my first attempt! May you do it with no less wisdom than courage!¹²⁹

The "dangers" Barth referred to here are not clear, but we can imagine that he may well have feared that the danger in an improved *Israellehre* would be that in avoiding the Scylla of anti-

¹²⁷ Van Buren, *The Austin Dogmatics*, 363.

¹²⁸ Barth, *Letters*, 262.

¹²⁹ Barth, *Letters*, 263. Barth's letter to Marquardt was occasioned by the book Marquardt wrote on Barth's doctrine of Israel, Cf. *EDJ*.

Judaism, one might fall prey to the Charybdis of a natural theology. With respect to Barth's exposition of the doctrine of election, Barth's worry perhaps was that an improved *Israellehre* might seek its foundation in a concept of God's self-determination or election abstracted from the eternal election of Jesus Christ.

Chapter Two

From the Word of God to ‘the Way’ of God: The Sources and Development of Paul M. van Buren’s Theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth

Paul M. van Buren was Karl Barth’s student from 1951-1954,¹ completing his doctoral dissertation on the topic of the atonement in John Calvin under Barth’s supervision.² Three years after returning to America from studies with Barth, van Buren gave a series of lectures at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest which largely reflected his education under Barth.³ These lectures display, in significant measure, an affinity with, if not outright imitation of, Barth’s *Church Dogmatics* generally and his *Israellehre* in *CD II/2* in particular.⁴ The evidence of this affinity would be largely absent from van Buren’s next major work, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (1963).⁵ In 1961, van Buren began a significant academic foray into the philosophy of linguistic analysis driven by his concerns to understand the meaning of the Gospel for “secular man,” which led him to write *SMG*. In that book, van Buren does not discuss Israel or Judaism in any significant measure. That said, van Buren does discuss Christology in *SMG* and, as was shown in the chapter on Barth, Christology is foundational for Barth’s doctrine of Israel. Notably, in *SMG*, van Buren departs from Barth on several key points of Christology, among other doctrinal loci. While van Buren eventually came to see this work as in some

¹ Van Buren reflects enthusiastically on his experience of Barth as a teacher in “Karl Barth as Teacher,” *Religion and Intellectual Life* 2, No 2, (1985): 84-85.

² Paul Van Buren, *Christ in Our Place* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1957). Van Buren would later translate seven addresses of Barth for the book *God Here and Now* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

³ These lectures have been published as *The Austin Dogmatics: 1957-1958*. Hereafter *AD*.

⁴ Ellen Charry calls this van Buren’s “Barthian period.” See “Introduction” to *The Austin Dogmatics*, xiv.

⁵ Paul Van Buren, *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel: Based on an Analysis of Its Language* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1963). Hereafter *SMG*.

respects flawed,⁶ the departures he made from Barth in *SMG* would inevitably color his later work of systematic theology, the three volume, *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (1980, 1983, 1988).⁷ Van Buren characterized this dogmatic account of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity as his attempt to take up Barth's advice to "improve" the *CD* by attending to problems in Barth's *Israellehre*.⁸ While in the *AD* van Buren had followed Barth's theology of Israel and Judaism closely, by the time of *TJCR* he had parted ways with Barth's doctrine in significant measure, albeit self-consciously as a church theologian in continuing dialogue with Barth.

This first chapter on van Buren charts the nature and extent of the change between the *AD* and *TJCR* in order to show the ways in which van Buren is a thinker whose doctrine of Israel charts a theological path 'after Barth.' I proceed with an initial description of van Buren's theology of Israel and Judaism in *AD*, followed by an account of the departures he makes from Barth during his turn to linguistic analysis, and end with an analysis of *Discerning the Way*, the first volume of *TJCR*. In that first volume, van Buren is explicit about taking up the task of articulating an alternative to Barth's dogmatics by departing from some of his most fundamental theological presuppositions. Through the analysis of *DW*, the fundamental assumptions that van Buren brings to the theological task will thus become clear and so also the basic differences between him and Barth will be laid bare. With this established, it will then be possible in the subsequent chapter to show how van Buren's fundamental divergence from Barth with respect to the task of theology plays out in his alternative theology of Israel and Judaism.

⁶ *Discerning the Way: A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 58. Hereafter *DW*.

⁷ *DW* (1980); *A Christian Theology of the People Israel* (New York: Seabury, 1983), hereafter *CTPI*; *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality: Christ in Context* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), hereafter *CC*. When referring to the trilogy as a whole, I will use the abbreviation *TJCR*.

⁸ For a detailed biographical account of van Buren's theological journey, including some of the reasons for his change of mind with respect to his thinking about the relationship between Christianity and Judaism, see "Reminiscence 3" in *Austin Dogmatics*, 347-366.

The Austin Dogmatics: Israel and Judaism as Witnesses to God’s Self-Revelation in Jesus Christ

In her preface to *The Austin Dogmatics*, Charry notes that these lectures constitute “the introduction of Barthian theology into the United States.”⁹ Indeed, these lectures stand as a remarkable summary and reworking of Barth’s massive work of theology. The similarities between *AD* and Barth’s *CD* are evident from the very first lecture, in which van Buren discusses “The Place and Task of Dogmatics” in a manner that could have been taken right off a page from Barth’s *CD* I/1. Indeed, as one progresses from start to finish through the lectures, it is clear that van Buren is reproducing the same basic dogmatic structure as Barth: beginning with the Word of God and moving steadily from there to the doctrines of God, Creation (which he includes under the doctrine of God), and Redemption.¹⁰ In addition, each lecture begins with a synopsis of the lecture. In true Barthian fashion, van Buren names the Word of God as “the criterion of Dogmatics” and defines the Word of God as “God in the action of his self-revelation.”¹¹ These and other significant similarities will stand out all the more in the analysis of *TJCR* below where van Buren explicitly parts ways with the above criterion and definition. For now, however, it is important to look at van Buren’s account of “election” or “predestination” in *AD* as it was in Barth’s account of this doctrine that we saw his doctrine of Israel come to full expression.

In van Buren’s doctrine of election, he follows Barth closely by giving an account of election as God’s eternal self-determination and by including the election of the community under the election of Jesus Christ. It is worth quoting van Buren at length to show the similarity:

The heart of the Christian gospel is the good news of God’s decision: that God has chosen us for himself and has freely ordained himself to be our free lover. The doctrine of election is derived from the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who is in One the choosing

⁹ Charry, “Preface,” in Paul M. van Buren, *The Austin Dogmatics*, xiii.

¹⁰ Charry notes the slight differences in the ordering of van Buren’s lectures in her “Introduction” in *The Austin Dogmatics*, xxiv-xxv.

¹¹ *AD*, 25.

God and the chosen man, in whom God took upon himself the rejection of sinful humanity and chose us to participate in his glory. The election of Jesus Christ is at the same time the eternal election of a congregation to bear witness of Jesus Christ to the world—and to every individual—that he belongs to Jesus Christ from eternity and is chosen in Jesus Christ. It is to call the world to faith in him by whom everyone's rejection is borne and removed.¹²

A number of key phrases in this synopsis warrant attention here with respect to Barth's doctrine of election and its relationship to his doctrine of Israel. First, note that van Buren repeats Barth's twofold structure of God's self-determining choice in that it involves both God's choice of human beings "for himself" and of "himself to be our free lover." Van Buren's account of this twofold structure rests on Barth's claim that in God's self-determination, God determined Godself for reprobation and humanity for a share in his glory:

Not only does God take us to himself to share in his glory in Christ, but in Christ God also took upon himself the rejection of God by us and the consequences of our decision to be rejected by God. In Christ is to be seen, not only man the elect, but also man the rejected, or as the old theology called it, man the reprobate.¹³

Next, note that van Buren makes the doctrine of election dependent on "the knowledge of Jesus Christ" as the "choosing God" and "chosen man" in one. In God's choosing, God does not issue a *decretum absolutum* about unknown individuals but rather makes a "self-determination" that determines the creature for grace. This self-determination is concrete in that it can be known by revelation as God's decision to "deal with us by dealing with Jesus Christ."¹⁴ Statements like the above demonstrate the extent to which van Buren follows Barth's doctrine of election. In fact, he goes so far as to say that if "you throw out the eternal predestination of man in Christ to sonship" then "you throw out the Christian doctrine of God at its very center."¹⁵

¹² *AD*, 120.

¹³ *AD*, 128-129.

¹⁴ *AD*, 124. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵ *AD*, 126.

Most significant for present purposes in this analysis of van Buren's account of the doctrine of election are the claims he makes concerning the election of a "congregation." He follows Barth in asserting that divine election, as the self-determination of God to be for humanity in Jesus Christ, includes the election of a "congregation."¹⁶ As was shown in the previous chapter, Barth's account of the eternal election of Jesus Christ provides the basic framework through which he understands the election of the one community of God made up of Israel and the church. Israel and the church are witnesses to Christ that serve God by attesting to the judgment and mercy of God revealed in Christ's death and resurrection, by hearing and believing the promise of God as it was fulfilled in Christ, and by embracing the form of existence given it under the covenant as it moves through death and into new life. In many respects, van Buren follows Barth on these points as well, but in a less systematic fashion.

For van Buren, Israel and the church are conceived as one community whose history is to be seen, in the witness of the Old and New Testaments together, as forming "a composite picture of the event of God's self-disclosure..."¹⁷ This one community is, as it is for Barth, one in its twofold aspect as a movement within the community from one form of existence to another. God's covenant with Israel, for van Buren, is a movement from the "old Israel" to the "new Israel" made up of Jews and Gentiles, also called the church.¹⁸ He thus consistently applies the term "Israel" to both Israel "after the flesh" and to Israel expanded into a community of Jews and Gentiles. For both Barth and van Buren, there can be no question of these being two different communities, rather they must be one because they are elect in Jesus Christ, the elected human and the electing God. As van Buren puts it, since God's covenant was first a covenant with "one

¹⁶ Van Buren translates Barth's *Gemeinde* as "congregation," while the English translation of Barth's *CD II/2* translate it as "community."

¹⁷ *AD*, 86.

¹⁸ *AD*, 132.

man as his Israel,” namely Jesus Christ who “was Israel in himself...,” there can be no question of the community of Israel being replaced by a new community.¹⁹ “Israel” thus also functions in the *AD* as a shorthand for Jesus who is the supreme and effective representative of humanity before God and God before humanity. “Old” Israel and “new Israel,” in their unity, serve God by reflecting the true Israel of God and so also take up this “representative” role in their own way as “Israel.” That old and new Israel take up this representative role is not to say that they themselves accomplish the effective representation of humanity before God. It is only Jesus who “acts for and is acted on in the place of and for the sake of the others” for their salvation.²⁰ Old Israel’s representative role was to be “the bearer in the world of God’s eternal election of humankind” that became a fulfilled reality in Jesus.²¹ New Israel’s representative role is now to “make known what it knows,” namely, that God has chosen from all eternity to be gracious to all of humanity in Jesus Christ. Earlier in the *AD*, in his chapter on “The Witness to Revelation,” van Buren put it thus: “Old Israel is a pre-reflection of the true Israel, as the church is called to be a post-reflection.”²² In both cases, it is a question of the role of the community of “Israel” in service of Jesus who is in himself the fulfillment or fullness of Israel.

While it is clear that van Buren employs much of Barth’s terminology throughout his account of the election of a congregation, nowhere does he explicitly use Barth’s language of Israel being “determined for hearing” or given a “passing form” in their election, as Barth did. It

¹⁹ *AD*, 130, 131. In her introduction to the *Austin Dogmatics*, Charry seems to present van Buren’s portrayal of Jesus as “Israel *tout court*” as unique to van Buren. She notes: “Christ not only represents but also is Israel in the narrative of salvation, so that Israel assumes heroic proportions” (xxvi). It seems to me, however, that Barth also assumes this, as is evident, for example, in the following passage: “Strictly speaking, he [Jesus] alone is Israel” (*CD* II/2, 214).

²⁰ *AD*, 130.

²¹ *AD*, 131.

²² *AD*, 86. This structure essentially accords with Barth’s account of the Old and New Testament witnesses as existing in, on the one hand, the time of “expectation” (*der Erwartung*) and “prophecy,” and on the other hand, in the time of “recollection” (*der Erinnerung*) and faith. Van Buren repeats this schema earlier in the *Austin Dogmatics* when he speaks of the two Testaments bearing witness “by anticipation” (an alternate translation of *der Erwartung*) and “by remembrance” (an alternate translation of *der Erinnerung*). (85)

is clear, however, that van Buren worked implicitly with these Barthian conceptions. In van Buren's account of Israel and the church as called to serve a "representative" or "representational" role as the elect congregation, this is especially evident.²³ Old and new Israel are called to be witnesses to "God's self-revelation" in which he comes "in judgment and mercy to his people."²⁴ What differentiates old Israel from new Israel is that while the former's witness could only "foreshadow" God's eternal purpose, the latter knows "what God has done for the whole world in Jesus Christ."²⁵ In this formulation of the difference between old Israel and new Israel one might hear an echo of Barth's claim that Israel is determined for hearing and the church for believing in the promise. For Barth and van Buren, while old Israel hears, it does not fully understand and neither did it believe. In light of the resurrection, however, new Israel knows what old Israel did not and further, those in the congregation of new Israel "believe on him, and so are sent by this calling out to the entire world with the good news of God's eternal decision enacted in Christ."²⁶ Old Israel's rejection of this good news, for van Buren, does nothing to invalidate or destroy "Israel as the witness of God's truth."²⁷ Like Barth, van Buren makes this claim not only with respect to "old" Israel, but also with respect to Israel's enduring witness to God in the form of "the synagogue":

Israel was called for this particular function [to be a witness to God's truth], and Israel must serve this function. If it will not bear witness to God's mercy, then it must go on and bear witness to God's judgment...As the church exists to bear witness to the grace of

²³ AD, 130. While van Buren does not speak about Israel and the Church as serving "the representation" (*der Darstellung*) of divine judgment and mercy as Barth did, he does employ the terms "representative" and "representational" in the sense of "witness" in a way that is essentially in step with Barth's use of *der Darstellung*. Thus, there is little doubt that van Buren would have had Barth's diverse terminology in mind here: Israel's witness has a "representational" (*darstellerisch, figürlich, abbildlich*) or "representative" (*repräsentativ, darstellend, stellvertretend*) aspect to it.

²⁴ AD, 78.

²⁵ AD, 131.

²⁶ AD, 131.

²⁷ AD, 132.

God, so the synagogue continues among us, a witness to the world of the judgment of God.²⁸

Biblical Israel, but also the living Jew, are thus “a mirror in which we see our rebellion,” for van Buren.²⁹ In spite of the fact that van Buren does not systematically frame his engagement with Israel and the church by the twofold formulations of “judgment and mercy” and “passing and coming,” the above is enough to demonstrate that he essentially adopts Barth’s approach of including his doctrine of Israel and Judaism within the doctrine of election. Israel and the church are conceived as one community, called to serve God by witnessing to the judgment and mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ. The existence of Israel (and living Jews) is determined “on the basis of God’s having spoken,” but while Israel receives and hears this spoken Word, it does not believe and so stands as a mirror of human rebellion against God.³⁰ Finally, as “old” Israel must make way for “new” Israel in the history of the covenant, “old” Israel represents that form of life that invariably must pass away in order to rise to new life.

For van Buren, there can thus be no turning “our back on the Jew” or forgetting the unity of Jew and Gentile in the church as this would be tantamount to turning our back on the unity of God and humanity in Jesus Christ.³¹ As Barth did in *CD II/2*, van Buren follows this implication through to its socio-political end, arguing that antisemitism is thus contrary to the Gospel. Unique to van Buren’s understanding of the unity of Jew and Gentile, however, is his application of it to the pressing issue of his own socio-political context, applying the oneness of Jew and Gentile to the issue of racial “integration” in America. He notes:

²⁸ *AD*, 132. In a footnote to this passage, Charry comments that van Buren had “indicated a desire to delete this sentence” but that she opted to keep it to show “the Barthian position on the Jews that van Buren would later repudiate and seek to redress” (132fn19). Later in this chapter and then in the next chapter I will take up van Buren’s attempt to “repudiate” and “redress” this position.

²⁹ Barth expressed this motif most succinctly in his essay “The Jewish Question and the Christian Answer,” in *Against the Stream: Shorter Post-War Writings 1946-52* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), 193-201.

³⁰ *AD*, 31.

³¹ *AD*, 132.

“[t]he scandal of a segregated church on color lines—that as Christians we not only will not worship together, but we will not live together and work together in the world—makes the world’s segregation seem positively virtuous.... segregation in the church...is a denial of the gospel.”³²

After the *AD*, it would not be long before van Buren took a different direction in his research and writing, engaging in scholarship on linguistic analysis and the question of the meaningfulness of talk of God in a secular world.³³ In a 1981 letter to Franklin Littel, van Buren described the last conversation that he had with Barth about this new direction. The conversation took place in 1961 around the time van Buren was working on what would become his most well-known book from this period, namely *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (hereafter *SMG*). Van Buren described the conversation as “for both of us in some ways painful,” as Barth did not approve of the direction he was taking.³⁴ While van Buren saw this shift in direction as carrying forward many of Barth’s insights, Barth did not see it that way. Barth instead urged van Buren to improve upon Barth’s own dogmatic endeavor instead, since “every page of his *Dogmatics* was in need of improvement.”³⁵ To Barth’s disappointment, van Buren would not take his advice; at least not at first.³⁶ Later van Buren would return to the task of dogmatics with his three-volume *JCSR*. To understand the origins of his departures from Barth in that later work, however, it is necessary to attend to the early departures he makes from Barth in *SMG*.

³² *AD*, 132-133.

³³ This new direction resulted in several book-length publications related to the topic of linguistic analysis that were released between 1963 and 1972: *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* (1963), *Theological Explorations* (London: SCM Press, 1968), and *The Edges of Language: An Essay in the Logic of a Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1972).

³⁴ *AD*, 363.

³⁵ *AD*, 362-363.

³⁶ Barth’s disappointment with van Buren is evidenced in Barth’s letters. In a letter from December, 1963 (Barth, *Letters*, 145), written by Barth to Prof. Grover Foley in Austin, Texas, Barth contrasts the good theology of John W. Deschner, with “the company of Korah in the persons of Paul van Buren and S. Ogden [Schubert M. Ogden]...” Barth’s appeal to the “company of Korah” is a reference to Numbers 16 which outlines the rebellious “company of Korah” who challenge Moses’ authority during the Israelite’s wilderness journey, only to find themselves eventually swallowed up by the earth (Num. 16:32). In a letter from February 1964, recounted in Eberhard Busch’s biography of Barth, Barth is quoted as saying that van Buren “rushed so wildly out of my school” (Busch, *Karl Barth*, 403).

Linguistic Analysis and “The Secular Meaning of the Gospel”

In her introduction to *AD*, Charry identifies van Buren’s involvement in two ministries in and around the Detroit Area as key motivating experiences driving his concerns with what he would later call the “secular meaning of the Gospel.” One of those ministries was an intentional community called “Parishfield,” which sought to “re-envision Christian ministry as the work of the laity in the world, especially the workplace and the inner city.”³⁷ The other ministry was the Detroit Industrial Mission (DIM), “an outreach ministry to the industrial workers and management of the city...that sought to carry the gospel onto the shop floor.” Van Buren served in the role of advisor for that ministry.³⁸ Prior to van Buren’s time lecturing on Dogmatics at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, in other words, he was exposed to what he saw as the difficulties of communicating the Gospel in traditional religious language to people who were decidedly “in the world,” with no religious background.³⁹

If these ministries served as experiential impetus for van Buren’s concerns over developing a gospel language that could speak meaningfully to “secular” people, he found help academically in an unexpected source. In his reminiscence of van Buren following his death, his colleague Thomas J. Dean, then Professor of Religion at Temple University (where van Buren taught for many years), said this regarding van Buren’s discovery of linguistic analysis:

While at the Episcopal Seminary of the Southwest, Paul attended a seminar at the University of Texas on Wittgenstein given by the philosopher William Poteat. Up to that time, Paul had always been opposed to philosophy—a legacy of his days under Barth and the suspicion of speculative metaphysics or anything hinting of a ‘natural theology.’ But Wittgenstein’s understanding of philosophy as linguistic analysis was a whole different ball game and opened up for Paul a new vista for how philosophy could be placed in the

³⁷ *AD*, xx. Charry notes that van Buren was Parishfield’s “main theological mind” (xxi).

³⁸ *AD*, xxi.

³⁹ Charry notes how already the *AD*, although very rooted in a Barthian approach, nonetheless show signs of what was to come in van Buren’s *SMG*.

service of religion. In any case, Paul resolved to recast the traditional supernatural language of theology into the ‘ordinary language’ of the secular age.⁴⁰

What did Ludwig Wittgenstein’s philosophy of linguistic analysis offer van Buren in his pursuit of a gospel language that would make sense to “secular man”? To answer this question, it is helpful to turn to *SMG*. In the preface, van Buren defines secularism broadly as a “reaction to” or even a “revolt against Idealism.” Following from this broad definition, van Buren defines “secular man” not just as a person who lives outside of and independent of the church, but as a person fully integrated into the modern age who is also a part of the church.⁴¹ This modern church member, however, faces a challenge: how to reconcile belonging in the church with his belonging to the modern world “in which men no longer believe in a transcendent realm where their longings will be fulfilled.”⁴² Van Buren suggests that the most helpful responses available to reconcile these two worlds are those found in the movements of linguistic analysis and biblical theology. Van Buren associates linguistic analysis primarily with figures like Ludwig Wittgenstein, Anthony Flew, Ian Ramsey, R.M. Hare, and R.B. Braithwaite. On the other hand, he associates biblical theology with a wide range of Protestant theologians, influenced by Albert Ritschl and his school, with whom they shared the assumption that “we [moderns] can more easily understand the thought of the biblical writers than that of the Fathers.”⁴³ The “common

⁴⁰ *AD*, 357-358.

⁴¹ *SMG*, 20. Interpreting Bonhoeffer’s call for a religionless Christianity, he notes: “Modern man is not ‘out there’ to be spoken to; he is within the being of every Christian trying to understand” (2). In this way, van Buren saw *SMG* as not principally a book for the secular person with no Christian faith, but for Christians who wished to understand their faith in a secular way.

⁴² *SMG*, 1-2.

⁴³ *SMG*, 45. Adolf von Harnack, one of Barth’s teachers, was influenced by Ritschl and carried forward his assumptions regarding the Fathers. Barth objected to many aspects of his liberal-Protestant teacher’s thought; however, Charry suggests that Barth’s goal of constructing a “pure theology, free of reliance on anything but divine revelation” makes him a “radical” Harnackian (*AD*, xxv). Whether or not Charry’s claim is correct, especially given Barth’s continual sympathetic return to the Fathers throughout the *CD*, is the subject of another study. Van Buren follows the Ritschl-Harnack line in many respects; however, he also follows Barth in noting the importance of attending closely to the Fathers. He also acknowledges the questionable nature of the Ritschlian thesis, noting that “Whether biblical theology does in fact understand the thought world of the Bible better than did the Fathers is perhaps a judgment best left to history” *SMG*, 45.

feature” between the linguistic analysis and biblical theology movements, according to him, is that they both “feature certain empirical attitudes,” namely, “a deep interest in questions of human life this side of the ‘beyond,’ and a corresponding lack of interest in what were once felt to be great metaphysical questions.”⁴⁴ Inasmuch as the “secular” may be defined as a revolt against idealism and metaphysics, linguistic analysis and biblical theology can be seen allies for those seeking a “secular” understanding of the Gospel.

Van Buren acknowledges, however, that representatives of biblical theology are not all in agreement as to how modern Christians should understand and communicate the Gospel message. Here, van Buren invokes Rudolf Bultmann and his critics on the right (Barth) and on the left (the American Schubert Ogden) as representative of an impasse in Protestant theology concerning this question.⁴⁵ Barth, van Buren claims, prizes biblical language concerning Jesus Christ with limited concern for translating ancient thought into modern thought; without, that is, sufficiently considering the full historical contextuality of modern people as an important factor in communicating the gospel.⁴⁶ Bultmann, on the other hand, tries to balance the concerns of reaching “modern man” with a demythologized language he can understand, with the indispensability of the historical kerygma concerning Christ. This balancing act, as van Buren sees it, leaves the door open for Barth to critique him for giving too much concern to “modern man” and Ogden to critique him for keeping too much of the mythological content of the

⁴⁴SMG, xiii-xiv.

⁴⁵ The characterization of Bultmann and Barth in terms of “left” and “right” is van Buren’s.

⁴⁶ SMG, 7-9. Barth, for van Buren, is not concerned with finding a “secular” understanding of the Gospel because understanding “comes only on the basis of faith, not apart from it...Either one stands in faith (*fides qua creditur*) and seeks to understand what one believes (*fides quae creditur*), or one stands outside faith and cannot understand the Gospel at all” (SMG, 8).

Gospel.⁴⁷ Resources for overcoming the impasse between those ‘right’ and ‘left’ of Bultmann, can be found, for van Buren, in “the logical analysis of theological statements.”⁴⁸

For van Buren, those who practice linguistic analysis are fundamentally concerned with “the function of language, and their method lies in the logical analysis of how words and statements function, both in normal and in abnormal use.”⁴⁹ While pursuing an understanding of the “meaning” of the Gospel, therefore, a linguistic analyst would look at words or statements used by a practitioner of Christianity in order to discern “the way it [the word or statement] functions in actual use” in a given context.⁵⁰ The reason the linguistic analysts would do this, according to van Buren, is because they assume that the “meaning of a word is identical with its use,” rather than assuming that the meaning of a word may exist independently of its use.⁵¹ Adopting this principle, van Buren is convinced that the “impasses” reached in Protestant theology are a result of “bad” or “unworkable” language which has created a gap between the meaning of the Gospel and its use. These impasses can be overcome, therefore, not by finding “new information” but rather by new arrangements of “what we have always known.”⁵² With this in mind, van Buren proceeds in two primary stages in *SMG*. The first is therapeutic as he aims “to describe and arrange...the conservative concern for Christology, the ‘liberal’ concern with a contemporary way of thinking, and the logical analysis of theological statements.”⁵³ The assumption is, by accurately describing and arranging the concerns of all three, the problems and possible solutions to those problems can be seen in a new light. Van Buren is admittedly vague

⁴⁷ *SMG*, 6.

⁴⁸ *SMG*, 18.

⁴⁹ *SMG*, 14.

⁵⁰ *SMG*, 16.

⁵¹ *SMG*, 16. Here van Buren is drawing on Wittgenstein’s arguments in his *Philosophical Investigations*.

⁵² *SMG*, 17, 81.

⁵³ *SMG*, 18.

about this “new light,” but asks his reader to follow him in what is essentially a “conversation.”⁵⁴

The second stage, is to “develop the consequences of this arrangement and the resulting method in sufficient detail to make clear their possibilities and limitations” for a secular meaning of the Gospel.⁵⁵

In the first stage, van Buren describes the “conservative” concern for Christology. He begins with an historical survey of “the way” or the process that led to the creation of the dogmatic statements of Chalcedon in A.D. 451.⁵⁶ With sympathy, van Buren charts all the major figures leading up to Chalcedon and their chief concerns: Justin Martyr, Origen, Arius, Athanasius, Apollinaris, and Cyril of Alexandria. He then turns to modern evaluations of Chalcedon, noting the negative evaluations of it in the school of Albert Ritschl, with Adolf von Harnack being his “most illustrious” student.⁵⁷ In these figures a drastic contrast between “Greek” and “Hebrew” thinking dominated, and a sharp division was made between the historical Jesus and the “Christ of faith.”⁵⁸ Turning to Barth, van Buren notes his reaction against Ritschl’s devaluation of dogma, and admires the fact that he “learned from the sixteenth century Reformers to listen to the Fathers with care and attention.”⁵⁹ This, according to van Buren, led Barth to a sympathetic reading of the Christology of the Fathers, especially their “stress on the divine hypostasis” as the basis for the existence of the humanity of Christ.⁶⁰ Barth, for van Buren, represents the modern theologian whose analysis of the Fathers is the most helpful for achieving a sympathetic understanding of patristic theology. However, it is just at this point that

⁵⁴ *SMG*, 20.

⁵⁵ *SMG*, 19.

⁵⁶ *SMG*, 23-32.

⁵⁷ *SMG*, 33.

⁵⁸ *SMG*, 33.

⁵⁹ *SMG*, 34-35.

⁶⁰ *SMG*, 36.

van Buren thinks that Barth has given too much weight to patristic categories and concerns. As he puts it:

the fact remains that these thoughts are those of the Fathers in their own time. Their Christology was their own interpretation of the message of the New Testament. Even if it is taken at its best and with all possible sympathy, however, it is not free of problems for us...⁶¹

What problems does van Buren allude to here? According to him, patristic Christology simply “did not do justice to the [humanity] of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁶² Patristic Christology, particularly the notion of the divine hypostasis, failed, according to van Buren, to account for a Jesus who was “fully man.”⁶³ Van Buren describes what is lacking in the Fathers this way:

Our condition as [human beings] is that of beings who have our own hypostasis, whose existence in history is, apart from what may be said by the doctrine of creation and providence, grounded in history. According to orthodox classical Christology, Jesus did not share this condition. He entered into the place where we are, but he was not grounded in this place as we are. He was a visitor, not a member of the family. In this respect, orthodox classical Christology is inadequate to meet its own goals.⁶⁴

Barth is thus implicated with the Fathers in not showing interest in “the historical and biographical details of Jesus’ life.”⁶⁵ What scripture says about the “history” of Jesus, for Barth, is that it was the history “of God’s gracious act in and for his world.”⁶⁶ This is not enough for van Buren.

This criticism leads to van Buren’s description of a Christology that can more fully account for the humanity of Jesus in his concrete history. Modern biblical theology, according to van Buren, has rightly emphasized the importance of “the Covenant” as central to an understanding of the Gospel. The language of “covenant” emphasizes the “historical character of

⁶¹ *SMG*, 38.

⁶² *SMG*, 38.

⁶³ *SMG*, 40.

⁶⁴ *SMG*, 40.

⁶⁵ *SMG*, 118.

⁶⁶ *SMG*, 119.

the event of God’s self-revelation” as well as “the importance of obedience as the proper response of man in God’s Covenant.”⁶⁷ This, according to van Buren, is what was missing in patristic theology and what might thus account for the supposed inadequacy of their Christology. This, of course, raises the question, what kind of Christology arises from a focus on “covenant?” Van Buren argues that a Christological title such as “Son of God,” for example, should be understood, from the perspective of the covenant, as Jesus’ identity as “the obedient bearer of a specific election or commission.”⁶⁸ This conception on Jesus’ identity as son suggests, according to van Buren, “a Christology of ‘call’ and ‘response.’”⁶⁹ Jesus’ identity as one “from God” and “sent by God” (both Johannine expressions) need not refer to a pre-existent Logos, but, like Moses, to a person “to whom God has spoken and who is obedient to Yahweh’s will.”⁷⁰ Van Buren recognizes the ways this construal takes on “the weaknesses of the ‘adoption’ Christology” but argues that “those weaknesses need not disqualify this alternative to the incarnational Christology of the Fathers.”⁷¹ The “word” of God concerning Jesus’ commission, while eternal as God’s “decision” and “plan” in the beginning, need not be understood as “an ideal entity, but as an action leading to a relationship.”⁷² According to van Buren, this conception of “word” avoids the “pagan idea of a transmutation of the divine into the physical.”⁷³

What van Buren presumes to have described here is a covenantal understanding of Christology derived from the biblical theology movement. In this covenantal understanding of Christology, the idea of the “Logos” or “Eternal Son” is “interpreted as Yahweh’s purpose, the

⁶⁷ *SMG*, 45. Van Buren will return to this critique in volume 3 of his *TJCR*.

⁶⁸ *SMG*, 48.

⁶⁹ *SMG*, 48.

⁷⁰ *SMG*, 49.

⁷¹ *SMG*, 50.

⁷² *SMG*, 52.

⁷³ *SMG*, 52. Or, as van Buren puts it elsewhere, “...if the Logos, which is God, has really been made flesh, as orthodox theology has maintained, then we have no need to speak about anything other than this ‘flesh’ which dwelt among us” (*SMG*, 183).

expression of his very self.”⁷⁴ According to van Buren, this formulation prohibits the believer from speaking of a Jesus existing “independently of Yahweh’s purpose” and secures his uniqueness as the one who “stands apart from all the others...in that he was obedient to his calling...[and in that] they only learn obedience by relying solely on the obedience of him.”⁷⁵ At the same time, this formulation provides what the Fathers supposedly did not, a Jesus who was truly human in that he was “as involved in life, as mixed up in politics, as much in the middle of human hate and love, friendship and enmity, as it is possible for man to be, and he was like this in fulfilling his calling to be present for others.”⁷⁶ With the description of the type of Christology made possible by biblical theology in place, van Buren states that from the perspective of the “left,” even this type of Christological revision is too “mythological in form, if not in content.”⁷⁷ He thus turns to consider the concerns of the “theological ‘left,’” represented especially by the American Bultmannian, Schubert Ogden.⁷⁸

For the purposes of this chapter, van Buren’s lengthy analysis and description of Ogden’s appreciation of and concerns with Bultmann need not be unpacked in detail. What is relevant is van Buren’s description of what he appreciates and dislikes about Ogden and Bultmann’s proposal. First, van Buren appreciates the effort both make to present an understanding of the New Testament without a naïve assumption of the “mythological world-picture in which the New Testament message is clothed.”⁷⁹ As an alternative to this mythological world-picture, Bultmann appeals to Heidegger’s philosophy of existence to propose an understanding of the New Testament as proclamation of humanity’s “original possibility of authentic historical

⁷⁴ *SMG*, 54.

⁷⁵ *SMG*, 54.

⁷⁶ *SMG*, 54.

⁷⁷ *SMG*, 55.

⁷⁸ *SMG*, 57ff.

⁷⁹ *SMG*, 58-59.

(*geschichtlich*) existence,” made actual in history “only because of the particular historical (*historisch*) event of Jesus of Nazareth.”⁸⁰ Ogden, according to van Buren, adopts Bultmann’s proposal but abandons even the necessity of the event of Jesus of Nazareth as the basis of authentic existence. This approach, for van Buren, will not do, and if anything reveals deep problems for him with the theological presuppositions of the left, including their borrowing from Heidegger. He thus proceeds to present five criticisms of the left’s alternative to traditional Christology. Three of the criticisms claim that the left does not actually meet the needs of communicating the gospel in a language appropriate to “the secular, empirical spirit of our age.”⁸¹ Instead of using the word “God,” for example, they appeal to a “highly or subtly qualified phrase such as ‘our ultimate concern.’”⁸² The other two criticisms claim that the left fails to do justice to “the historical aspect of the Gospel” about Jesus Christ.⁸³ Van Buren thus ends up with criticisms of both the right and the left and claims that their common failure arises from a depreciation of the “historical” and “empirical” existence of the person Jesus of Nazareth.⁸⁴

Van Buren then turns in the following chapter to the concerns of linguistic analysts, particularly those that use linguistic analysis to examine the language of faith. Here he draws upon several authors including Flew, Ramsey, Hare, and Braithwaite. Again, the present context does not necessitate a full examination of van Buren’s description of each of these authors and their concerns. What is important is the conclusion he reaches from his analysis, namely, that

⁸⁰ *SMG*, 61-62. Here Bultmann’s distinction between two different conceptions of “history” is on display. The distinction has its origins in Martin Kahler, *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historical-Biblical Christ* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishing, 1964). The original German title shows the distinction at work: *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der geschichtliche, biblische Christus*.) As David W. Congdon argues, Bultmann associates *Historie* with “facts that can be established by critical historical methods and associates *Geschichte* with the interpretation of these facts and the awakening of meaning.” David W. Congdon, *Rudolf Bultmann: A Companion to His Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 91.

⁸¹ *SMG*, 74.

⁸² *SMG*, 170. Here, with the reference to “ultimate concern,” van Buren includes Paul Tillich in the ranks with Ogden.

⁸³ *SMG*, 74.

⁸⁴ *SMG*, 79.

Hare and Braithwaite are right about the language of Christian faith on two accounts. First, he claims that they are right to reject “simple literal theism” which still argues for a conception of God as one who literally could be found “walking in the garden of Eden.”⁸⁵ In this rejection they are in accord with Bultmann’s demythologizing programme. They are right, as well, for van Buren, to extend the above rejection into a rejection also of a “qualified literal theism,” which attempts to make something meaningful of the language of theism by qualifying its key assertions until they become more palatable to modern ears. In rejecting this qualified theism, they diverge from Bultmann. Second, and importantly for van Buren, Hare and Brainwaite are also right to argue nonetheless that “the language of faith does have a meaning, and that this meaning can be explored and clarified by linguistic analysis.”⁸⁶ Van Buren is especially appreciative of Hare’s use of the concept of a “blik,” which he defines as “a perspective entailing a commitment.”⁸⁷ Applying the concept of the “blik” to the question of Christology, van Buren argues that “the language of Christology is language about Jesus of Nazareth on the part of those for whom he has been the occasion and remains the definition of their ‘blik.’”⁸⁸ Implied in this formulation, then, is the fact that the “language of Christian faith is the language of a believer, one who has been ‘caught’ by the Gospel.”⁸⁹ In order to understand the language of faith, then, one must examine that language as it actually functions in the life of the believer.⁹⁰ The language of faith is “not a set of cosmological assertions” but rather must be “taken to refer to the Christian way of life.”⁹¹ Van Buren puts it this way:

The Christian ‘way of life,’ an expression recalling the New Testament designation of life in Christ as ‘the Way’ (Acts 9:2), is central to the linguistic interpretation we have been

⁸⁵ *SMG*, 91.

⁸⁶ *SMG*, 100.

⁸⁷ *SMG*, 91.

⁸⁸ *SMG*, 91.

⁸⁹ *SMG*, 100.

⁹⁰ *SMG*, 101.

⁹¹ *SMG*, 101.

considering. It contains elements of wonder, awe, and worship, but it is bound up with a basic conviction concerning the world and man's place in it which bears directly on decision and actions.⁹²

Here van Buren returns to the key insight of linguistic analysis: the meaning of a word or a statement is identical with its use or function. Problems of language occur when there is in an act of communication between a speaker and a hearer, a lack of correspondence between the meaning of the words and their function in the life of the speaker. Van Buren makes the same point with reference to the warning linguistic analysts give about mixing words from different "language-games."⁹³ Given that words will function differently in different language-games, the key to understanding is found in being able to identify the language-game being played.⁹⁴

This leads van Buren to ask what kind of language game or games find expression in the Gospel concerning Jesus of Nazareth. The first thing that van Buren notes is that the language of the Gospel "will involve us in talking about history," history here being understood as "an answering of questions about human action in the past."⁹⁵ Since the Christian faith is eminently about the history of Jesus Christ, it is to this history that van Buren turns. Of course, such a "turn" begs the question of which source gives one access to this history. This leads him to a recognition of the modern "quest" for the historical Jesus, including its basic methodological problems.⁹⁶ Dismissing the presumptions of the original quest, Van Buren nonetheless accepts, for the purposes of argument, the consensus of the "new" quest, since the new quest argues that

⁹² *SMG*, 101. Here van Buren mentions for the first time, but certainly not the last time, the concept of "the Way" as an alternative to the key concepts of the "right" and the "left." He will return to this concept in the first volume of *TJCR*, using it as an interpretive framework for considering the "Jewish-Christian Reality."

⁹³ This is, again, a reference to Wittgenstein.

⁹⁴ *SMG*, 105.

⁹⁵ *SMG*, 110.

⁹⁶ Here van Buren refers to Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede* (New York: Macmillan, 1968) as the turning point from the Old to the New quest.

it is at least possible to catch “glimpses” of the historical Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospels.⁹⁷

Using the “new” quest as his point of departure, van Buren then proceeds to give an interpretation of the history of Jesus, Easter, and the Gospel using the key assumptions of linguistic analysis.

Jesus, says van Buren, is depicted by the Gospels as “a remarkably free” human being.⁹⁸ He was recognized as a person of “authority,” who was free in his “openness to friend and foe,” free from “familial claims,” free from the “need for status,” and free also from the claims of his tradition, even as he continued to keep many of the “religious rites” of the Jews.⁹⁹ Most importantly, Jesus expressed his freedom in “humble service to others.”¹⁰⁰ Ultimately, because Jesus lived his life “free,” he was led to his death by the hands of “fearful and defensive men.”¹⁰¹ On the basis of his definition of history as the attempt to answer questions about human action in the past, van Buren says that “we can go this far in understanding Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁰² Van Buren recognizes, however, that this historical description of Jesus is clearly not the same as “faith” in Jesus. Faith in Jesus arises at Easter, an event that is not accessible to the historian. What is accessible, however, is “the situation before Easter” and the “consequences of the Easter event.”¹⁰³ After the Easter event, the disciples spoke about Easter in language that can be analyzed. Van Buren summarizes his interpretation of the language of Easter this way:

Two days later, Peter, and then other disciples, had an experience of which Jesus was the sense-content. They experienced a discernment situation in which Jesus the free man whom they had known, themselves, and indeed the whole world, were seen in a quite new way. From that moment, the disciples began to possess something of the freedom of Jesus. His freedom began to be ‘contagious.’ For the disciples, therefore, the story of

⁹⁷ *SMG*, 120. The key figures van Buren appeals to from the “new” quest, all students of Bultmann, are Günther Bornkamm, Ernst Fuchs, and Gerhard Ebeling.

⁹⁸ *SMG*, 121.

⁹⁹ *SMG*, 121-122.

¹⁰⁰ *SMG*, 123.

¹⁰¹ *SMG*, 123.

¹⁰² *SMG*, 124.

¹⁰³ *SMG*, 128.

Jesus could not be told simply as the story of a free man who had died. Because of the new way in which the disciples saw him and because of what had happened to them, the story had to include the event of Easter.¹⁰⁴

Building on this account of Jesus and Easter, van Buren goes on to develop the consequences for the “meaning” of the gospel.

The Gospel, according to him, is a “historical perspective,” in that it has Jesus of Nazareth as its “point of orientation.”¹⁰⁵ Importantly, however, while the Gospel is grounded in the particular history of Jesus of Nazareth, those who commit themselves to that history do not describe their commitment as if it involved the choice between “one point of view among many,” rather they use language that suggests they were “chosen” by the free human, Jesus of Nazareth.¹⁰⁶ In turn, the believer uses language that expresses their “commitment to a way of life” centered on Jesus of Nazareth in terms of a “response.”¹⁰⁷ Here van Buren’s description of a covenantal Christology of “call” and “response” reappears.¹⁰⁸ In this context van Buren refers to the concept of election, although now in language notably different from the Barthian turns of phrase that he had employed in the *AD*:

The statements that Jesus was ‘called by God’ to be the one man who was free to be for all the others, that he ‘bore the divine election’ of Israel to be a light for the Gentiles, that his history ‘was the enactment of God’s eternal plan and purpose,’ if taken to be cosmological assertions, are meaningless in the terms of the empirical attitudes in which this study is grounded. These statements, however, belong after the words ‘I believe,’ and the word ‘I’ is important. The statements, in the form of a confession of faith, reflect or suggest a situation in which the history of Jesus has been or might be seen in a new way. They also express the commitment of the speaker to what he has now ‘seen.’ To speak of Jesus’ ‘call’ or ‘election’ is to speak of Jesus as one with a history which is different from that of any other man, and of Jesus as one who is ‘set apart’ from all the others and for all

¹⁰⁴ *SMG*, 134. If space permitted, it would be important to further discuss terms van Buren employs here such as “discernment” and “sense-content,” which relate to his understanding of linguistic analysis and empiricism. For this, see *SMG*, 129-133.

¹⁰⁵ *SMG*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ *SMG*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ *SMG*, 141.

¹⁰⁸ As will be evident by the end of the next chapter, van Buren’s Christological reflections in *SMG* are in many respects reproduced or rearticulated in the last volume of *TJCR*, namely *Christ in Context*. Cf. “The Function of Christology,” in *CC*, 28-53.

the others. As the language of one who, in seeing Jesus as the free man who has set others free, has also been set free himself, the statement is appropriate and logically meaningful.¹⁰⁹

Here is one of the rare instances in *SMG* that van Buren engages with the topic of election.

However, while in *AD* he was willing to use the language of God's decision and self-determination, here he rejects all such "cosmological assertions." Instead, he suggests that the language of Jesus' election should be interpreted as the believer's understanding of Jesus as the source, the "historical norm," from which they have "caught" their own freedom.¹¹⁰ Van Buren argues that the Christology that follows from this becomes clear in terms of its function in the life of the believer: the humanity of Jesus is understood as his history as "a free" human being, while his divine nature is understood as that which has made his freedom "contagious."¹¹¹

Appealing again to Hare's concept of a "blik," van Buren notes that the "language of faith expressed in the Gospel may be understood if it is seen to express, define, or commend a basic presupposition by which a man lives and acts in the world of men."¹¹²

In concluding *SMG*, van Buren examines the impact of his interpretation of the Gospel on "major doctrines of Christian faith."¹¹³ Among these are the doctrines of revelation, predestination, creation, providences, sin, justification, sanctification, and the doctrine of the church. Given that the overall aim of this chapter is to come to an understanding of the development of van Buren's thought in relation to Barth's, it is worth summarizing van Buren's analysis of three doctrines in particular, namely revelation, predestination, and the church. What is striking about van Buren's analysis of each of these three, beyond the fact that his engagement

¹⁰⁹ *SMG*, 154.

¹¹⁰ Van Buren expresses some hesitation over the metaphor freedom that is "contagious" and can be "caught," but uses it anyway. Later in *SMG*, van Buren will suggest that this empirical metaphor expresses the Christian confession of the work of the Holy Spirit. *SMG*, 161.

¹¹¹ *SMG*, 168.

¹¹² *SMG*, 143.

¹¹³ *SMG*, 173.

with these doctrines takes up *less than nine* pages of the entire work, is the way he translates theological assertions about these doctrines into a solely empirical meaning. The doctrine of revelation, he claims, corresponds to an understanding of Christianity as expressing a “historical perspective” in that it holds together the believer’s “blik,” the fact that they have been “caught” by the Gospel, with reason as that faculty of humanity that can make sense of the relation between their faith and the history in which it is rooted. Notably, in van Buren’s analysis of the doctrine of predestination, he invokes Barth’s radical account, although without any mention of the ecclesiological correlate of the doctrine. Again, however, taking up Barth’s claim that God has universally elected all in Christ, van Buren states that what is important about Barth’s doctrine is its fundamental empirical implication, namely that “[t]he most important thing” about a human being is simply that being’s humanity and thus the fact that “God loves all” and that “Christian love” is for everyone, “including one’s enemies.”¹¹⁴ What is not fundamentally important about the doctrine of predestination, for van Buren, is the human response (or lack thereof) to God.

Finally, with respect to the church and its mission, van Buren makes no mention of Israel or the election of a “congregation” that “witnesses” to Jesus Christ. Instead, van Buren describes the mission of “the Christian” as “the way of love upon which he finds himself, the way toward the neighbor, not the way of trying to make others into Christians. His mission is simply to be a man, as this is defined by Jesus of Nazareth.”¹¹⁵ Such a claim, of course, draws one back to van Buren’s definition of who “Jesus of Nazareth” was, namely, the free person whose freedom is

¹¹⁴ *SMG*, 176.

¹¹⁵ *SMG*, 191.

contagious. Nowhere are the categories of judgment and mercy employed here, although in his analysis of the doctrines of sin and justification van Buren approaches these categories.¹¹⁶

The above analysis of *SMG* should make it clear the extent to which van Buren has departed from Barth. With the desire to understand the Gospel as a “secular man” in strictly “empirical” terms, van Buren has placed the history of Jesus entirely within world-history, without feeling any need to place that history within a more fundamental divine history, as Barth did. Van Buren was, of course, aware that he was departing from Barth and from the key confessions of the Christian tradition by doing this. He admits that his proposal is just that, a proposal concerning the secular meaning of the Gospel that pretends in no way to offer a “better or worse mode of thought than that of ancient times.”¹¹⁷ Further, while he recognizes that his proposal “represents a reduction of Christian faith to its historical and ethical dimensions,” he nonetheless simply concedes that this is the reality that theology must face in “modern culture.”¹¹⁸ In spite of these admissions, however, he also argues that he has “left nothing essential behind” given that he has continued to converse with and translate into modern language the historic tradition of the Fathers and given that he has remained committed to the language of Easter.¹¹⁹ Van Buren’s *SMG* represents a stark shift in his thinking compared to his earlier appropriation of Barth. Despite later statements by van Buren that call into question the aims of *SMG*, his turn to linguistic analysis will continue to color his later work.

¹¹⁶ Even here, however, his ultimate statement about judgment and mercy is expressed empirically. Judgment is meant to express the human experience of being “bound” and “enslaved” to “mistrust and self-concern,” or “fear” and “anxiety” (*DW*, 178-181). Consequently, justification is meant to express the believer’s historical perspective that “he no longer feels the need to ‘prove’ himself to himself or anyone else. He is free to accept himself, convinced that he is acceptable, for he has been set free by Jesus of Nazareth” (*DW*, 181).

¹¹⁷ *SMG*, 193.

¹¹⁸ *SMG*, 198, 199-200.

¹¹⁹ *SMG*, 200.

A Return to Barth?

It would not be until 1974 that van Buren would, as he later described it, return from investigations into linguistic analysis to “the task that Barth had asked of me,” taking to heart Barth’s statement that the *CD* was “in need of improvement.”¹²⁰ His return to Barth came, however, by way of a new point of departure. In 1974, van Buren was tasked with searching for a “new professor in the area of Jewish studies” at Temple University (where he then had a position as chair of the Department of Religion).¹²¹ Through that process, he began to engage with “actual Judaism, the living faith of this living people of God.” What he discovered in this new engagement was a topic that took hold of him and brought him back to the dogmatic task. Van Buren described this return by reflecting on its relation to his concerns of the previous decade:

Whatever my earlier difficulties in understanding the use of the word ‘God,’ I found that if I were to get anywhere with the problems now confronting me, I had to accept myself as a member of one of those two linguistic communities [Jewish and Christian] and therefore to speak with them of the God of whom they both spoke. My older problems did not receive any direct answers. They simply receded into the background; or rather, the position from which I had been asking them was no longer the one on which I could stand if I were to take seriously this new (or very old) problem...All the old problems remained, but they now appeared to be philosophical problems, not half so burning as the theological ones. I had run into a paradox and an incoherence that made the philosophical ones seem positively trivial.¹²²

Van Buren’s attempt at correcting Barth’s *CD* would take distinct form in the years to follow, beginning first with his 1976 book, *The Burden of Freedom: Americans and the God of Israel*,¹²³ and following that, his three-volume *TJCR*. While much could be said about the former text and its importance in van Buren’s new thinking about Israel and Judaism, most of the basic moves

¹²⁰ *AD*, 362, 363.

¹²¹ *AD*, 361.

¹²² *AD*, 362.

¹²³ *The Burden of Freedom: Americans and the God of Israel* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976).

that van Buren makes there appear in his later work in *TJCR* and so, for simplicity's sake, I will focus on that three-volume work, as it captures van Buren's most comprehensive attempt at correcting Barth's *Israellehre*. Before I do that, however, a brief account of the ordering and structure of *TJCR* is in order.

In a 1976 letter to Franklin Littell, van Buren described the beginnings of his attempt to correct Barth's *Israellehre*, noting the challenges such an endeavor entailed:

I'm deep into Barth's *Israellehre*, and it goes so centrally into his doctrine of God, election, Christology, etc. that I am staggered at the task which I have set myself. Reworking all those interlocking and deep problems is going to be quite a job! The real difficulty in Barth's thought is that he clearly never seems to have been thinking about or talking to living Jews. His *Israellehre* is dialectical when it needed to be dialogical. Yet for all that, he is the first to have tackled the problem, and for all its shortcomings, he did make Judaism a crucial item right within the agenda of serious theology. That was surely an absolute *novum* in the whole history of the Christian theological tradition and one that has still not been sufficiently appreciated.¹²⁴

Van Buren was surely right in saying that Barth's *Israellehre* "goes so centrally into his doctrine of God," as has already been evidenced by the first chapter's analysis. Barth's theology of the Word of God in his doctrine of election, specifically its Christological focus, determine in advance his theology of Israel and Judaism and so any attempted change with respect to the latter will involve changes in the former. Fully aware of this, van Buren thus sets out in *TJCR* not only to correct Barth's *Israellehre*, but also to provide an alternative account of revelation, election, and Christology! While van Buren treats these three dogmatic foci in each volume of *TJCR*, the individual volumes can be seen to correspond roughly to the following volumes in Barth, and thus be seen as a whole new Dogmatics: *DW* with Barth's "Doctrine of the Word of God" and so Barth's understanding of the task of theology as it is determined by revelation; *CTPI* with Barth's "Doctrine of God" and "Doctrine of Creation" and so Barth's understanding of election;

¹²⁴ *AD*, 362.

and *CC* with Barth's "Doctrine of Reconciliation" and so Barth's remarkable Christological statement. Describing the division of these volumes in this way could be misleading, however, if it is assumed that each volume takes up an essentially different subject matter, disconnected from the others. Like his teacher Barth who, as Joseph Mangina puts it, "tends to think in long, spiralling arcs of reflection,"¹²⁵ van Buren will continually return throughout each volume of *TJCR* to the essential themes of each of the other volumes, looking at them from a different vantage point. With the above in mind, I have chosen to foreground my description of van Buren's theology of Israel and Judaism by describing his account of revelation in *DW*, as it is there that his new departure from Barth sets the stage for his radically different theology of Israel and Judaism (the subject of the next chapter).

Sinai and Jesus Christ: A Theology of Revelation after Barth, after the Holocaust

Early on in *DW*,¹²⁶ van Buren notes that the "immediate occasion" of the book was "an important change taking place in the mind of the church."¹²⁷ The Second Vatican Council's statements on the Jews—that "God holds the Jews most dear for the sake of their Fathers; He does not repent of the gifts He makes or of the calls He issues..."—marked a new stage in the church's relationship with the Jewish people.¹²⁸ The fact that some churches were rejecting the

¹²⁵ Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 23.

¹²⁶ Unique to this first volume is the fact that its proper title is *Discerning the Way*, whereas "A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality" only appears in the subtitle. Van Buren notes that this is because "the definition of theology is an essentially contested one, itself a matter of theological discussion..." (*DW*, 4). By the time of *A Christian Theology of the People Israel*, however, van Buren adopts *A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* as a proper title, "[h]aving metaphorically found my way back into the task of theology..." (*CTPI*, xv).

¹²⁷ *DW*, 4.

¹²⁸ *Nostra Aetate*. More recently, the Catholic Church has expanded on the essentially positive relationship that it has posited between Judaism and Christianity in "'The Gifts And The Calling Of God Are Irrevocable'" (Rom. 11:29) A Reflection On Theological Questions Pertaining To Catholic-Jewish Relations On The Occasion Of The 50th Anniversary Of 'Nostra Aetate' (no.4)." Online: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20151210_ebraismo-nostra-aetate_en.html

doctrine of replacement or ‘supersessionism,’ according to van Buren, constituted not only a “reversal” of the church’s past teaching about the Jewish people but also opened up a whole new set of implications with respect to the church’ teaching about itself, God, and revelation.¹²⁹ Why did van Buren see this to be the case and what implications did he think followed from this? Van Buren offers no immediate answers to these questions, but early on in *DW* he does acknowledge what is perhaps the bigger issue lurking in the background: if a reversal of the church’s teaching regarding its relationship with the Jewish people has new implications for revelation, then this throws open the question of what the “ground for theological reflection [is] in our new situation.”¹³⁰ Van Buren describes *DW* as an attempt to “search out” just such a ground for theology and just in that way the remainder of that volume constitutes his prolegomenon to his *TJCR*.

Instead of speaking of the search for a “ground for theology,” van Buren could just as easily have asked “what is the criterion of Dogmatics” required by this new situation? This question is fundamental when considering van Buren’s departure from Barth’s *Israellehre* and from his earlier dogmatic endeavor as a teacher of ‘Barthian’ theology. At the end of the last chapter, I suggested that Barth may have seen a danger lurking in the background of any attempt to improve his *Israellehre*, namely, that in avoiding anti-Judaism, Christian theology is in danger of falling prey to a foreign foundation, which for Barth meant natural theology. Above, it was shown that in the *AD* van Buren followed Barth in his claim that the Word of God, as “God in the action of his self-revelation,” is the true ground for theological reflection and so the criterion of dogmatics.¹³¹ In *DW*, however, van Buren parts ways with Barth and his earlier position in *AD*

¹²⁹ *DW*, 4-5.

¹³⁰ *DW*, 5.

¹³¹ *AD*, 25.

on this point. In language that is strikingly similar to his focus on the “empirical” and “historical” in *SMG*, van Buren notes that his “critical reflection” on the church’s speech will now take “history,” or “the context of our temporal existence,” as its basic “framework” rather than a “metaphysical or cosmological framework”:¹³²

The whole book and especially its early pages will stress this context [of our temporal existence] by emphasizing a figure of speech or metaphor: We are on a journey, a path through history; we are on a Way. If the figure seems at first to be overworked, the reader is asked to bear with it and absorb the picture, for the metaphor is itself the content of what I wish to say. It is not *like* our situation; it *is* our situation.¹³³

The remainder of *DW* consists of van Buren’s attempt to describe the different aspects to the “journey” that Jews and Christians have been on throughout history. As they have walked, Jews and Christians have engaged in “conversation” which has included talk about God and this is what the term “theology” refers to. Jews and Gentile Christians both declare this God to be the God of Israel, and both declare that this God has given Godself and God’s will to be known through revelation. On the level of historical description, Van Buren characterizes revelation as “*an acknowledged reinterpretation of...tradition in response to Jewish history.*”¹³⁴ The central events that are revelatory in this sense within the traditions of the Jews and the Christians are Sinai and Jesus Christ respectively. At the burning bush and then at Sinai, Moses stands in the tradition of “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” and hears a new word from God concerning the promises spoken to them. Torah becomes, for Israel, the “way in which to walk into the future”

¹³² *DW*, 4-5. In spite of the fact that van Buren admits more than once in *DW* that elements of his *SMG* invited an “unhappy confusion” about the Christian faith, it is hard not to see distinct lines of continuity between *SMG* and *DW*. As will become clear in my analysis of Yoder and Jenson, the concern for “history,” often in distinction from a concern for “metaphysics,” will be a key topic of theirs as well, although for different reasons and to different ends for each.

¹³³ *DW*, 5. Emphasis in original. Jenson, as will be seen below in chapters 6 and 7, is also concerned with the category of “history” and our “temporal existence.” Like van Buren, Jenson is also wary of appealing to theological frameworks that only claim to offer a “likeness” of reality (Jenson’s key term is “analogy”). However, Jenson will decidedly *not* oppose metaphysics and history as such as van Buren seems to be doing here. Rather, he will seek to incorporate the language of “history” and “temporality” *into* metaphysics.

¹³⁴ *DW*, 37. Emphasis in original.

as they pursue and await the fulfillment of those promises.¹³⁵ The pattern of receiving a new word continues with the Apostolic writers who, as recipients of their own Jewish tradition, reinterpret it as pointing “to the new phenomenon of Gentiles coming to adore the God of Israel as also the God of the ungodly.”¹³⁶ The Gentiles too are now set on a Way in history in which they are to listen to the voice of the God of Israel through the voice of Jesus Christ. One can see how van Buren’s “historical framework” has come to bear on his conception of the Apostolic writers’ reinterpretation of their tradition. Rather than focus on those aspects of the Apostolic writings that would emphasize Jesus’s messianic identity, and so his identity as the one whom the people Israel had awaited, van Buren takes the later historical fact of Jewish rejection of Jesus and the flourishing of rabbinic Judaism as self-evident historical proof that Jesus did not fulfill Israel’s messianic hopes.¹³⁷ What is left then is the historical fact that Gentiles have understood the Jew Jesus as their own “way” into the service and worship of the God of Israel.

Revelation, then, follows a “pattern” for van Buren, in that it always involves not only the “reception” of the tradition by a new generation, but also its “reinterpretation” in light of new events in Jewish history.¹³⁸ Once that reinterpretation is accepted by the community, it is understood to be revelation. Both of the above “ways,” Sinai and the giving of Torah for the Jews, and Jesus’ death and resurrection for Gentiles, have thus been understood as the “content” of God’s revelation in the past that also sets a course for the future.¹³⁹ That does not mean, however, that these ways remain impervious to subsequent re-interpretations in the future. In

¹³⁵ *DW*, 38.

¹³⁶ *DW*, 38.

¹³⁷ Indeed, later van Buren will go so far as to say that in light of the fact that Jesus did not fulfill Israel’s messianic hopes, the title “Messiah” should not be used by Gentiles at all. See *CTPI*, 36-37.

¹³⁸ *DW*, 37. Van Buren describes in greater detail this “pattern” in *CTPI*, 169-173.

¹³⁹ Here an echo of Barth’s concern that dogmatics be seen as unfolding the “content” (*Inhalt*) of the Word of God, should be heard. The notable difference with van Buren, of course, is that the “content” being unfolded for him is Jewish history, i.e., “the Way.”

fact, for van Buren, because Jewish history is the context within which revelation happens, the sheer fact of ongoing Jewish history means the possibility of ongoing revelation, for the Jew first but also for the Gentile who walks in history with the Jews. For Barth, however, while it is true that ongoing Jewish history ensures the enduring “witness” of Israel such that God’s revelation is made manifest in the present, he does not understand this as “ongoing” revelation. What is witnessed to by Israel and Judaism in their enduring existence, for Barth, will always be the definitive revelation made in Jesus Christ, the Word of God who turns toward humanity for the purpose of redemption.

Van Buren worries, however, that accounts of revelation that declare Christ’s revelation to be universally definitive encourage theologians to “sweep all following history...into the bin of insignificance.”¹⁴⁰ Why? Simply because Jews have continued to speak of and reinterpret revelation as a revelation from Sinai with the giving of the Torah, not as revelation through Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection. In other words, descriptively speaking, if revelation means what van Buren says it means, then living Jews continue to “acknowledge” Sinai as revelatory and to ignore this historical fact is to deny the “way” that Jews have been on through history. Conversely, the history of Jesus is revelatory too, according to van Buren, but is so precisely because Gentile Christians have “acknowledged” it as revelatory.¹⁴¹ The Gentile mistake, in his

¹⁴⁰ *DW*, 43. In this context, van Buren is critical of Wolfhart Pannenberg’s statement that “with the resurrection of Jesus, the end of history has already occurred...”. Cf. *Jesus: God and Man* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1968), 142, cited in *DW*, 43. Barth says as much too in *CD IV/1*, 734-735: “Human history was actually terminated at this point [on Easter Day]...It is better not to say that [after Easter] time continued, but rather than a further time, a new time commenced...the end-time.” Later in *CTPI*, van Buren calls this view on history the “hourglass” picture of God’s revelatory work,” noting that such a picture “totally distorts what actually happened” in both the post-Exilic period and the post-Second Temple period of Jewish existence. His basic point is to contest the idea that God’s revelatory work was narrowed down through Israel’s history “until it came to a single strand in the person of Jesus,” only to widen “out once more in the church” (168). See also his comments about the problems with “realized eschatology” in *CC*, 70-71.

¹⁴¹ This is, of course, totally different from Barth for whom human acknowledgment in no way determines revelation.

estimation, has been to talk about revelation as though it means Jesus Christ, full-stop.¹⁴² Opting for a more open-ended concept of revelation that is differentiated on the basis of these two different communities who have appropriated their traditions through history, van Buren then suggests that Jewish history in the twentieth century might “warrant our use once more of the term *revelation*.”¹⁴³ Why? Precisely because Jews and Gentile Christians have begun to reinterpret their own traditions in light of recent historical events. As a Gentile, van Buren argues that there are at least three specific events in modern Jewish history that are potentially revelatory and so in some way determinative for Christian theology in “this new situation”: the Holocaust, the establishment of the State of Israel, and the church’s changing attitudes towards the Jewish people.¹⁴⁴ Since van Buren understands Jewish and Christian revelation as “the reinterpretation of tradition in response to Jewish history,” he sees the task of Christian theology as necessitating the reinterpretation of the tradition in light of these new events within Jewish history. To drive this point home, it is helpful to consider a passage from *DW* that could justifiably represent the most succinct explication of van Buren’s departure from Barth:

The assertion that the church adores *Israel’s LORD* is fundamental for all its conversation and all its theology, and every further theological point can be only an unfolding of this one claim. Consequently, any theological affirmation, any proposed contribution to our conversation that cannot be shown to be derived from or rooted in this one key sentence, is to be regarded with the gravest suspicion.¹⁴⁵

That this statement paradigmatically represents van Buren’s departure from Barth can be demonstrated by simply considering the fact that by “Israel’s LORD,” van Buren means something like ‘the revelation of God as defined by Israel as it has existed through history up to today.’ Contrast this with Barth’s definition of theology—that in all its aspects theology is the

¹⁴² *DW*, 173-174.

¹⁴³ *DW*, 39. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁴ *DW*, 177-180.

¹⁴⁵ *DW*, 33. Emphasis mine.

representation of the reality of the Word of God that turns towards humankind and therefore redeems humankind—and the contrast is clear.¹⁴⁶ Where Barth makes the redemptive action of the Word of God the theological point from which all theology “unfolds,” van Buren replaces it with Israel’s worship of, and life with, God through history, including especially the three aforementioned major historical events described above. If this criterion is indeed to be normative for Christian theology, van Buren argues that Christianity must radically reinterpret its own tradition.

What might such a reinterpretation of the tradition of Gentile Christians mean in light of this recent history? While the below analysis of *CTPI* will answer this question with respect to van Buren’s attempt to correct Barth’s *Israellehre*, a few of van Buren’s remarks from *DW* are worth noting. First, van Buren argues that as they walk together, Jews and Christians are called to “theological responsibility” by God (ch.3). In light of recent history, such responsibility calls Gentiles in particular to, at the very least, be theologically responsible with respect to their speech about (and treatment of) the Jewish people. The history of Gentile vitriol against the Jews stands as a mark of incoherence within a community that declares love for the God of Israel. Van Buren’s *TJCR* represents his effort to speak responsibly about Israel as a Gentile Christian. According to van Buren, Gentile theological responsibility will entail rejecting a theology of displacement and contempt towards Jews, both of which have been used throughout history as a justification for persecution of and violence against Jews. Along with that, love for the God of the Jews would entail a rejection of any interpretation of scripture that would support such a theology.¹⁴⁷ This means, again, reinterpreting the tradition of the Apostolic writers in light of

¹⁴⁶ *CD* I/2, 790. A parallel passage can be found in *CD* II/2, 537-538: “...theology is wholly and utterly the knowledge and representation of the Word and work of God.”

¹⁴⁷ *DW*, 61-65.

subsequent Jewish history, allowing their own harsh and biting words against “the Jews,” to be checked by the spoiled fruit of such readings in history. Gentile theological responsibility will also mean, however, upholding the essential difference between Jews and Christians, in spite of the fact that Gentiles worship the God of Israel. According to van Buren, while the Apostolic authors, being Jews, initially thought that Gentiles would be united with Jews as one people, that simply did not become a sustained historical reality.¹⁴⁸ Thus, while it is important to continue to declare that the Gentiles only have access to revelation through Jewish history—the history of Jesus the Jew—the social reality of Jew and Gentile united as one people is not, according to van Buren, to be hoped for or sought by Gentiles prior to the eschaton.

It should be clear already that van Buren’s account of revelation here leads him away from a normative account of Israel and the church as a single “congregation” or community that is differentiated internally. Taking history as his framework, van Buren simply notes the division of Israel and the church into two communities and attempts to reflect theologically upon that reality. That being said, van Buren will affirm that the witness of Jews and Gentile Christians is one in the sense that both ultimately witness to the one God of Israel.¹⁴⁹ Even this commonality contains its own internal difference, however. Van Buren notes that the Gentile calling in the “way” of Israel’s God involves adoring the God of Israel for having “drawn them to Himself in a further way...by His Spirit and through His Son,” a way different from the Jews who “know him immediately and always as their God.”¹⁵⁰ The doctrine of the Trinity, for van Buren, is thus best

¹⁴⁸ *DW*, 65-66, 132.

¹⁴⁹ *CTPI*, 87.

¹⁵⁰ *DW*, 69-70. Van Buren demonstrates an awareness that the specter of Sabellianism or Modalism appears in such formulations of God’s different “ways.” But he claims that his own position avoids both. Gentiles, he says, do not know God by way of the modes of “Spirit” and “Son,” in contrast to Jews who know God immediately or only in the mode of the Father. The Trinity, for van Buren, is not only a matter of Gentile “apprehension” of God. Rather, says van Buren, Gentiles know God in “His reality” to be Triune, and so “confess and worship Him as triune because that is how He has been and that is how He is with us and for us.” For van Buren’s further arguments against modalism and Sabellianism, see also *DW*, 89.-93. To what extent van Buren is actually successful in avoiding the critique of

understood not as a theological statement on God’s eternal “being” or “essence” but a confession of what the one God of Israel has done in history, by reaching “out to us Gentiles,” and including them in “the Way.”¹⁵¹ Or, as van Buren puts it later: “...the doctrine of the Trinity...[is] an expression of God’s gathering to Himself of a Gentile church.”¹⁵² Here van Buren’s claim in *SMG*, that the meaning of doctrine is found in its use or function, reappears.¹⁵³

Working in a non-traditional order, van Buren unpacks this understanding of the Trinity beginning with the Spirit, whose descent at Pentecost births the church “on its way to becoming a Gentile enterprise alongside God’s continuing Jewish enterprise.”¹⁵⁴ The Spirit, as God’s *Shekinah* (presence) with Israel, is also God’s presence with Gentiles as they walk in the Way, gathering them to “His Son so that we may be His sons and daughters.”¹⁵⁵ The Son is the one through whom the God of Israel “has made Himself available” to Gentiles and this Son is Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew. Jesus’s status as “Son,” however, is dependent on Israel’s sonship, not, as with Barth, the other way around.¹⁵⁶ As the “son of God,” *Israel* is the bearer of God’s Word which later becomes flesh for Gentiles in Jesus of Nazareth:

...Jesus has become historically light for the Gentiles as God’s Word to the Gentiles. He was and is a man, a Jew, not a second God, heaven forbid, not a deified man, but just a

modalism is up for debate. I will return to this below when I discuss Jenson’s Trinitarian ontology in Chapters 6 and 7. Jenson’s critique of van Buren centres on the fact that van Buren’s *TJCR* developed a positive statement on the Jews and Judaism by “developing a less trinitarian Christology.” See *ST*, vol.2, 193fn29.

¹⁵¹ *DW*, 69.

¹⁵² *DW*, 92.

¹⁵³ *DW*, 70. Indeed, at the outset of *CTPI*, van Buren describes his methodological departure from Barth in *DW* in the language of *SMG*: “rather than...the Word of God, or revelation...we had no alternative but to develop the doctrine of the Trinity...as a testimony to the action of the God of Israel...[t]he result may be called a historical-functional doctrine of the Trinity...” (*CTPI*, 8). In *SMG*, van Buren notes: “Theologians concerned with the ‘relevance’ of the Gospel for ordinary believers in their ordinary life and ordinary work should be particularly open to a method of analysis which appeals so frequently to the ordinary use of language...By means of a functional analysis of language, it shows the various empirical footings of different theological assertions, and it suggests ways in which the meaning of apparently transempirical aspects of the language of Christian faith may be understood” (*SMG*, 196).

¹⁵⁴ *DW*, 74.

¹⁵⁵ *DW*, 77.

¹⁵⁶ *DW*, 80. Recall that for Barth, “the whole elected community of God belongs to Him [Jesus Christ],” such that the status of “sonship” is a gift given to the community in the Son and by the power of the Spirit. For Barth, Jesus Christ does not “belong” to Israel. *CD* II/2, 204.

man. Only the LORD is God. But in the words of Jesus—‘Come unto me!’ and ‘I am with you unto the end of the ages’—many Gentiles have heard God’s Word for the first time. What Jesus was and is we confess to be truly *God’s* plan, His Word to us, a Word truly new yet which was God’s plan from the beginning, ‘before the world was founded’ (Eph. 1:4). God, the Spirit of Holiness, has caused His light to shine for us Gentiles in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6) and by him drawn us to walk in His Way. For us Gentiles in the Way, then, Jesus is not the LORD, but our Lord, the one Jew who has given us access to the God of the Jews.¹⁵⁷

Interestingly, with its reference to Eph. 1:4, the above passage is the closest van Buren comes in *DW* to indicating how he might conceive of eternal election in light of the “Jewish-Christian Reality.” The eternal election of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as such a thing can even be spoken of, is an election subsumed within God’s intention to call Israel to be a light to the Gentiles so as to call them into the “Way” of the LORD. The implications of this understanding of Christ’s eternal election will be examined in more detail below in the analysis of *CTPI*, but for now the above quotation is enough to signal van Buren’s departure from Barth. In concluding his treatment of the Trinity, van Buren argues that the Father is none other than the one God of Israel, the one LORD who both Jews and Christians worship, but who the Gentiles uniquely declare to be “the One who as Spirit draws us to Himself through Jesus of Nazareth.”¹⁵⁸

Much more could be said about *DW*. In order to draw this chapter to a close, I offer a few brief comments on van Buren’s reflections on the subjects of the Bible, its authority and its relationship to the church, and finally redemption.¹⁵⁹ These two topics nicely articulate the basic departure that van Buren has made from Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God in *DW* as well as serve as a preview for van Buren’s articulation of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments in *CTPI*. According to van Buren, Barth’s articulation of the basic “content” of

¹⁵⁷ *DW*, 85.

¹⁵⁸ *DW*, 89.

¹⁵⁹ *DW*, 184-201.

scripture as being a story about the Word of God turning to the world for the purposes of redemption is too reductive. Van Buren states his alternative understanding thus:

The content of this book, generally, is the story of the beginning of God's Way with His beloved creation into which we have been called to walk. It is therefore the story of the beginning of our Way. God is the subject matter of this book always as the Giver of the Way, as its ever new beginning, and as its not-yet-realized end. Since it is the story of our Way—both as the Jews and as we Gentile Christians are walking it—its protagonists are those who set out on this journey, beginning with Abraham. Israel and his descendants are the protagonists of the Scriptures, Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples of the Apostolic Writings. That is to say, flesh and blood Israel holds the center of the stage, for this is the story of a Way through time and place and, as such, its *dramatis personae* are historical people.¹⁶⁰

Here what is immediately striking is the division that van Buren has made between the protagonists of “the Scriptures” and “the Apostolic Writings.”¹⁶¹ While he states that “God is the subject matter of this book as the Giver of the Way,” note that he does not say that God is the subject (and neither is God the object!). Clearly, for Barth, the one protagonist of both the Old and the New Testaments is Jesus Christ and all other characters serve to witness to him.

The theme of redemption, so integral to Barth's theology of the Word of God and his Christological construal of election in *CD II/2*, will be treated below in more detail in the analysis of *CTPI*. For now, it is enough to signal that with van Buren's commitment to working with a radically “historical” perspective, his understanding of redemption departs from Barth's in two ways: first, he suggests that redemption was not realized in Christ, rather, Christ's death and resurrection was the “door that opened for us [Gentiles] the possibility of this walk and so entry into Israel's hope.”¹⁶² What is Israel's hope for van Buren? Whatever it is, it is “historical, in the strict sense that what was hoped for was a new condition in the historical future of this actual

¹⁶⁰ *DW*, 130-131.

¹⁶¹ In his last book, *According to the Scriptures*, van Buren will reject this particular division, opting instead for a reclamation of “Old Testament” as appropriate for the Church. Cf. *According to the Scriptures*, 133. From what I can tell, however, in that late work van Buren did not depart in any other significant way from most of the conclusions that he had reached in *TJCR* and for that reason I do not treat the text in detail below.

¹⁶² *DW*, 196.

people on this solid earth.”¹⁶³ Secondly, and following from the above claim, van Buren argues that one should avoid speculating about redemption understood as an “ultimate destiny.” As he puts it, “It seems unlikely, having made the commitment and self-limiting move entailed in having begun this creation that His [God’s] final goal were to be rid of it; but who knows? Perhaps for God, too, enough can be enough; but of these matters we really know nothing, and neither did Paul.”¹⁶⁴ These concluding reflections make it clear that in *DW*, despite his intentions to return to the task that Barth had asked of him in their last conversation in 1961, van Buren saw fit to seek out a new starting point for theology—one with significant consequences for his understanding of revelation—in order to think not only after Barth but after the formative events of the twentieth century. It now remains to be seen how this new starting point affects van Buren’s theology of Israel and Judaism.

¹⁶³ *DW*, 187.

¹⁶⁴ *DW*, 200.

Chapter Three

Witnesses to the Creator and Redeemer: Van Buren's *Christian Theology of the People Israel*

In his introduction to *A Christian Theology of the People Israel*, van Buren reflects on his decision in *DW* to adopt the categories of “history” and “temporal existence” as his framework, noting:

I am aware that in *Discerning the Way* I departed somewhat from Barth, and I am also aware that, for Barth, there could be no such thing as a small departure on this matter of the criterion of theology.¹

Indeed, van Buren makes it clear that, unlike Barth, his theology of Israel will not proceed on the basis of the criterion of “the Word of God, or revelation.”² While admitting that the categories of “history” and “temporal existence” are norms that are ambiguous and broad and so “not as clear as Barth’s,” van Buren sees this route as necessary in light of the fact that Barth’s clear norm resulted in him seeing “dimly...living Israel as a reality which *witnesses to God and the divine purpose for creation*.”³ While Barth did see living Israel, which he referred to under the collective term of “the synagogue,” as a witness to Jesus Christ, he did so primarily in negative terms, describing it as the ongoing witness to God’s judgment on the human rebellion borne definitively by God in Jesus Christ. Furthermore, as has already been discussed above, Barth’s theology of Israel and Judaism was based on a reading of the scriptures largely abstracted from

¹ *CTPI*, 4.

² *CTPI*, 8.

³ *CTPI*, 9. Emphasis mine.

any engagement with the writings of the Jews of his own day.⁴ This is why, according to van Buren, he could only see living Israel's witness "dimly."

What van Buren argues is necessary, then, to correct Barth, is a theology of the people Israel that accounts for Israel's ongoing, "positive" witness throughout history.⁵ This means at the very least allowing Israel's living testimony about itself to be heard by the church. Van Buren thus begins *CTPI* with a synopsis of the work that, while stated in dogmatic terms similar to those of Barth, nonetheless stands in marked contrast to Barth's own doctrine of Israel at key points. It is worth quoting van Buren's synopsis in full:

A Christian theology of the people Israel, as an integral part of the church's self-critical reflection, asks about the church's duty and ability to hear the testimony of the Jewish people to God. Its necessity lies in Israel's election and the consequent dependence of the church's testimony upon that of Israel to the God and Father of Jesus Christ as Creator and Redeemer. Its foundations are the Scriptures of Judaism as confirmed both by the Apostolic Writings and the life of the Christian church, and also by the Rabbinic Writings and life of the Jewish people, including their rejection of the church with its faith in Jesus Christ. Its goal is the definition of Israel's contribution to the church's service to God and, as a part of this, its service to Israel.⁶

The church's duty is clear in light of the new situation revealed in the events of Jewish history in the twentieth century. The church in this new time has come to affirm the "eternal covenant" between God and Israel, revealing the necessity of a Christian theology of the people Israel.⁷ What of the ability of the church to do so? This, van Buren notes, is more complex. At the very least, the ability of the church to hear Israel's living testimony will involve learning to re-read the Old Testament in a way that takes seriously the exegesis and theological reflection of "postbiblical Israel" on its scriptures and that takes seriously the Jewish rejection of the church's

⁴ Although again it should be stressed that this did not mean that Barth was antisemitic or that he did not have any positive interactions with Jews. Again, see the important clarificatory works by *Busch* and *Lindsay* in this regard.

⁵ *CTPI*, 11.

⁶ *CTPI*, 1. Emphasis in original. In *CTPI*, 17, van Buren points out that by "Israel," he means to refer to "the one people of God" beginning with Abraham up to the Jews of his own day.

⁷ *CTPI*, 19.

claims about Jesus.⁸ Van Buren recognizes that this is no small task and that perhaps one of the biggest hurdles in this regard is articulating a relationship between the Old and New Testaments that can support such a re-reading. If the unity of the scriptures consists in the fact that the Old Testament relates to the New as the promise to its fulfillment, then on what basis can the church possibly see it as a duty to hear the testimony of the Israel that has rejected Jesus as the fulfillment in person? Given this problem, van Buren argues that it is necessary to disavow understandings of the unity of the Old and New Testaments—he mentions Barth’s here—that are based on the traditional promise-fulfillment model.⁹ For van Buren, the promise-fulfillment model is insufficient because the promises of God (the messianic age, the restoration of Israel, and the peace between nations foretold in Isaiah 2:4) were not fulfilled by Christ.¹⁰ Rather, what remains is the ongoing trust in the promise of God’s coming as attested in the scriptures, but now that trust is “shaped to the lives and forms of the two different communities” of Israel and the church as they live into an unfinished “covenantal story.”¹¹ For van Buren, if one is to shape a theology of scripture around this historical reality, then the continuity between the Old and New Testaments must be described otherwise than in the language of fulfillment. Israel’s witness in the Old Testament must be seen as a witness to God and the divine intention for creation that endures throughout Jewish history apart from the Gentile Christian confession of Jesus Christ.

⁸ *CTPI*, 12, 18, 33-37, 268-294.

⁹ *CTPI*, 27-33.

¹⁰ Thus, van Buren later comments on Paul’s use of Isaiah 11 in Rom.15:12, that: “Nothing that the author of this passage [in Isaiah] hoped for had come to pass, except the one thing mentioned in the verse Paul cited: one had risen to rule the Gentiles and to be their hope” (*CTPI*, 349). As will become clear below, van Buren believes part of Israel’s living witness is its challenge to any notion of a “proleptic” or “spiritual” redemption, what he calls “redemption-in-principle” (*CTPI*, 287).

¹¹ *CTPI*, 29; *CC*, 278-283. Van Buren expands on the implications of his argument for their being two different communities gathered around Israel’s scriptures in his final, posthumously published, *According to the Scriptures: The Origins of the Gospel and of the Church’s Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 94-115, where he discusses the “dual reading of Israel’s scriptures.”

The Gentile confession of Jesus Christ, based as it is on the New Testament, must be seen as a confirmation of or addition to Israel’s original witness, not its negation or fulfillment.¹²

Following from the foundational departure made with respect to Barth’s criterion of theology in *DW*, van Buren’s decision to depart from the promise-fulfillment construal of the scriptures sets the stage for his first major departure from Barth’s *Israellehre* in his *CTPI*. Barth’s affirmation that Israel and the church are the “one community of God” took for granted the promise-fulfillment construal of the scripture’s unity, locating both the promise and its fulfillment in the person of Jesus Christ. In the eternal decision of God to be for us in Jesus Christ, Barth claimed, the promise and its fulfillment are united from all eternity.¹³ In the promise and in its fulfillment, God gives nothing less than Godself as the fulfillment of his “primal and basic purpose...in relation to the world,” namely, “to impart and reveal Himself—and with Himself His glory.”¹⁴ As witnesses of God’s eternal decision, Israel attests to the promise-to-be-fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the church to the promise-as-fulfilled in Jesus Christ. In this way, the witness of the community is a singular witness in two forms, as the object of their witness is finally the same. For this reason, when Barth treated the election of the community, he did so as an element under the election of Jesus Christ, arguing that the witness of the elect community of Israel and the church, as the one community of God, is explicitly a witness to Jesus Christ through whom “God” and the “divine purpose” is known and accomplished.¹⁵ In short, Barth’s theology of Israel and Judaism as witnesses to Jesus Christ

¹² The idea that Gentile inclusion is a novel addition in the history of the covenant between God and Israel is central to van Buren’s construal of the relationship between Israel and the Church.

¹³ Below I will treat some of the Christological implications of van Buren’s position, including his rejection of the traditional doctrine of the unity of the subject in the incarnation of Christ as he treats it in *CC*, 252ff.

¹⁴ *CD* II/2, 140.

¹⁵ Of course, as was shown in Chapter 1, the foundation of this claim about Israel and the Church as witnesses to Christ was already laid by Barth in *CD* I/2 with respect to the biblical witness, which basically identifies Israel with the Old Testament (the time of expectation) and the Church with the New Testament (the time of recollection).

followed from his representation of Jesus Christ as the promise of God in person, the electing God and elected human in one. In rejecting the promise-fulfillment construal of the scriptures, van Buren not only rejects Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, but also Barth's doctrine of the electing God.¹⁶ As a consequence of this rejection, van Buren must also reject the notion that the elect community of Israel and the church are his (Jesus Christ's) community. Israel, for van Buren, does not attest Jesus Christ to the world.

This departure raises a critical question: if, according to van Buren, Israel does not witness to the purpose or decision of God in Jesus Christ to redeem humanity, then what purpose or decision of God does it witness to, if any at all? If Israel's witness to the will and purpose of God is not a witness to the eternal divine self-determination—the twofold determination—of God, to be gracious to the creature in Jesus Christ by electing judgment and perdition for Godself and salvation for humanity, then what is it a witness to? In other words, what alternative doctrine of God does van Buren provide in his *CTPI* and what effect does that have on his theology of Israel and Judaism?

Israel's Testimony to God's Self-Determination

Fully in line with his desire to provide a theology of the people Israel that listens to Israel's testimony, van Buren begins at the beginning of the Torah. The Genesis creation accounts, according to van Buren, constitute Israel's "narrative confession of reality."¹⁷ Israel's confession was borne out of its experience of God's revelation to them in the "Exodus-Sinai" event. In that event, Israel experienced God as both the Creator and Redeemer of Israel. Israel

¹⁶ Indeed, van Buren recognized that his approach to a Christian theology of Israel would mean "more departures from Barth's thought than a revision of his understanding of the criterion and task of theology" (*CPTI*, 8).

¹⁷ *CTPI*, 44.

knows God as redeemer because God rescued them from Egypt. Israel knows God as creator of their peoplehood because God made a covenant with them at Sinai and called them God's people. These particular ways of God's involvement with Israel—the Exodus from Egypt and the reception of Torah at Sinai— are the ground of Israel's knowledge of God as Creator and Redeemer. These ways also reveal to Israel the more general truth, however, that God is creator of the heavens and the earth and that God is so committed to his creation that he will not abandon it in the face of threats to its existence. God “will therefore rescue Israel and his whole creation from dissolution and death.”¹⁸ According to van Buren, by testifying to God as the Creator-Redeemer, Israel witnesses to God's self-determination. Van Buren describes the notion of self-determination in language similar to Barth, but with distinct differences:

The act of Creation constitutes a divine self-determination. A self-determining act is a step freely chosen which commits the agent of that step to the consequent course. Thereafter, things will never be the same for that agent. In the unique case of Creation, where the agent is God, we must presume that God took this step in full freedom and with full awareness of what he was doing. This act, however, involved *a decision* as well about himself as about Creation. Having made this decision and taken this step, there are some things which God cannot be and some choices that are no longer open to him: God can never again be anything other than the Creator of the heavens and the earth. From then on, he had creation on his hands, so to speak.¹⁹

What is notable in van Buren's account of God's self-determination here is his starting point. Remember that van Buren is attempting to listen to Israel's witness to God. Having rejected the “promise-fulfillment” model of the unity of the scriptures, what van Buren must attempt to hear is a conception of God's self-determination that will not be revealed definitively in Jesus Christ. For this reason, van Buren cannot reproduce his previous account of God's self-determination in *AD*. There he followed Barth in arguing that God's self-determination was “the Father's choice

¹⁸ *CTPI*, 46.

¹⁹ *CTPI*, 62-63. Emphasis mine. Van Buren briefly treated the notion of God's self-determination in *DW*, 70, 186, but expands upon it substantially in *CTPI* and *CC*. For his account in *CC*, see *CC*, 219-225.

of the Son.”²⁰ Listening to Israel’s testimony to God’s self-determination can no longer mean saying that “God has determined to deal with us by dealing with Jesus Christ.”²¹ Rather, Israel’s testimony to the God of the covenant confesses the God who “can never again be anything other than the Creator of the heavens and the earth.”

To this Barth might be imagined as arguing that such an account of God’s self-determination is still too general, borne out of “arbitrary speculation” (*willkürliche Spekulation*) that remains on the level of the “immediate logical sense of the concept” of God’s relationship to creation.²² The failure of such an account on Barth’s terms would be that it fails to present what has been revealed in the New Testament as the “actual relationship in which God has placed Himself” with respect to creation, namely, the relation that is Jesus Christ.²³ As if hearing his teacher in his ear, van Buren is quick to argue that his account of Israel’s testimony to God’s self-determination is not speculative or merely conceptual. For him, the event of the Exodus, understood through the revelation at Sinai, is concrete and definite in that what is revealed to Israel is not a general relation of God and creation, but a concrete and specific relation between God and Israel governed by Torah. Through that concrete relation, Israel learned not only that God’s covenant with Israel constituted its creation as a people, but also that its creation as a people aimed at an end: the redemption and completion of creation. God is thus revealed concretely to be both Creator and Redeemer.²⁴ While this revelation does reveal something general about the relationship between God and creation, it is only through the particular relationship between God and Israel that Israel knows this.²⁵ In fact, van Buren calls it a “Gentile

²⁰ *AD*, 124.

²¹ *AD*, 124.

²² *KD* II/2, 5; *CD* II/2, 7.

²³ *CD* II/2, 7.

²⁴ *CTPI*, 69.

²⁵ *CTPI*, 55, 127-142.

theology” that too quickly “moves directly from the Exodus to the general statement that God is a God of the liberation of the oppressed.”²⁶ Van Buren insists that his “...conclusion [regarding God’s self-determination] is not reached by free speculation, nor is it the logical conclusion of an analysis of the concept of Creation.”²⁷ In light of the above, it is helpful to ask, how has van Buren attempted to stick with Barth while also modifying his account of God’s self-determination? It should be clear by now that what has occurred in van Buren’s account of God’s self-determination is that the particularity of Jesus Christ as the ground of knowledge concerning God’s self-determination has been traded for the particularity of the God of Exodus-Sinai as Israel’s ground of knowledge concerning God’s self-determination. God’s self-determination is known, by Israel, in the events of Exodus-Sinai, as a “covenantal self-determination.”²⁸

An additional question arises at this point, however. What of the “twofold” aspect to the divine self-determination that was so central to Barth’s account of Jesus Christ as God’s decision for fellowship with humanity for Godself and fellowship with Godself for humanity? Van Buren does, in fact, mention a “dual determination” involved in God’s eternal decision, but in his case, this dual determination is established in God’s act of Creation, in God’s establishment of an other.²⁹ For van Buren, the dual determination is expressed by the fact that with the act of Creation, God is determined as Creator and the world as creation. God determines Godself to be the Creator-Redeemer of creation and determines creation for an existence in which the creature becomes a “hearer of God’s address.”³⁰ The Creator’s address, however, reveals to the creature that God has determined the creature “for his own good purpose,” and that purpose is the

²⁶ *CTPI*, 157.

²⁷ *CTPI*, 63.

²⁸ In *CTPI*, van Buren will refer to God’s self-determination with the assumption that Israel understands that self-determination only by way of their own covenant with God. By the time of *CC*, whenever he mentions God’s “self-determination,” he makes this element clear by adding the adjective “covenantal” in front of “self-determination.”

²⁹ *CTPI*, 67.

³⁰ *CTPI*, 65. This language is, of course, classic Barth.

creature's participation in God's goal of completing creation.³¹ The "dual determination" that results from God's self-determination is thus not established within God's "primal history," as it was with Barth. One could, perhaps, make the case that van Buren's articulation of God's self-determination to be the Creator-Redeemer is a twofold self-determination. Then, one could say, this would constitute his alternative to Barth's version of double predestination, articulating what God elects for Godself (to be Creator) and what God elects for humanity (redemption). Van Buren, however, never speaks of a twofold self-determination of God in the manner that Barth does. The only "dual determination" he speaks of is, as was just discussed, that between the Creator and the creation. For Barth, there is a twofold determination in God's eternal decision because by speaking his eternal "Yes" in Jesus Christ, God also speaks a subordinate "No," not conceived, of course, as an equal word to the former, but rather as its "boundary." There is no such account in van Buren of this dialectic between God's "Yes" and "No" in the primal history of God.³²

The closest that van Buren comes to considering a primal history in God is through his attention to the notion, first stated by the Jewish mystic Isaac Luria, that in the act of creation "God must have contracted himself, so to speak, in order to make room for his creation to exist at all," and that this "contraction" involved divine suffering.³³ While not necessarily recommending Luria's interpretation to Christian theology, he does look to it as a Jewish voice that attests to creation involving "an inestimable cost" on God's part, and so creation being "grace through and

³¹ *CTPI*, 65.

³² Although, as will become clear below, he may very well be implying a certain version of Barth's notion of the divine decision involving a "willing" and a "non-willing." This becomes especially clear in van Buren's use of the "Yes-No" dialectic within his description of the witness of Israel's rejection of the Church's claims about Jesus.

³³ *CTPI*, 63-64. Van Buren also mentions Luria's proposal in *DW*, and *CC*. Barth clearly objected to the idea of a divine contraction in his doctrine of the divine perfections. Speaking of God becoming one with the creature, and so with "created time," in Jesus Christ, he states: "No contraction [*Einschränkung*] or diminution of deity takes place..." CD II/1, 616.

through.”³⁴ Of course, in his account of eternal election, Barth too spoke of the cost of God’s election of our rejection, of God’s “hazarding of His Godhead and power and status,” and thus of the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”³⁵ For Barth, however, this hazarding of God had a particular form attached to it from eternity, namely, Jesus Christ. For Barth, it was only possible to see creation as grace because God’s self-determination involved, from eternity, his own redemptive self-giving in Jesus Christ; taking upon himself the rejection due to sinful humanity so as to raise humanity up to a share in God’s glory. For van Buren, however, who does not employ this “Yes-No” dialectic, grace is revealed as grace simply because God has made space for an other, and has a good purpose in mind for that other, namely the purpose of redemption.

Why is redemption needed, according to van Buren? Creation needs redemption because when God creates, there is risk involved. In making space for the other, God gives that other the choice to seek a purpose that goes against God’s good purpose. Here van Buren treats the Genesis account of “*Adam’s*” sin.³⁶ Sin is, quite simply, choosing “death rather than life, disobedience rather than free cooperation.”³⁷ As this “choice” occurred in Israel’s history, “chaos” threatened creation. Adam’s choice, however, was not “fundamental,” however, and was thus not the cause of the sin of others after him. Van Buren then states the implication that, for Israel’s witness—specifically that of the rabbis—sin and death have never been a crucial element of the story. Rather, “the center of their story was “Sinai.”³⁸ From this center, Israel’s witness declares the problem of sin and death “countered” by the call of Israel, but “not yet overcome.”³⁹

³⁴ *CTPI*, 64.

³⁵ *CD II/2*, 162,167.

³⁶ *CTPI*, 103. Emphasis in original. In *CTPI*, 96, van Buren notes that adam is a “collective [term] for the man and the woman.”

³⁷ *CTPI*, 103.

³⁸ *CTPI*, 104.

³⁹ *CTPI*, 105.

The calling of Israel thus witnesses to God’s commitment to redeeming creation from the threat of human disobedience and the chaos it unleashes, but it is not a commitment whose goal has been established from eternity in God’s self-determination, as it is with Barth. Rather, for van Buren, Israel’s witness to God’s self-determination is precisely to the God who grants freedom to God’s covenant partner, with the effect that God, as Creator, “has no guarantee that his world will ‘win through.’”⁴⁰

God has started something fundamentally good with creation—uttering a “Yes” and a “very good” to the created order—but that good thing is not perfect at the moment of its beginning. Israel’s witness, according to van Buren, has no account of “a golden age in the past, a perfect primordial paradise from which the world has fallen. Rather, the perfect is yet to come.”⁴¹ Along the way to the perfect, creatures find themselves addressed by God, and so “made responsible” to that address.⁴² God’s fundamental “Yes” to creation thus brings with it “the terrible possibility of irresponsibility, of failure to be what creation was made to be: God’s faithful and responsible creature.” This is the closest van Buren comes in *CTPI* to speaking of the reality of a “Yes” and “No” at work in God’s relationship to creation. The covenant, says van Buren, “does entail a genuine decision. If God commands obedience, then disobedience lurks in the background as an alternative.”⁴³ This disobedience is called sin, and the effect of sin is evil.⁴⁴ Recall that for Barth, evil is precisely that which God, in God’s eternal election, “does not will.” As witnesses to God, human creatures are to testify to both what God wills (God’s Yes) and what God does not will (God’s No). Barth argued that this would necessarily entail a “confrontation”

⁴⁰ *CTPI*, 100. On the topic of the uncertainty of God’s will and purpose, van Buren seems to equivocate throughout *TJCR*. At times it seems as though van Buren speaks confidently that God “will” redeem creation and at other times he makes it clear that such confidence must be tempered with uncertainty.

⁴¹ *CTPI*, 90.

⁴² *CTPI*, 88.

⁴³ *CTPI*, 100.

⁴⁴ *CTPI*, 107.

with evil in which evil is defeated. Human beings, for Barth, have been overtaken by evil, however, and so lack the capacity to testify to God's rejection of evil by overcoming it. The defeat of evil, for Barth, is assured from all eternity by virtue of God's decision to be gracious to human beings in Jesus Christ, but that defeat had to become "the content of a history," the history of Israel and the church, as witnesses to the eternal self-determination of God, and finally the history of Jesus Christ.

Accepted in van Buren's account of the divine self-determination is Barth's notion that the history between God and Israel involves a movement in which God's fundamental "Yes" to creation has as its goal the overcoming of sin and death. For van Buren, this means that God creates an unfinished reality that moves towards completion (redemption) and Israel's covenant with God is the fundamental context within which this movement occurs. Rejected, however, in his account of the witness of Israel, is any notion that Israel (or the Gentiles for that matter) have been given over so totally to disobedience, sin, and evil as to put redemption fully into the hands of God. Rather, according to van Buren, "[w]e are still as we were made, being able to hear God's command and promise, and capable of loving, obeying, and trusting him."⁴⁵ Israel's witness does, according to van Buren, attest to "sin" and "death," but primarily as ongoing threats to God's plan for the continuation and eventual perfection of creation. According to van Buren, the witness of Israel is thus not to be found in the expectation of a decisive act of redemption on God's part that defeats an enemy that has totally overtaken Israel (as with Barth). Rather, Israel understands itself determined to hear God's address and commanded to participate in God's mission to redeem creation. Instead of Jesus Christ's coming constituting the redemption of humanity (as with Barth), van Buren hears Israel's witness declaring that Torah is

⁴⁵ This statement contrasts strongly with Barth, who called the attempt of "picturing to ourselves human beings unfallen and sinless" an "impossible task" (*CD* II/2, 163).

precisely the remedy that God has given Israel as it faces the threat of sin, evil, and disobedience along the way.⁴⁶ Israel's "No" to sin and evil is accomplished with its "Yes" to Torah.⁴⁷ The church, in van Buren's estimation, has missed this fundamental testimony of Israel since it has articulated its "understanding of creation and its problem" in such a way as to magnify sin to the denigration of creation.⁴⁸ Sin and death, says van Buren, are not central motifs in Israel's testimony to God, rather, Torah as God's gracious gift for living in God's good creation is central.⁴⁹ Creation will be perfected, not by "a single act of divine rule" that "fulfils itself step by step,"⁵⁰ as with Barth, but through a cooperative relationship between God and Israel, in which creation's completion "depends...on the free response of God's dialogical partner."⁵¹

It should be clear from van Buren's account of God's self-determination that he has departed from Barth's doctrine of the electing God while retaining some of his most critical categories. Van Buren continues to be committed, that is, to the concept of God's self-determination and to the assertion that God's relationship to creation is not known by way of a general concept but through a particular relationship, namely the covenant. Abandoned, however, is the exclusive assertion that Jesus Christ is the subject and object of this relationship or covenant. This departure raises the question as to the nature of the relationship between the Creator-Redeemer and Jesus Christ. If God's self-determination is not a determination for a relation to creation grounded in Jesus Christ, then what significance, if any, does Jesus Christ

⁴⁶ *CTPI*, 216.

⁴⁷ This will be covered in more detail below on 115ff.

⁴⁸ *CTPI*, 87.

⁴⁹ *CTPI*, 104-105.

⁵⁰ *CD II/2*, 90.

⁵¹ *CTPI*, 99. This difference between van Buren and Barth comes out with utter clarity in *CC*, when van Buren treats the significance of Easter, noting that it is "the ambiguous event in which the Church recognizes both God's refusal to abandon his cause, which Jesus made his own, and the cross as evidence of the seriousness of the conflict between that cause and the misuse of human power" (*CC*, 107). The church's "amen" to this "ambiguous event," says van Buren, constitutes its own commitment to cooperating with God in leading the world to redemption and so is actually a condition of possibility for Easter's occurrence!

have with respect to God’s relation to creation? Van Buren recognizes that a Christian theology of Israel must ask this question. His answer is that, like Israel, the church confesses God to be the Creator-Redeemer, but it does so on the basis of a different event of revelation, namely the event of Easter. In the event of Easter, God is revealed to the Gentiles as the Creator-Redeemer who rescues them “from the nothingness of pagan darkness into life and light in Christ.”⁵² This event, like the Exodus, was not “totally redemptive,” but brought Israel’s hope of redemption to the Gentiles. Gentiles confess this, however, only by taking up “Israel’s testimony to the Creator God of the Exodus” as the basis of its own “Easter-faith.”⁵³

What of the New Testament witness to Jesus Christ’s pre-existence or, in Barth’s words, Christ’s eternal election? Can the church hear Israel’s living witness to the “creator-redeemer” apart from a confession that the creator-redeemer is known definitively in Jesus Christ, who was the Word “in the beginning with God” (John 1)? Barth’s novel interpretation of John 1 was to say that the *logos tou theou* could not be appealed to in order to speak of a Word or decision of God abstracted from Jesus Christ as God’s revelation of Godself and so of God’s eternal will. Rather, *logos tou theou* was a concept that stood in for the actual referent to whom it referred, namely Jesus Christ. At this point it should not be surprising that van Buren rejects Barth’s interpretation here as well. For van Buren, God’s eternal Word reveals his “purpose and intention,” but not primarily Godself. For van Buren, revelation in the scriptures is rarely ever presented as God’s self-revelation.⁵⁴ Thus, van Buren can say: “As in Creation, and as at Sinai, so in the life of this Jew, the creative Word spoke, and as a result, behold: creation, Israel, Jesus

⁵² *CTPI*, 53.

⁵³ *CTPI*, 53.

⁵⁴ *CTPI*, 6-9; 215. It is helpful to note again that Jenson, contra van Buren, will continue to affirm Barth’s claims regarding God’s self-revelation.

of Nazareth!”⁵⁵ Note here that in this series the Word is not definitively revealed in or as Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, Jesus of Nazareth belongs in the same series as “creation” and “Israel,” being another instance of God speaking God’s Word in history. Van Buren notes that while the Apostolic writings provide a witness to what theologians have called Christ’s “pre-existence” (van Buren points out that the term itself is not in scripture), such a concept should not be understood in a “temporal” sense to imply that the human being Jesus of Nazareth was in any way with God “before the foundation of the world.”⁵⁶ Jesus Christ can be understood as having been “in the beginning” and the church can be understood as having been chosen in him “before the foundation of the world” (Eph. 1:4) only in the sense that his life enacts the “eternal personal resolve” of God to complete creation.⁵⁷ Van Buren points out that Torah functions in the same manner in rabbinic writings:

The idea [of pre-existence] certainly appears in the opening of *Genesis Rabbah*, where, commenting on those verses from Proverbs [8:22, 27-31], the Rabbis argued, in their own inimitable way, that Torah was with God when he began to create the world. The thrust of their claim, however, appears to be not so much temporal as evaluative: Torah has a higher value even than creation. It is as if the Rabbis could have said that creation is a product of Torah, but would never have said the opposite, that Torah is a product of creation.⁵⁸

According to van Buren, Jesus’ embodiment of the Word of God was “evaluated” so highly by the early church that Jesus was accorded priority over all else. At no point, however, was the implication to be made that the human Jesus in any way pre-existed in identity with the eternal Word of God.⁵⁹ Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnation of the will and Word of God in history for

⁵⁵ *CTPI*, 83.

⁵⁶ *CTPI*, 82.

⁵⁷ *CTPI*, 77-79, 83. This interpretation was already present in *SMG*, 50-52, and appears again in the third volume of *TJCR*, namely *CC*, 251-252.

⁵⁸ *CTPI*, 81.

⁵⁹ Of course, as was said above in chapter 1, Barth did not necessarily assert the eternal pre-existence of the *humanity* of Christ either. What was pre-existent was God’s identification of Himself with Jesus of Nazareth who, in human history, would become flesh. However, as we will see in chapter 5 when we examine Jenson’s theology,

Gentiles, while unexpected up to that point, was nonetheless seen by the Apostles as consistent with the revelation of the God of Exodus-Sinai.⁶⁰ In Jesus, the Exodus-Sinai revelation is thus confirmed, not completed or abrogated.⁶¹ Where does this leave the relationship between the Creator-Redeemer and Jesus, for van Buren? If Jesus Christ is not the expected universal redeemer, then who is he?

In short, for van Buren, Jesus Christ is “Israel-for-the-church.”⁶² Jesus, says van Buren, “has re-presented to the Gentile church Israel as God’s chosen witness to the humility and generosity of the Creator.”⁶³ The relationship between the God of Israel and his Son Jesus is thus subordinated under the foundational relationship God has with Israel:

Jesus Christ recapitulates and embodies Israel’s reality, its relationship to God, and its calling to be a light for the Gentiles. So the Gospel according to Matthew has Jesus relive Israel’s sojourn in Egypt to be called back to the land by God. And the theological tradition that saw in Jesus the re-presentation of Israel’s prophets, priests, and kings, also was responding to this reality. Behind such witnesses stands the figure of Jesus-as-Israel, serving Israel in its mission to the Gentiles and being for them the place at which is seen the humility and the generosity of God. Just so is Jesus the *telos* of the Torah.⁶⁴

Van Buren’s departure from Barth’s doctrine of the Word of God and revelation, and his substitution of it for a “historical framework,” shows its impact powerfully at this point. Jesus Christ is not to be understood as the unity of God and humanity that is to be re-presented in the one community of God in its twofold form as Israel and the church. Rather, the one people of God is the Israel of the Bible in its existence all the way up to today and it is God’s unity with this people, through election and covenant, that “is the basis and foundation of His unity with His

there is a certain sense in which Barth affirmed the eternal pre-existence of the history of Jesus Christ as the basis for all other history.

⁶⁰ *CTPI*, 82.

⁶¹ Here, of course, is another key difference between Barth and van Buren. For van Buren, what happened in Jesus Christ (the inclusion of Gentiles in the covenant) was *not* expected, whereas for Barth what was expected by Israel came in Jesus Christ.

⁶² *CTPI*, 249.

⁶³ *CTPI*, 249.

⁶⁴ *CTPI*, 253.

Son Jesus Christ and so His unity with the church.”⁶⁵ On these terms it is clear that Jesus Christ cannot be the subject and the object of divine election. Van Buren says that Israel testifies to the God who is electing (i.e. the Subject of election), but Israel does so on the basis of the covenant established at Sinai, not on the basis of the revelation of the unity of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ.⁶⁶ Israel’s testimony is thus that the subject of election is the one God of Israel, the Creator-Redeemer of heaven and earth, and that, as the elected people, the object of God’s election is Israel.⁶⁷

To summarize van Buren’s doctrine of God, we can say that he argues that the God Israel witnesses to is the Creator-Redeemer, whose primal will or purpose, revealed to Israel in the event of Exodus-Sinai, is to bring creation to completion in covenant partnership with Torah-observant Israel. This doctrine of God, despite the obvious differences it displays with Barth’s, is nonetheless similar in the way it attempts to hold creation and redemption together. God, for Barth and van Buren, does not decide to create and only after decide to redeem creation. Rather, God’s first decision is a self-determination precisely to be the redemptive creator. It should be clear already, however, that the nature of the difference between van Buren and Barth centres on how God determines Godself as creator and redeemer.⁶⁸ For Barth, God’s self-determination means that “God wills to be God solely in Jesus Christ” whereas for van Buren, God wills to be God as the Creator and Redeemer of Israel, and through Israel to all peoples.⁶⁹ Taking into consideration the critical departures van Buren has made with respect to his doctrine of Israel’s

⁶⁵ *DW*, 83. In *CC*, 252ff, van Buren articulates this alternative account of the (covenantal) unity between God and Israel in opposition to the Chalcedonian assertions about the “unity of the Subject” in the incarnation.

⁶⁶ *CTPI*, 118.

⁶⁷ Nowhere does van Buren articulate God’s self-determination in terms of God’s “self-election,” i.e., as being also the “object” of election.

⁶⁸ *CTPI*, 44.

⁶⁹ *CD II/2*, 91.

God, what impact can be seen in his theology of Israel? While several answers to this question have already begun to unfold above, it is now necessary to state them explicitly.

Israel and the Nations: Election and the People(s) of God

For Barth, the community of God was the primary object of the election that took place in Jesus Christ. Of course, the subject and object of eternal election was, for Barth, Jesus Christ. However, Barth also asserted that Jesus Christ's election was "simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God by the existence of which Jesus Christ is to be attested to the whole world and the whole world summoned to faith in Jesus Christ."⁷⁰ This one community is Israel and the church, representing the judgment and mercy of God to the world, determined by God to hear and believe the promise, and given a passing and a coming form in the history of the covenant. From the preceding analysis, it has already been established that van Buren's desire to listen to Israel's living testimony has precluded any account of Israel and the church as one community in two forms. Whereas for Barth, Israel corresponded to the Old Testament people of God and the church to the New Testament people of God as Israel's determined end or goal, for van Buren the Israel of the Old Testament continues in unbroken continuity down to the present day as living Israel in covenant with God apart from the church. The way of God's history with Israel does not lead to the church, but rather to the goal of the redemption of creation. This is what Israel was elected for, and what it continues to be elected for.

Israel, for van Buren, witnesses to God as the electing God on the basis of its own independent election as the people of God, called to participate in the covenant whose goal is the redemption of creation.⁷¹ On the basis of Israel's witness, van Buren thus concludes that it is

⁷⁰ *CD II/2*, 195.

⁷¹ *CTPI*, 120. Recall Barth's rejection of any "independent election of the community" (*CD II/2*, 197).

through Israel that “God...has chosen to deal with the vast reaches of his creation.”⁷² The relation between God and the whole creation is thus determined by God’s relationship with Israel. This is, of course, a radical departure from Barth, and from van Buren’s own earlier position in *AD*, that God has chosen to deal with creation by dealing first with Jesus Christ. For Barth, the relationship between God and the whole creation was determined by the double predestination of Jesus Christ, the unity of God and humanity and so the one and true Mediator between God and humanity.⁷³ For Barth, the community, in its own “mediating character,” was to witness to the Mediator, Jesus Christ, who would come in time as “His own representative among men” in order to reveal God and God’s glory.⁷⁴ In van Buren’s reading of Israel’s witness, and in his prior articulation of revelation, there is no coming of God in which God reveals Godself definitively as God’s own representative.⁷⁵ Put differently, there is no coming of God in the form of the one mediator between God and humanity. From this it follows that there will be no community whose primary witness or mediating character corresponds to that coming. Instead, for van Buren, God comes again and again throughout history, calling and inviting people to join in moving creation towards redemption. While elect Israel has received God’s revelation from Sinai and has been called independent of all other nations to join and serve God in the mission of redemption, the nations do not receive this call or invitation independently.⁷⁶

⁷² *CTPI*, 119-120. There is a sense in which Barth could have agreed to this statement *if* it was grounded first in the claim that Israel’s election was an election in Christ. Also, note van Buren’s similar claim later: “Whatever may be God’s broader purpose for the whole of his creation, it is going to be unfolded in a quite particular history, and this history of the people Israel will be presented as that to which the history of all creation is related” (137). Again, while Barth could have written this statement, he would have had to have prefaced it with the claim that Israel’s mediatorial or priestly role here was a function of its election in Jesus Christ.

⁷³ *CD II/2*, 197.

⁷⁴ *KD I/2*, 92; *CD I/2*, 84.

⁷⁵ This much should be clear from van Buren’s rejection of Barth’s understand of revelation as God’s “self-revelation.”

⁷⁶ *CTPI*, 165. Thus, van Buren notes: “Israel was called as a people; the church has been called together out of many peoples. Israel is called to be a holy nation; the church has been called out of the nations to be a community within the nations.”

Rather, Gentiles among the nations receive an invitation to join in God’s movement of redeeming creation through Israel’s witness. Israel’s witness to its election by God is the primary way that God invites his creatures into a cooperative task of redeeming creation. It does so by showing, in its own covenant existence, that “since God made men and women in his own image and likeness, they correspond to God by being able to respond to God.”⁷⁷ Israel’s elected existence thus mediates and conditions the relation between the God of Israel and the rest of creation. If there is one mediator, for van Buren, it is Israel.

On what basis does van Buren reach this conclusion? At base, van Buren’s conclusions arise from his reading of the Torah’s witness to God as the “covenantally self-determined” God.⁷⁸ Van Buren surveys God’s covenant with Noah in Israel’s witness to “pre-history,” then the beginnings of covenant history with Abraham, and finally the great covenant established with the people of Israel through the revelation at Mt. Sinai.⁷⁹ These covenants reveal a God who is concerned with all of creation, but who ultimately chooses to exercise “his universal care for his creation by caring paradigmatically for Israel.”⁸⁰ Israel’s is thus a “mediating” election in that through their covenant with God Israel mediates God’s blessing to the nations. God has chosen Israel, but with a particular purpose in mind, the redemption of creation. The question, of course, is how Israel mediates God’s will and purpose for creation among the nations.

⁷⁷ *CTPI*, 120. For Barth, the elected community, as witnesses to Jesus Christ, correspond to Jesus Christ by attesting either to God’s “Yes” or God’s “No” (*CD II/2*, 208).

⁷⁸ While van Buren uses this particular phrasing God’s “covenantal” self-determination primarily in *CC*, it is an expression of what was saying already in *CTPI*.

⁷⁹ *CTPI*, 116-152. Van Buren’s chapter “Israel’s Election—and the Nations” explores the different covenants spoken of in Israel’s witness.

⁸⁰ *CTPI*, 125.

Israel's Representative Service: The Visible Reality of the Unfinished Covenant

According to Barth, the people of Israel witness to Jesus Christ and so mediate God's will and purpose for creation among the nations by reflecting "the judgment from which God has rescued man and which He wills to endure Himself in the person of Jesus of Nazareth."⁸¹ For Barth, who assumed that God's will and purpose for creation was to redeem creation in Jesus Christ, it is Jesus Christ who effectively represents fallen humanity "by Himself mediating on behalf of the one who must necessarily be rejected."⁸² As the witness to Jesus Christ, Israel's mediating role is not effective, but reflective. The very existence of Israel, for Barth, represents the judgment of God and by doing so attests to the "No" of God that is included subordinately under his "Yes." Israel serves to make visible to the world the misery, disobedience, and obduracy of humanity under the curse of sin that was taken away in Jesus Christ.

For van Buren, Israel's witness does not attest to such a degree of "misery" and "disobedience," and thus Israel does not see the need for a mediator, Jesus Christ, as God's effective response to the threat of sin. While humanity sins, it is not ontologically stained by an original sin derived from a "fall." Indeed, although Israel's witness includes accounts of its own sin, it nonetheless also testifies to Israel's holiness, its obedient response to God's command.⁸³ Israel's witness thus attests to "God's involvement in and closeness to his creation, both in mercy and judgment."⁸⁴ Israel's role as the elect of God, therefore, cannot be to serve the "representation" solely of the judgment of God taken away by Jesus Christ. Israel does not "represent" an aspect to Jesus' divine "self-presentation." Neither, therefore, can Israel be conceived typologically as "the synagogue" that up to today continues to serve as witness to

⁸¹ *CTPI*, 206.

⁸² *CTPI*, 166.

⁸³ *CTPI*, 159-161.

⁸⁴ *CTPI*, 18. Emphasis mine.

human obduracy and the human refusal to accept the grace of God. Israel's service, for van Buren, is precisely its enduring existence as the people of God, called to obedience to Torah.⁸⁵ Barth's error, according to van Buren, is not to be located in his claim that Israel and the church were "two parts of a single but divided people of God," but rather in his claim that Israel's continued existence apart from the church was "a sin to be overcome only by Israel joining the Church and its confession of the novelty of Christ."⁸⁶ Israel's continued existence attests to the world that "God is still working at the completion of his creation in his same old way, the way of particularity."⁸⁷ This is what Israel makes visible in its existence.

If Israel does not represent some aspect of God's redemptive movement towards the world in Jesus Christ, then where has this left Jesus Christ in all of this? As was already mentioned above, van Buren employs Barth's language of representation in the case of his description of Jesus as Israel-for-the-church.⁸⁸ It is worth looking at three of van Buren's statements about Jesus's representational role:

He has re-presented to the Gentile church Israel as God's chosen witness to the humility and generosity of the creator.⁸⁹

[B]y binding Gentiles to this one risen Jew, God has confirmed the re-presentational identity of Jesus with his people Israel, confirming in him the election of Israel to be a light for the Gentiles, thereby bringing them from death into life.⁹⁰

Jesus Christ recapitulates and embodies Israel's reality, its relationship to God, and its calling to be a light for the Gentiles... And the theological tradition that saw in Jesus the re-presentation of Israel's prophets, priests, and kings... was responding to this reality.⁹¹

⁸⁵ *CTPI*, 170-171.

⁸⁶ *CC*, 195. Here van Buren seems to give a nod to the notion of Israel and the Church being a "single" people. But, in my estimation, this is more a statement that reflects van Buren's claims about God's universal care for creation. All creation is "the people of God," and yet God does not deal with all of creation except through the particular.

⁸⁷ *CTPI*, 171.

⁸⁸ *CTPI*, 249-253.

⁸⁹ *CTPI*, 249.

⁹⁰ *CTPI*, 250.

⁹¹ *CTPI*, 253.

The above three passages demonstrate van Buren's departure from Barth. Israel and the church together no longer represent Jesus Christ. Rather, Jesus Christ, as one of God's chosen sons in Israel, re-presents the object of God's election—Israel—to the Gentiles, as it is through the election of Israel that God has decided to care for the world. This is not to deny Jesus as an effective mediator for van Buren. What it is to do is to locate that role within Israel, thus preventing it from becoming in any way universalized.⁹² Jesus, a Torah-observant Jew, is precisely in that way a light to the Gentiles. Jesus brings God's Word to Israel to the Gentiles and that Word is the Word of promise. While this Word was heard first in Israel, it has now also been heard among the nations. What is this Word? It is the Word of God's self-determination to be the redemptive creator. As was shown above, this Word not only involves God's self-determination, however, it determines creation too and, as God's elect, it determines Israel. The nature of that determination must now be examined.

Israel Determined as Responsible Co-Worker

According to Barth, God's decision to reveal and impart Godself involves the hearing of the self-witness of God and belief or faith in that witness. Furthermore, for Barth, both aspects constitute the twofold determination of the one community of God. The community is determined to hear and believe in God's promise, Jesus Christ. As hearer of God's promise, Israel reveals that humanity is in the subordinate position as the addressee and that God is in the position of "Leader, Disposer and Giver."⁹³ Because God's Word/promise is, in advance of anything that human beings can do, the unity of God and humanity in Jesus Christ, the gospel of God's mercy ruling in God's judgment, there can be no effort on the part of human beings to

⁹² Van Buren outlines his worries about Christianity's "universality" on 170-172 of *CTPI*.

⁹³ *CD* II/2, 235.

work towards such a unity. Rather, human beings can “only follow God...be subject to Him [and] listen to Him. Such is his humanity.”⁹⁴ Never, says Barth, can this relationship be dissolved or reversed, not even in the case of disobedience and the refusal of the promise. Whether only in hearing or also in believing, humanity is determined by the Word of God’s promise.

For van Buren, however, the promise of God, and so Israel’s determination by that promise, is not God’s Word concerning God’s mercy ruling in God’s judgment; it is not the Word concerning the unity of God and humanity in Jesus Christ. The promise of God, for van Buren, is the promise that the “Creator will finish his incomplete creation; he will make right what is wrong...will make whole what is broken.”⁹⁵ Israel receives this promise at Sinai, not as a form of revealed knowledge, but as an invitation to participate in the fulfillment of the promise.

Thus, van Buren notes that

revelation, according to Israel’s witness, creates participation. God’s revelation creates a community of response, a *we* that says ‘we will do.’ God’s revelation from Sinai set Israel on God’s way into history, forged as a responding community, a participant in God’s purpose for his creation.⁹⁶

Revelation is not primarily God’s Word spoken concerning God’s own decisive action in fulfilling those promises. Rather, God’s word is God’s commandment in the form of Torah. For van Buren, Israel’s commitment to Torah constitutes the response, the “we will do” that Israel speaks back to God. Thus, van Buren replaces Barth’s account of the movement within the community from “hearing” to “believing,” with the back and forth, push and pull, of God “revealing” and people “responding” or failing to respond.

Inasmuch as van Buren is keen to speak of a “failure to hear” the promise of God, he turns frequently to indict the church. It has been the church’s failure to hear Israel’s living

⁹⁴ *CD II/2*, 234.

⁹⁵ *CTPI*, 149.

⁹⁶ *CTPI*, 159. Emphasis in original.

witness that has prevented the church from recognizing God’s enduring work for the redemption of creation, including Israel’s cooperative role in that work.⁹⁷ As has already been discussed above, this failure has been perpetuated by the church’s view of Christ as universal redeemer, as the one through whom dead Israel rose to new life in the church. For van Buren, however, elect Israel has not passed from death to life understood as an ultimate transition. Having disavowed any notion of sin as total depravity, he understands the form of Israel’s life through history as consistently taking the form of a cooperative struggle (as God’s partner) against death on the way to the completion of creation.

Torah-Existence as the Enduring Form of Israel’s Witness

For Barth, Israel and the church are together the two forms of the one community of God, whose histories represent and so witness to the redemptive movement God has ordained for the creature in Jesus Christ: the movement from death to life in the history of the covenant. Israel, as the representation of humanity under judgment, corresponds to the form of life that must pass away and the church, as the representation of humanity under mercy, to the form of life that is to come. Israel is the form of the community that is passing precisely because in Jesus Christ the humanity that Israel represented has passed away and has been raised to new life. As should be quite clear by now, van Buren’s non-Christological reading of the divine self-determination, as well as his claim that redemption in Christ is neither universal nor definitive, will not accommodate such a reading of Israel’s witness. Israel, for van Buren, while receiving a share in redemption in the Exodus-Sinai event, simply has not experienced the redemption that God has promised to bring for all of creation. While “new things” have happened in light of Christ’s

⁹⁷ *CTPI*, 151.

death and resurrection, namely the inclusion of the Gentiles, all things have not become new (contra Barth). Barth's assertion that redemption for Israel involves rising to life in the church is thus roundly rejected by van Buren. In fact, in a remarkable passage in which he employs Barth's Yes-No dialectic, van Buren claims that Israel's "No" to the church's claims about redemption in Christ is precisely its "Yes" to God:

*Israel's living witness to God takes the form of Torah-life, a willing, creative acknowledgment of the authority of God's revelation of his involvement in his creation. Israel's fidelity to Torah as a Yes to God and as a No to the church is a supporting witness to the church of the incarnation of God's commanding word and of creaturely responsibility, both of which the church was first invited to see in the Torah-true Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.*⁹⁸

Both Barth and van Buren have an account of the "form" of Israel's participation in the covenant. The form of Israel's participation in the covenant, according to Barth, is its miserable history of abandonment through which it attests to the old human as the passing human.⁹⁹ The form of Israel's participation in the covenant, according to van Buren, however, is its very existence as a people called and committed to live "according to God's Torah."¹⁰⁰ Israel's living witness attests to the fact that it has not passed away and that, contra Barth, it is not a "preserved antique" but a living servant of God. Israel's "Yes" to Torah is its continued faithfulness to God as it works in partnership with God in the redemption of creation. What of Israel's "No" to the church's claims that redemption has come in Christ? Here van Buren claims that the "No" of Israel is really a no to a church that had obscured the meaning of Israel's covenant and its inclusion in it. In *CC*, through an allusion to the medieval figures of *Ecclesia and Synagoga* depicted in statues at the Strasbourg cathedral, van Buren argues that the "blindfold" over the

⁹⁸ *CTPI*, 210. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁹ *CD II/2*, 261. Of course, Barth is also careful to note that inasmuch as the church pre-exists in Israel, Israel also attests to the form of the coming human.

¹⁰⁰ *CTPI*, 157.

eyes of the Jewish people is not its own failure to confess Christ but rather the failure of the Gentile church, specifically in its teaching that the church is the replacement of Israel and in its long history of anti-Judaism.¹⁰¹

Van Buren claims that the church was simply mistaken to universalize claims to redemption in Christ. Part of this mistake, according to him, involved a misunderstanding of Paul's gospel. While Paul did indeed preach a gospel of universal mercy for all, he did so within a "radically eschatological framework" in which the Gentiles, his primary audience, were being drawn into Israel's covenant in such a way that they would not be required to adopt the Jewish law.¹⁰² While the law was a "joy" for Israel, and its way of obeying its God, it was a "curse" for the nations who had rejected God's initial offer of the law. Paul's gospel was that apart from the law God had made a way of "bringing many Gentiles to obedience to the God of Israel."¹⁰³ The church, on the other hand, interpreted Paul's words about the law's "curse" as a universal statement meant to "condemn the world for failing to live up to its perfection," which was an "impossible task" anyway.¹⁰⁴ In this view of the law, Christ becomes God's universal offer of mercy and the Jewish rejection of Christ is construed as their stubborn trust in "their careful performance of the commandments" rather than the mercy of God. Conversely, van Buren states that if Paul is seen as "a Jew, an Israelite, a Pharisee, and blameless in his keeping of Torah," then a different picture of Paul's gospel emerges in which Paul is seen to wholeheartedly affirm the ongoing observance of Torah for Jews.¹⁰⁵ What, then, of Paul's statements concerning

¹⁰¹ *CC*, 196-197.

¹⁰² *CC*, 193; *CTPI*, 279. Several scholars influenced van Buren's views of Paul, namely Krister Stendahl, Lloyd Gaston, and John Gager. To say that these scholars influenced him is not to say, of course, that he adopted their diverse positions without change or without his own interpretations.

¹⁰³ *CTPI*, 278.

¹⁰⁴ *CTPI*, 280.

¹⁰⁵ *CTPI*, 148.

Jewish-Christian unity in Christ? In *CC*, van Buren argues that it is likely that Paul thought that he was part of

a remnant of Israel, a small part acting on behalf of all, [that would] take the risk of apostasy to welcome the Gentiles as Gentiles into a new life of this new stage of the covenant. In this new gathering, the distinction between Jew and Gentiles would have no place, so it was important that most of Israel hold on in the path of Torah already being worked out before this new experiment was started, so that the young Church might never be without the faithfulness of Israel as a reminder of the rock from which it had been hewn, the root onto which it had been grafted.¹⁰⁶

As a further consequence of the mistake of universalizing redemption in Christ, the church missed the many unfinished and unpredictable aspects to the economy of redemption. The economy of redemption, for van Buren, need not be interpreted as determined in advance as having its absolute goal in Christ.¹⁰⁷ Van Buren does claim that Paul understood the economy of redemption ultimately to involve “bringing the world into God’s service” through Christ. However, given that the time between “Paul and the present” includes “the long journey which God and the Jewish people have made together,” he does not believe that Christ’s life, death, and resurrection should be understood as the effective accomplishment of redemption. In place of Paul’s “radically eschatological framework,” van Buren appeals again to ongoing developments in history to argue for a conception of the economy of redemption that is “mutually determined” by God’s initiating action and the human response.¹⁰⁸ For this reason, he is willing to say, for example, that “God may have discovered after the fact that the death of his faithful son Jesus would be the way to draw innumerable Gentiles to their knees before him.”¹⁰⁹ Christ’s life,

¹⁰⁶ *CC*, 193. Van Buren also treats Paul’s gospel in *CTPI*, 146-148 and 277-283.

¹⁰⁷ Van Buren again makes this clear in treatment of the “goal of Torah” in *CC*, 184ff.

¹⁰⁸ *CC*, 185.

¹⁰⁹ *CC*, 172.

death, and resurrection can thus be seen as God’s initiating action to provide “fresh new steps” leading towards the ultimate goal of the economy, but not the actuality of redemption.¹¹⁰

That said, there is a sense, for van Buren, in which Christ can be called the redeemer of the Gentiles in that, through Christ, the Gentiles were invited into covenant partnership with the God of Israel. For van Buren, however, creation as a whole remains unredeemed in any ultimate sense. God’s covenant intention to redeem the whole of creation thus remains the operative goal towards which Israel and the church are invited to strive as co-workers. Inasmuch, then, as redemption can be spoken of in terms of a “death” and “resurrection,” it is spoken of in relation to the Gentiles, called out of pagan darkness and into covenant life. In this covenant life, Jews live a witness whose form is “Torah-life.” For Gentiles, van Buren admits, things are more complicated, for the form of the witness of the Gentiles is at once an imitation of Jesus the Jew and yet Gentiles are not “to hold those features of Torah that mark the Jews as Jews.”¹¹¹ Van Buren is clear that one feature of the Gentile church’s witness is that it be a “servant to Israel” as Israel fulfills its task of being a light for the nations.¹¹² As to the Gentile church’s own distinctive witness, however, van Buren argues that it “is called to serve the God of Israel...in a Gentile way, and that means it will have to figure out for itself how to go about serving such a God in a non-Jewish way.”¹¹³ While Paul and the apostles provide some guidance on this, according to van Buren, the Gentiles will have to respond creatively to God’s call in light of its own unique place in history.¹¹⁴ The one criterion that van Buren provides for the form of the Gentile church’s witness is that the one it confesses Lord is the “crucified one.” Whatever form the Gentile

¹¹⁰ *CC*, 186.

¹¹¹ *CC*, 156.

¹¹² See the chapter “The Church’s Service to Israel” in *CTPI*, 320-352, for a fuller account of this.

¹¹³ *CC*, 156.

¹¹⁴ *CTPI*, 283.

church's witness takes, then, it will correspond to the one whose service to God led him to the cross and thus attest that "God gets his work done by making use of human weakness."¹¹⁵ With this construal of the place of Jews and Gentiles in the economy of redemption in place, van Buren rests his case for why Israel's "No" is not to Jesus Christ, but to a church that calls Israel to abandon the means by which God has called it to join as co-worker in the covenant, namely, Torah.¹¹⁶

Conclusion: Christology after Barth?

The analysis in this chapter of van Buren's attempt to "correct" Barth's *Israellehre*, has shown the many ways that van Buren sought to re-work Barth's *CD* from the ground up in order to articulate a positive theology of Israel and Judaism as witnesses to the creator and redeemer. Clearly the fundamental departure between the two takes place at the level of Christology, and this becomes plain in van Buren's final volume of *TJCR*, namely *Christ in Context*.¹¹⁷ Even the ordering of van Buren's trilogy, treating Christology last, is illustrative of the gap between him and Barth, a gap that began with *SMG*. Indeed, in *CC* van Buren argues for what is in many respects a much more developed articulation of the Christology of "call and response" seen in *SMG*, although in this case without as much anxiety over the use of theological terminology and with a much fuller treatment of the context of Israel's covenant as the basis for the church's Christological claims. As in *SMG*, while he acknowledges the patristic legacy, van Buren largely sets it to the side, and when he does engage it, he radically reinterprets it in order to do justice to

¹¹⁵ *CC*, 175.

¹¹⁶ For this reason, van Buren notes that "[t]he Jewish No to the church... is not to be found in the origins of the church. The No... was spoken on the basis of further developments both in the church and in Israel" (271).

¹¹⁷ Here a full examination of *Christ in Context* would only serve to confirm this. It is my conviction, however, that much of what is said in *CC* has already been implied, if not also said directly, in *CTPI* and indeed, even in his early Christological reflections in *SMG*.

the full covenantal context of Jesus's existence as a member of Israel. This becomes most clear in his "covenantal critique of the unity of the subject" in classical Christology, a topic of particular relevance in relation to Barth's doctrine of election.¹¹⁸ According to van Buren, in the light of Israel's witness to the church, the patristic claim that Jesus Christ is one subject with two natures, divine and human, must be interpreted as a claim that simply ignores Jesus's covenantal context in Israel. Even more, according to van Buren, the patristic construal of the unity of God and humanity "at least approaches, and may actually be, blasphemy" when considered from the position of Israel's witness to the distinction between creator and creature.¹¹⁹ Jesus, for van Buren, is fully human in his historical specificity as a Jew, a member of Israel. Jesus's distinction from humanity is not his "divinity" but his unique "calling and his response to that calling."¹²⁰ Jesus the Jew is one with God in the intimacy of covenantal relationship. The unity of God and humanity attested in Jesus Christ, for van Buren, is thus not the unity of a single subject but a "covenantal unity" that has "two distinct subjects," namely God and Israel.¹²¹ Thus, Jesus demonstrates, for van Buren, not the unity of God and humanity considered in general or universal terms, but rather the unity of Israel and God in the covenant and then the unity of God and the Gentile church made possible through Jesus' invitation to the Gentiles.

For Barth, of course, the traditional patristic dogma of the unity of the subject was crucial. To be sure, he too argued for an interpretation of the dogma that attended concretely to "the divine action which has taken place in Him [Jesus Christ]" and so eschewed any account of the two natures of Christ that was "autonomous" from an account of that action.¹²² The

¹¹⁸ *CC*, 252-254.

¹¹⁹ *CC*, 256.

¹²⁰ *CC*, 254.

¹²¹ *CC*, 257.

¹²² *CD* IV/1, 133. Of course, a careful reading of most of the Fathers would recognize that they did not think of Christ's two natures apart from the economy of redemption either.

difference, however, is that Barth holds fast to the confession of Christ as very God (*vere Deus*). Of course, the fact that van Buren parted ways decisively with his *Doktorvater* at the level of Christology was already evident in *DW*. The in-depth delineation of this departure in van Buren's final volume on Christology is, one could say, already implicit in *DW* in van Buren's decision to abandon Barth's doctrine of the Word of God.

In spite of the major differences that have come to light between van Buren's theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth, and Barth's theology, it cannot be doubted that van Buren clearly desired to learn from and wrestle with Barth, picking up his most important themes and transforming them in order to articulate a doctrine of Israel after him. Was he successful? The question really depends on answering a more fundamental one: was van Buren successful in articulating a *Christian* theology of the people Israel that could affirm what Barth could not, namely, an account of Israel's obedient witness to God apart from the church? There is no question that van Buren, a Christian theologian, did claim to offer just that. At the same time, however, van Buren's departures from Barth serve to illustrate the ways that his theological proposals put him in considerable tension with many claims of the Christian tradition. Of course, one can always contest what counts for true "Christianity," but this only begs the question of at what point one has finally left behind matters crucial to the historic faith. Clearly, van Buren attempts to walk a fine line between seeking a reforming attitude towards the core tenets of the Christian tradition and seeking an almost completely new framework of Christian self-understanding in light of Jewish history, and especially in light of the Holocaust.

In evaluations of van Buren's attempt, this tension has not gone unnoticed, not least by Jewish readers. David Novak, for example, noted in an appreciative review of *DW*, that after van Buren's attempt to discern the way for a new understanding of the Jewish-Christian reality,

crucial differences remain. According to Novak, it is “the incarnation, more than anything else, which has separated us, the two covenantal faith communities, one from the other. It still does.”¹²³ When Novak wrote that, he had yet to read *CTPI* or *CC*. Perhaps had he read those he would have seen with more clarity the extent to which, as was just discussed above, van Buren was willing to move beyond the traditional claims regarding the incarnation as well.

Wyschogrod wonders just this in his review of *DW* and *CTPI*. He argues that van Buren’s work is ultimately illustrative of a clash between the “irresistible force” of Jewish-Christian dialogue and the “immovable object” of the church’s Christology:

Frankly, I have the feeling that we are witnessing the encounter of the irresistible force with the immovable object. It is difficult for me to see how progress can be made without compromising doctrines essential to each of the faiths.¹²⁴

Van Buren was, of course, aware that he was departing, at many points radically, from the Christian tradition and was willing to take the risk for the potential gains for the church’s renewed relationship with the Jewish people. Considering this, one must certainly admire the sheer scope of van Buren’s attempt and the passion with which he sought a new way beyond Christian dogma stained by its anti-Judaic heritage. In this way van Buren surely did take up the task Barth asked of him, since Barth too understood the church’s renewed relationship to the Jews as a crucial issue for the church. Given the above analysis, however, it is not hard to imagine that Barth would have seen van Buren’s attempt at ‘correcting’ him as giving in too much to the “irresistible force” of Jewish-Christian dialogue and not holding fast enough to “the immovable object” of the church’s faith. Said differently, van Buren sought a foundation for his

¹²³ Novak, “A Jewish Response to a New Christian Theology,” *Judaism* 31, no.1 (Winter 1982): 120.

¹²⁴ Wyschogrod, “Christology: The Immovable Object,” in *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 80.

doctrine of Israel in a concept of election that was abstracted from the election of Jesus Christ as the self-determination of God.

Chapter Four

A Threefold Witness: Yoder's Early Engagement with Barth's Ethics and its Relationship to his Later Theology of Israel and Judaism

Two of the figures in this study, namely van Buren and Jenson, develop theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth that involve significant reflection on the Christian doctrine of God. Both van Buren's and Jenson's later works included multi-volume systematic theologies that took up, often in direct connection with Barth's exposition in *CD II/2*, questions of divine self-determination and the eternal election of Jesus Christ. In van Buren's case, he engaged these questions by way of an alternative theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth, driven especially by a post-Holocaust conscience regarding the church's past complicity in various forms of anti-Judaism.¹ In Jenson's case, as I will go on to show in chapters six and seven, he engaged these questions more in relation to a theological alternative to Barth's conception of the being of God, God's eternity and God's relationship to human history. However, as I will show, Jenson's proposed answers to these questions had a direct impact on his later theological account of Israel and Judaism.

The author under examination in this chapter and the next, John Howard Yoder,² differs significantly from van Buren and Jenson in almost all of the aforementioned respects. First, Yoder was never a systematic theologian. Much of Yoder's wide-ranging corpus began as occasional writings.³ Taking Yoder's work as a whole, it is more accurate to locate his writings in the discipline of Christian ethics. One can hardly deny, however, that Yoder constantly

¹ In fact, van Buren basically made the 'Jewish-Christian reality' the ordering principle of his systematics.

² For my comments on Yoder's abuse of women, please see my personal note on page 16 of the introduction.

³ To be sure, much of van Buren's and Jenson's writings could also be called occasional. Both of them, however, took on projects of a 'systematic' nature later in their lives.

approached Christian ethical discourse in conversation with traditional systematic themes (revelation, creation, sin, evil, redemption, eschatology, etc.) which provided an indispensable grammar for him.⁴ The difference between Yoder and van Buren and Jenson is that he never attempted to unify these diverse theological foci under a system of thought as the previous two authors did. Second, Yoder differs from the previous two authors in that his engagement with Barth was concerned primarily with Barth's ethics, and so not directly with Barth's treatment of the eternal election of Jesus Christ, or his account of the election of the community. Indeed, when it comes to the question of Yoder's mature theological reflections on Israel and Judaism (the subject of the next chapter), Barth's influence should not be overestimated, although given that he was well aware of what Barth had written on the subject, it would also be a mistake to underestimate Barth's influence.⁵

In spite of the fact that Yoder nowhere offers a sustained engagement with Barth's doctrine of election, it is nonetheless important to keep in mind two basic facts pertinent to this examination of his writings. First, no one doctrine of the *CD* is an island. This means that one can go to *The Doctrine of Creation* or *The Doctrine of Reconciliation* and pick up on the basic lines of Barth's doctrine of election repeated in that new context.⁶ That Yoder never engaged in his own significant textual analysis of §32-34 of *CD* II/2 does not imply, in other words, that he had no argument for or against Barth's doctrine of election. On the contrary, I will show that he

⁴ Yoder, perhaps, would have called these themes scriptural rather than systematic.

⁵ A different study of Yoder's theological reflections on Israel and Judaism could investigate other, at times more direct, sources for his reflections on this topic, such as his research on sixteenth-century Anabaptist disputations with the Reformers and his relationship with his Jewish friend Steven Schwarzschild. Where appropriate, these influences will be mentioned in this and the next chapter. To keep as close as possible to the primary theme of this chapter, however, most of these references will occur in the footnotes. See Paul Martens, "Reconstructing Jewish Christianity," 87-115, in *The Heterodox Yoder* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012) for an account Yoder's relationship with Schwarzschild.

⁶ By saying this, I do not mean to imply that the *CD* shows *total* consistency without any development. Indeed, Barth himself noted changes or movements in his thought.

in fact does. Secondly, almost all the volumes of the *CD* (including II/2) made an impression on Yoder during and after his time in Basel. In the formative years he studied in Basel, Barth's thought influenced him as he sought to develop and clarify his theological position on topics that he would continue to engage throughout his career: the distinction between the church and the world,⁷ 'Constantinianism'⁸ as a form of ecclesial apostasy, and the claim that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is the theological basis for Christian pacifism (to name only a few of Yoder's favourite topics). As will become clear throughout this and the next chapter, these topics correspond in specific ways both to important doctrinal foci in Barth's thought and later to Yoder's post-1970s reflections on the Jewish-Christian schism. In this first chapter I will show how Yoder's understanding of election appropriates and departs from Barth's doctrines of divine and human freedom, election/predestination, and finally his doctrine of revelation as well. Yoder's reflections on the Jewish-Christian schism will then be taken up in the next chapter with an eye to how Yoder's early engagement with Barth plays itself out in that context.

The materials examined below which display Yoder's appropriation and critique of Barth in the aforementioned areas include important archival evidence and early writings from 1954-

⁷ While the sources that influence Yoder's use of this distinction are many, Yoder would have certainly encountered it early on from Harold Bender, whose *Anabaptist Vision* made this distinction one of the central features of "genuine Anabaptism." According to Bender, the Anabaptist concept of the church was distinct in that it implied "[v]oluntary church membership based upon true conversion and involving a commitment to holy living and discipleship." From this concept of the church, noted Bender, follows an "inevitable corollary," namely "the separation of the church from the world." See, Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1944), 20, 26-27.

⁸ With the introduction of the label 'Constantinianism' here, it is helpful to note that Yoder's appeal to the history of Emperor Constantine and the changes his conversion brought about with respect to the Christian movement's status and power in the world, is a matter of considerable debate. Peter Leithart's book *Defending Constantine: The Twilight Of An Empire And The Dawn Of Christendom* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2010) sought to counter Yoder's picture of Constantine's imperial blessing on Christianity as a 'fall.' A subsequent volume edited by John D. Roth, *Constantine Revisited: Leithart, Yoder, and the Constantinian Debate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), took up Leithart's argument. A helpful paper, by D. Stephen Long, makes clear a matter that should be kept in mind when considering Yoder's negative appraisal of Constantine, namely, that Yoder was hardly the first Christian to make this appraisal and that many major theological figures (including Barth) came to similar conclusions regarding the negative legacy of the Emperor. Cf. D. Stephen Long, "Yoderian Constantinianism?" in *Constantine Revisited*, 100-123.

1955.⁹ In the first part of the chapter, I will provide a general outline of Yoder’s time in Basel. Following that, in the next part of the chapter I will examine Yoder’s key statements in a letter he wrote to French pastor and pacifist Andre Trocmé in 1954 concerning Barth’s doctrines of divine freedom and election and their relationship to the church’s witness. These statements will be further analyzed with the help of an essay Yoder wrote in the same time period, namely “Peace without Eschatology.”¹⁰ In that essay, Yoder’s early understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church appears and illuminates what I argue is a basic doctrine of election at work in Yoder’s early theology. The claim I will make in this part of the chapter is that Yoder’s doctrine of election differs from Barth’s in that he avoids any account of an eternal election and in that he articulates the form of the community’s witness not only in terms of twofold witness to judgment and mercy but also in terms of the human justice made possible through Christ. Following this argument, I will examine letters and course notes from 1955 in order to demonstrate the way that Yoder’s departure from Barth’s doctrine of divine freedom led him to a departure from Barth’s doctrine of revelation as well. The basic difference between Yoder and Barth on this doctrine is their understandings of the meaning of God’s self-determination. For Yoder, Jesus Christ reveals that God has “tied” Godself down in history, where for Barth, Jesus Christ reveals the God who remains free in his commitment to humanity.

In the concluding part of the chapter, I briefly comment on two of Yoder’s most sustained engagements with Barth: *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* (hereafter *KBPW*),¹¹ material first

⁹ Yoder wrote in English, French, and German (among other languages). Occasionally, when examining Yoder’s writings, I will provide French and German words and phrases that are relevant to my comparative analysis of Yoder and Barth.

¹⁰ The paper’s title was later changed to “If Christ is Truly Lord” in *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 52-84. The paper was first presented in the month of May at a Theological study conference at Heerenwegen, Zeist in the Netherlands. It later appeared in a slightly revised form under the original title of “Peace without Eschatology” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiastical and Ecumenical* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 144-167.

¹¹ John Howard Yoder, *Karl Barth and the Problem of War & Other Essays on Barth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2003).

developed between 1955-1957 and later published in 1970, and *The Pacifism of Karl Barth* (hereafter *PKB*), an address first delivered in French to the Belgian and French congresses of the *International Movement for Reconciliation* in 1962 (later published in English in 1964).¹² These last two works, Yoder's most concentrated engagements with Barth, draw together the many strands of Yoder's appropriation and critique of Barth from 1954-1955.¹³ Taken together, the material from 1954-1962 displays how Yoder's time studying in Basel, attending Barth's seminars and conferences, corresponding with Barth and with others about Barth, and finally teaching courses on Barth soon after returning to America, shaped and sharpened Yoder's theological position on numerous topics early in his career.¹⁴ After having elucidated key areas of appropriation and departure from Barth, it will be possible, in the next chapter, to state in what sense Yoder's later theological reflections on Israel and Judaism are after Barth.

Yoder's Early Engagement with Barth

Yoder studied in Basel from 1951-1957, during which time, he took five seminars and attended five colloquia with Barth, all of which covered material from earlier volumes of the *CD* and material that would later come to be included in later volumes.¹⁵ Like Jenson, however,

¹² John Howard Yoder, "Le Pacifisme De Karl Barth," *Cahiers de la Réconciliation*, No.2, Feb. 1963: 3-23. First delivered as a presentation at the *Mouvement International de la Réconciliation*, National Congress, Orgemont, France, March 1962.

¹³ As I note below, while it may seem that these works would be the most logical place to begin a study of Yoder's relationship to Barth, such a procedure would fail to account for all that led up to Yoder's argument in those works. Also, since the subject matter in those later works is focused exclusively around Barth's account of the problem of war and his argument with pacifism, I think it is important to attend here to evidence that is more closely related to the topic of this study, namely election and the theology of Israel and Judaism.

¹⁴ The best published account of the importance of Yoder's time studying with Barth is found in the chapter "Doctoral Studies with Barth and Cullmann," in Zimmerman's *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 101-139. My account differs from Zimmermann's primarily in that while his chapter is a general survey of Yoder's engagement with Barth (and Cullmann), the present chapter is focused principally on how areas of agreement and disagreement between Barth and Yoder relate to Yoder's theological reflections on Israel and Judaism.

¹⁵ During Yoder's time studying in Basel, he and Paul van Buren may have briefly overlapped. Van Buren left Basel in 1954 and Yoder began full-time studies that year. The extent to which they would have engaged with one another during their time in Basel, if they did at all, is unclear. In his essay "Christ, the Hope of the World," in *The Original*

Yoder did not have Barth for a *Doktorvater*. Yoder's doctoral thesis, an historical examination of the dialogues between the Anabaptists and Reformers in Zurich from 1523 to 1538, was supervised by Ernst Staehelin, Professor of church history in Basel.¹⁶ By the time he had completed his thesis he had engaged in his own substantial dialogue with many of the Reformed faculty in Basel, including Barth. The engagements with Barth left their mark on Yoder's writings, as is evident by the many times he cites him explicitly throughout his varied publications (and in many implicit references).¹⁷ Although he would not go to study full-time in Basel until 1954, in an early essay he wrote while in Basel, he notes that he attended Barth's lectures as early as 1950-51.¹⁸ The lectures Yoder referred to from 1950-51 would eventually become the material included in *CD III/4* on war.¹⁹ That Yoder's initial encounter with Barth

Revolution, 145, Yoder referred to van Buren's *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel* in a context which indicates his disapproval of the basic aim of the book. I am only aware of one piece of correspondence between Yoder and van Buren. It occurred in 1979 when van Buren was about to release the first volume of his *Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality*. Yoder, together with Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, were sent the manuscript of *DW*. Both Hauerwas and Burrell responded appreciatively, but due to time constraints, Yoder had to send the manuscript back only having read "five pages." He noted that van Buren's "way of beginning is certainly worthwhile" but that he "saw too little of how you were beginning to work things out for me to have anything to say about the validity of the total package." Cf. John Howard Yoder to Paul M Van Buren, May 10, 1979, Box 132, The Yoder Papers, Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (hereafter AMBS), Elkhart, Indiana. Further references to the Yoder papers will omit the city and state.

¹⁶ John Howard Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformation in der Schweiz, I: Die Gespräche zwischen Täufern und Reformatoren 1523-1538* (Karlsruhe: Verlag H. Schneider, 1962). Towards the end of his time in Basel (1957), Yoder would write a second volume which was concerned more with the dogmatic and theological implications of his historical analysis. It was published as *Täuferium und Reformatoren im Gespräch: Dogmengeschichtliche Untersuchung der frühen Gespräche zwischen Schweizerischen Täufern und Reformatoren* (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1968). Both volumes are available in English in the volume *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland: An Historical and Theological Analysis of the Dialogues Between Anabaptists and Reformers*, ed. C. Arnold Snyder, trans. David Carl Stassen and C. Arnold Snyder (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004).

¹⁷ If one fully absorbs Yoder's appropriation and critique of Barth in these formative years in Basel, these implicit references become clear throughout wide swaths of Yoder's writings.

¹⁸ Yoder, "If Christ is Truly Lord," in *The Original Revolution*, 83. Cf. also, Mark Thiessen Nation, *John Howard Yoder: Mennonite Patience, Evangelical Witness, Catholic Convictions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 18, and Earl Zimmermann, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 105, for additional details regarding Yoder's time studying in Basel.

¹⁹ See *KD III/4*, 515-538; *CD III/4*, 450-470. Yoder engaged this material first hand and also through the interpretation Jean Lasserre's *War and the Gospel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1962), originally published as *La Guerre et L'evangile* (Paris, 1953). In the preface to *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, Yoder notes that in 1954 Jean Lasserre asked him "to present Karl Barth his gift of a copy of *La Guerre et L'Evangile*." In the preface to the English translation of Lasserre's text, Yoder praises it, stating that "Lasserre's pacifism is no crank's hobby and no confused humanism...Not sentimental revulsion against the horror of Hiroshima or the terror of Algeria, but the

involved the topic of war is an important factor to consider, especially given that Yoder's early assignment in Europe, given to him by his Mennonite mentor Harold Bender, was to "reacquaint the European Mennonites with their Anabaptist heritage and its peace tradition."²⁰ Indeed, Yoder's engagement with Barth on war throughout his time studying in Basel—which took on many forms, including preparing papers on Barth for conferences and personal consultation with Barth—constitutes an expansion of his task of reacquainting European Mennonites with the Anabaptist peace tradition to include also a mission to acquaint others (here the influential Reformed teacher Barth) with the Anabaptist peace tradition. Indeed, one of the consistent complaints that Yoder voiced to Barth regarding his rejection of pacifism was that Barth's engagement with pacifism was too limited in its scope.²¹

Yoder's effort to acquaint Barth better with the Anabaptist peace tradition is evident in a template he developed in June 1955 for a discussion of christianity and war in which he sought, in part, to defend the Anabaptist position on nonresistance from the critiques Barth levels against pacifism in *CD III/4*.²² Yoder addressed Barth's claims that pacifism amounted to "ethical Absolutism" (*ethischen Absolutismus*) and (echoing many of Luther's complaints against the Anabaptists) that the pacifist stance was "legalistic" (*gesetzlich*), overly "enthusiastic" (*schwärmerisch*) or "fanatical" (*fanatischen*).²³ It is clear that he and Barth clashed over the topic

Word of God in Jesus Christ mediated by Scripture has driven him to this testimony. It should be read with no other question in mind than whether that living and powerful Word is here faithfully heard and spoken."

²⁰ Earl Zimmerman, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 73.

²¹ See, for example, the chapter "Pacifisms Old and New" in *KBPW*.

²² Yoder, "Vorlage zur Besprechung über Christentum und Krieg," Typescript Discussion Template, Box 229, Folder "Rewrite," The Yoder Papers, AMBS. It is unclear whether Yoder ever sent this template to Barth, although it was addressed to him. In the letter from 1957 which I cite below on page 173, Yoder apologizes for not having taken Barth up on his offer to discuss his position on war. This suggests that whether or not Barth had seen the template, they had yet to discuss it in a formal setting.

²³ In *KD*, 523-526; *CD III/4*, 457-459, Barth refers to pacifists (and militarists) using some of these terms. In his template for discussion, Yoder turns the tables on these accusations, not by critiquing Barth per se, but by stating, for example, that modern forms of existentialist thought on the "freedom of God" rely more on "enthusiasm" (*Schwärmerei*) than Anabaptist claims to the ethically binding and normative nature of revelation in Jesus. There is a sense in which Yoder's jab at existentialists could also be taken as a critique of Barth as in a letter to W. Alvin

on more than one occasion.²⁴ Yoder's efforts were not finally convincing to Barth, although Yoder would later point out that Barth would describe his position as "practically pacifist."²⁵ Yoder's early engagement with Barth extended far beyond the material on war from *CD* III/4, however. When Yoder started full-time studies in Basel, he began to gain a greater sense of Barth's work as a whole.²⁶ Yoder's course notes, conference papers, articles, and letters from 1954-1955 make it clear that he had begun a substantial engagement with Barth's theology, moving variously through the volumes of the *KD* available at that time and engaging Barth's thought in courses with other Basel faculty and through published materials written by and about Barth.²⁷ I now turn to an examination of this material from these crucial years.

Pitcher from 1955, Yoder calls Barth "existentialist." Yoder to W. Alvin Pitcher, July 1955, Box 229, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

²⁴ Yoder not only engaged Barth in the classroom and in his colloquia but, as is evident from letters in the Yoder archives, he also met with Barth in his home. In an undated letter from James Smart (sometime prior to Sept. 1957), Smart recalls "walking down the street with you [Yoder] the night we were both at Barth's. You were wheeling your bicycle." See James Smart to Yoder, Box 209, Letter Box B, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

²⁵ *PKB*, 22. The passage Yoder refers to comes from *CD* IV/2, 550: "According to the sense of the New Testament we cannot be pacifists in principle, only in practice. But we have to consider very closely whether, if we are called to discipleship, we can avoid being practical pacifists, or fail to be so." Around the same time period during which *CD* IV/2 was written and then published (1953-1955), Barth was documented repeating again that "Pacifism is an absolutism." Cf. John Godsey, "Karl Barth's Table Talk," *Scottish Journal of Theology Occasional Papers*, No. 10, (1963): 81. It is highly probable that Barth's remark was directed across the table at Yoder, given that Godsey elsewhere names Yoder as one of the participants and that in that same response Barth said: "Even a Mennonite must be glad to have a man for protection." That Barth refers to the role of the "police" here is perhaps further evidence of why Yoder thought Barth had never really considered his position seriously given that Yoder saw the police function as "qualitatively" different from the question of war which Yoder was principally concerned with at that time. Cf. *KBPW*, 77.

²⁶ Barth was working on his doctrine of reconciliation during Yoder's time in Basel. Volume IV/1 was released in 1953, the year prior to the start of Yoder's full-time studies. Barth would subsequently release IV/2 in 1955, IV/3 in 1959, and IV/4 in 1967.

²⁷ As I go on to show below, Yoder was familiar with each volume of the *CD*, although not necessarily each part-volume. From what I can tell, Yoder nowhere engages directly with *CD* II/1, the first part volume of his doctrine of God. That being said, Yoder knew well one of the central features of that part-volume, namely, the doctrine of "the God who loves in freedom." It is thus likely that Yoder had a working knowledge of that volume as well. Course notes also make it clear that Yoder studied Barth's thought in classes with Hendrik van Oyan (Ethics) and Ernst Staehlin (Church history), and Fritz Buri (Systematic Theology).

Barth's Ethics, Human Freedom, and Predestination

In the winter semester of 1954, Yoder sat in on Barth's lectures on sanctification which would eventually become material included in *CD IV/2*. For reasons that will become clear below, Yoder found Barth's lectures on sanctification to engage with the question of Christian ethics in a way much more satisfying than the material on ethics that he had heard in those early lectures on war from 1951. In fact, Yoder would become convinced that Barth's reflections on sanctification signaled a development in Barth's ethics, a development that was in tension with his previous dogmatic formulations regarding ethics in the early volumes of the *CD*.²⁸ The exact nature of this tension becomes clear in a letter Yoder wrote to Trocmé during the same time period he was in Barth's seminar on sanctification.²⁹ In the letter, Yoder notes that Albert J. Meyer, Yoder's replacement as the Mennonite Central Committee's peace section representative for Europe, had previously led him to a recent pamphlet by Barth on ethics that reproduced material from *CD II/2*.³⁰ The pamphlet was *The Gift of Freedom: Foundation of Evangelical Ethics*.³¹ Yoder described his reaction after having read it: "It is a little less timely [*à propos*]

²⁸ Yoder would later describe this "movement" in Barth's thought in the essay "Karl Barth: How His Mind Kept Changing," in *How Karl Barth Changed My Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 166-71.

²⁹ For the literature on Trocmé, including misgivings Trocmé had about Barth and clashes he had with Barth's good friend Pierre Maury, see Richard P. Unsworth, *A Portrait of Pacifists: Le Chambon, the Holocaust, and the Lives of André and Magda Trocmé* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2012). Yoder mentions Maury's critique of pietism in the context of his discussion about the "Bogey of Pietism" in *The Christian Witness to the State* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2002), 84fn1. Below, in Yoder's correspondence with Trocmé, it becomes evident that one of the critiques against pacifism that Yoder sought to counter was the claim that pacifism was just another form of pietism.

³⁰ Thiessen Nation mentions Meyer's arrival in Europe in *John Howard Yoder*, 17fn65.

³¹ This essay originated as an address by Barth at a 1953 meeting of the *Society for Evangelical Theology* in Bielfeld, Germany. The German text which Yoder refers to in his letter appeared as Booklet 39 in the *Theologische Studien* series, titled: *Das Geschenk der Freiheit: zur Grundlegung Evangelischer Ethik* (Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1953). In *Karl Barth: His life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, 400, it is clear that this address was a "tacit controversy with Bultmann, and in another way also with the 'freedom' which Western politicians had now inscribed on their banners." In my analysis, I have cited the translation included in Barth, *The Humanity of God* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960), 67-96.

than we had hoped.”³² When considering what Yoder might have meant by “less timely,” it is helpful to read this letter in the light of both the global and the European context in which Yoder was developing his pacifist theology. Globally, the arms race was in full swing.³³ Closer to Yoder’s immediate European context, the Algerian war had just begun. No doubt this event was in the background to Yoder’s correspondence with Trocmé.³⁴

What had Yoder hoped to find in Barth’s pamphlet and what did he find instead? The remainder of the letter sheds light on this question, although one can surmise that Yoder was looking for a prophetic voice that could articulate an account of Christian ethics that would support his peace efforts. Yoder goes on to state his reasons for wanting more from Barth. First, he states that Barth is distracted from the task of ethics by “his dialectical gymnastics” [*sa gymnastique dialectique*]. In the context of the text in question, it is Barth’s dialectic between “love and the sovereignty of God” to which Yoder refers.³⁵ Yoder notes, that this aspect of Barth’s work is “not bad, but that’s not what we’re looking for.”³⁶ Next, Yoder complains that Barth’s account of “freedom” [*liberté*], while correct in stating that genuine Christian freedom is a “freedom to” or a “freedom for” [*liberté à*] not a “freedom from” [*liberté de*], nonetheless fails to acknowledge that freedom means that the human being is “in front of a choice” [*devant un*

³² Yoder to Trocmé, December 10, 1954, Box 81-21, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. Trocmé was an influential conversation partner for Yoder. Earl Zimmerman notes that Yoder met Trocmé while “Trocmé was serving as the European secretary of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation” (*Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 132).

³³ Earl Zimmermann provides a comprehensive account of the global context in which Yoder’s peace theology was developed. See his chapter “North American Mennonite Experience,” in *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 32-69.

³⁴ Both Yoder and Trocmé would be involved in peace efforts in Algeria later in the 1950s. In the essay “Peace without Eschatology,” analyzed below, Yoder makes reference to “French colonialism” in the context of his critique of Constantinianism, no doubt a reference to the Algerian war. See Yoder, “Peace without Eschatology,” 70.

³⁵ Barth writes of this throughout “The Gift of Freedom,” but he had more systematically examined this theme in *CD II/1*. In the letter, Yoder summarizes Barth’s “dialectic” this way: “The freedom of God is His aseity, his sovereignty, the fact that He does not need anyone; His love is in the fact that He deals with men. Logically, love and liberty thus defined exclude each other; but in God they coincide, He is free in that He loves us, He loves us in that He is free.”

³⁶ Zimmerman notes that in an early letter to Bender, Yoder had complained about Barth’s dialectic, suggesting that rather than just being “not bad,” it threatened to “undermine serious ethics.,” See Zimmermann, *Practicing the Politics of Jesus*, 111.

choix].³⁷ Here Yoder is responding to Barth's claim that "[t]he gift of freedom... involves more than being offered one option among several.... God does not put man into the situation of Hercules at the crossroads."³⁸ The human being is free, for Barth, only in choosing "in accordance with the freedom of God."³⁹ For Barth, "[i]t would be a strange freedom that would leave man neutral, able equally to choose, decide, and act rightly or wrongly!"⁴⁰ According to Yoder, however, Barth's argument that "choosing the wrong" is not a "free choice" is "a rigging of words" [*un truquage [sic] de mots*].⁴¹ What Yoder really dislikes, however, is what Barth does next with his understanding of divine freedom, namely, develop an account of ethics that excludes ethical principles.⁴² Yoder notes, given his previous experience sitting in on Barth's lectures on war, that he had already encountered this argument "in the form of the affirmation that God remains free to call one of these [Christian] children to make war" and free also to "call others not to do it." According to Yoder, "the fundamental fault" [*la faute fondamentale*] in this logic is an epistemological one: "how would God communicate to us His contradictory appeals; would we control them [*comment [sic] les contrôlerions-nous*]?"⁴³

³⁷ See "The Gift of Freedom," 78, where he makes the claim regarding Christian freedom being a freedom "for."

³⁸ "The Gift of Freedom," 76

³⁹ "The Gift of Freedom," 77. In John Godsey's "Karl Barth's Table Talk," 99, Barth was asked, potentially by Yoder himself, "Can we choose freedom? Have we the ability?" to which he replied, "The liberty of free will is sin! It is the shame of humanity that we live as if we could choose."

⁴⁰ "The Gift of Freedom," 76.

⁴¹ Yoder's notes indicate that this critique of Barth's account of freedom may have been influenced by his ethics professor, Hendrik van Oyen. See Yoder, Course Notes, Box 81-21, Notebook 9, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

⁴² Barth's argument is summarized nicely in "The Gift of Freedom," 85: "The question of good and evil is never answered by the human's pointing to the authoritative Word of God in terms of a set of rules... Holy Scripture defies being forced into a set of rules... [t]he ethicist cannot take the place either of the free God or of free humans."

⁴³ Yoder's later analysis of this aspect to Barth's ethics would take up Barth's concept of the "borderline case" (*Grenzfall*) in detail in *KBPW*. Yoder's analysis of Barth in this regard was also the topic of discussion at the second of two conferences on "The Lordship of Christ over Church and State" that took place in Puidoux, Switzerland. Trocmé was in attendance at both conferences. At the second conference in 1957, Trocmé said of Barth's use of the concept of the "borderline" case: "Barth's borderline case surely comes out of his dreadful fear of Hitler [*Barths Grenzfall kommt sicher aus der furchtbaren Angst vor Hitler*]." Cf. "Aussprache uber das Referat von Yoder 2," *AMBS and GC John Howard Yoder Digital Library*, accessible at <https://palni.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15705coll18>. Below, in an examination of another of Yoder's letters, I provide further insight on the theological foundation for ethical "principles" that Yoder believes scripture recommends.

It is at this point in the letter that Yoder mentions being in Barth's course on sanctification at the time of his writing, and here the tension Yoder sees between Barth's previous account of ethics (in *CD* II/2 and III/4) and his current treatment of ethics in his lectures on sanctification becomes apparent through a discussion of Barth's use of the doctrine of predestination or election. The remainder of the letter is worth quoting:

In answer to the question, is predestination to salvation or obedience (or to witness) [*à [sic] salut ou à l'obéissance (ou au témoignage)*]? Barth would answer by the second. His universalism makes the only use of predestination, like the church, its witness. At present, Barth speaks in his course of sanctification and quite clearly criticizes the imbalance, in Calvin, of justification in relation to sanctification.

But with or without Barth, I believe that this argument is biblical, that election cannot be separated from the obedience of faith [*que l'élection ne peut être séparée de l'obéissance de la foi*], and that this conception is at the bottom of all the questions of Church-world relations. It eliminates at the same time the 'responsible' Constantinian church and the 'irresponsible' pietist church, in favor of a church responsible for the world and fulfilling its responsibility by being different from the world, separated to be "a people that belongs to Himself, zealous for good works" [Titus 2:14].

Therefore, we cannot face the reproach of irresponsibility addressed to us by the militarists; the Bible does not know anything of a responsibility which leads [us] to conform to the means with which the world takes care of its stability.⁴⁴

Here Yoder brings up what would become enduring themes of his theology: Christian obedience, the church-world distinction, and his polemic against 'the Constantinian church.'⁴⁵ There will be occasion below to examine these themes in relation to an essay that Yoder wrote in the same year as his letter to Trocmé. For now, it is important to note that Yoder's mention of predestination and election is novel given that these are not subjects to which he ever paid much attention in his theological career.⁴⁶ Why bring them up here, then? There are two related

⁴⁴ Yoder to Trocmé, December 10, 1954, Box 81-21, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

⁴⁵ Yoder also brings up the "pietist Church" in the same context. Yoder would offer critiques of Pietism throughout his career as well, but certainly not in the same measure as Constantinianism.

⁴⁶ He attends descriptively to accounts of predestination here and there throughout *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), mentions it in several of his other works in passing, but never makes it an explicit topic of constructive theological concern. That said, as I go on to elucidate below, I believe that Yoder operates with a basic doctrine of election.

reasons. One is that predestination is directly relevant in the context of Barth's *The Gift of Freedom*. In that text, Barth introduces predestination or eternal election as precisely that act of God which determines divine and human freedom and so also the theological basis for speaking of ethics at all. To make this clear, some key points of Barth's *Gift of Freedom* must be unpacked briefly.

God is free, for Barth, “insofar as He is the Lord, choosing and determining Himself to be the Father and the Son in the unity of the Spirit.”⁴⁷ This freedom, says Barth, is thus not “abstract” in the sense of a naked power to choose, but concrete.⁴⁸ God’s freedom is a particular “encounter and communion...order and, consequently, dominion and subordination...majesty and humility, absolute authority and absolute obedience...[and] offer and response.”⁴⁹ According to Barth, given the revelation of this free God in Jesus Christ, it must also be said that this God’s freedom is a freedom “for *man*,” a freedom “to coexist with man and, as the Lord of the covenant, to participate in his *history*.”⁵⁰ With this definition of divine freedom in place, Barth then defines human freedom. Human freedom “is the joy whereby man appropriates for himself God’s election...willing, deciding, and determining himself to be the echo and mirror [*Echo oder Spiegel*] of the divine act...in the midst of the community of men.”⁵¹ The word “mirror”—so integral to Barth’s understanding of the witness of Israel and the church—is important here since, for Barth, there can be no confusing free divine action and free human action. God’s eternal election of “Himself in His Son to be the God, Lord, Shepherd, Saviour, and Redeemer of humankind” is God’s primal history, which is fulfilled and perfected in time in the death of

⁴⁷ “The Gift of Freedom,” 71.

⁴⁸ “The Gift of Freedom,” 71.

⁴⁹ “The Gift of Freedom,” 71.

⁵⁰ “The Gift of Freedom,” 72. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹ *Das Geschenk der Freiheit*, 12; “The Gift of Freedom,” 79.

Jesus.⁵² Jesus' death, says Barth, is the "perfect reconciliation" between God and alienated, depraved, imprisoned, and enslaved humanity.⁵³ This divine act of reconciliation is, for Barth, the "gift of freedom." As the perfected gift, it requires no "improvement or repetition" [*Nachhilfe oder Wiederholung*].⁵⁴

This is not to say, however, that human beings must not in any way repeat God. Indeed, for Barth, human freedom consists in the human repetition of God's "'Yes' and 'No'" as spoken in Jesus Christ, but crucially, only in the manner appropriate to the human creature.⁵⁵ The human creature can only repeat God in the form of an "echo" or "mirror" of an already perfected act. This means that the human creature can only ever be God's "follower" [*Nachfolge*] and "co-worker" [*Mitarbeiter*].⁵⁶ As God is free and gives the gift of freedom in being "for" humanity in predestination and in Jesus' death on the cross, so now must the human creature appropriate its freedom in being "for" God. This freedom is for the individual Christian, but only within the context of "the people of God."⁵⁷ Together with that people, the individual Christian begins "the venture of responsibility [*das Wagnis der Verantwortung*] in the presence of the Giver and the fellow receivers of the gift [of freedom]."⁵⁸ This venture of responsibility is, for Barth, the "venture of obedience [*das Wagnis des Gehorsams*]."⁵⁹ Given this brief account of key points to Barth's *The Gift of Freedom*, it is no surprise that Yoder brings up predestination specifically in connection with the obedience of faith and Christian responsibility in his letter to Trocmé.⁶⁰

⁵² "The Gift of Freedom," 79.

⁵³ "The Gift of Freedom," 81.

⁵⁴ *Das Geschenk der Freiheit*, 14; "The Gift of Freedom," 81.

⁵⁵ "The Gift of Freedom," 81.

⁵⁶ *Das Geschenk der Freiheit*, 14; "The Gift of Freedom," 81.

⁵⁷ "The Gift of Freedom," 79.

⁵⁸ *Das Geschenk der Freiheit*, 12; "The Gift of Freedom," 80.

⁵⁹ *Das Geschenk der Freiheit*, 12; "The Gift of Freedom," 80.

⁶⁰ Yoder may have also brought up predestination in his letter to Trocmé as a subtle nod to Trocmé's 1953 *The Politics of Repentance*, The Robert Treat Paine Lectures for 1951 (trans. John Clark; New York: Fellowship Publications), a text written in 1951 in French under the slightly different title "Politique et Repentance." To my knowledge, the French text was never published. Yoder was familiar with the English edition of this text. There,

There is yet an additional, related, reason for Yoder to mention predestination here, however, and that is his reference to Barth's criticism of Calvin on the relationship between justification and sanctification. The material Yoder heard Barth lecture on towards the end of 1954 would end up in *CD IV/2*, §66.2.⁶¹ In the interest of understanding Yoder's comments, it is worth quoting Barth at length:

Calvin's doctrine of the *participatio Christi* has one weakness... This consists in the fact that he found no place—and in view of his distinctive doctrine of predestination he could not do so—for a recognition of the universal relevance [*die universale Tragweite*] of the existence of the man Jesus, of the sanctification of all men as it has been achieved in Him. The eternal election which according to Eph. 1:4 has been made in Jesus Christ was referred by Calvin only to those who in God's eternal counsel are foreordained *to salvation* [*zum Heil*] and therefore to reconciliation, justification and sanctification in Jesus Christ, while His existence has no positive significance [*Bedeutung*] for those who are excluded from this foreordination, for the reprobate.⁶²

Barth calls this aspect to Calvin's doctrine of election a "serious distortion of the biblical message because it makes of the elect "an end in themselves," serving "only to attest the holiness of a God whose mercy is limited to them." What is lost, for Barth, in Calvin's doctrine of predestination, is the "teleological meaning [of the elect] among other men," namely their witness "of that which has come on the whole world and all men in the one Jesus Christ."⁶³ With this additional reference in mind, Yoder's opposing predestination unto salvation with predestination unto obedience can now be seen in its fullest context, as a reference both to

Trocmé says the following concerning predestination: "The scriptural view of history cannot be understood without admitting the idea of election. God chose a people for himself from among the nations: Israel. The new Israel, which is the Church, is also elected, but it has no racial or geographical boundaries. Jesus chose, one by one, the men who were to be his disciples (Luke 6:13). Let us notice, in passing, that the problem of predestination is clarified and simplified if it is realized that Jesus chose his disciples as missionaries. The ultimate purpose of election is not first and foremost the salvation of the individual elected, but rather the function he is thus called upon to fulfill in the world. So it is for Israel and for the Church: 'I will give thee for a light to the Gentiles'" (Trocmé, *The Politics of Repentance*, 84-85).

⁶¹ It is clear that this is the passage Yoder refers to given that the subject matter fits Yoder's description and given that this is actually one of the rare moments when Barth actually criticizes Calvin in this section.

⁶² *CD IV/2*, 520. Emphasis mine. Yoder was almost certainly referring to these comments of Barth on Calvin when he introduced the question "is predestination unto salvation or obedience?"

⁶³ *CD IV/2*, 520-521.

Barth's claim, as expressed in *The Gift of Freedom*, that human freedom is an eternally determined freedom to obey and to Barth's criticism of how Calvin's doctrine of predestination limits the use of election to a statement only about those "foreordained to salvation."

Reading Yoder's comments to Trocmé in light of Barth's *The Gift of Freedom* and his comments on Calvin's doctrine of the *participatio Christi* in *CD IV/2* has helped clarify where Yoder sees Barth moving in the right, that is "biblical," direction. Election is an election unto obedience, responsibility, and sanctification for the purpose of witness. It is also clear, however, with Yoder's criticisms of Barth's understanding of freedom, along with his suggestive qualification (in the second to last paragraph) "with or without Barth" [*mais avec ou sans Barth*] and finally with his oblique reference to Barth's "universalism," that Yoder thought Barth's understanding of election lacking at certain points.⁶⁴ What problems might Yoder have discerned in Barth's understanding of election? Before answering that question, it is necessary to highlight the great commonality between Barth's and Yoder's understandings of election.

Some interpreters of Yoder have pointed out that he never gave the doctrine of election much attention.⁶⁵ However, this early letter is suggestive for indicating what is perhaps a basic doctrine of election at work in Yoder's thought. As the letter already makes clear, Yoder thinks that election is for the purpose of "witness." Election is God calling God's people to be distinct amidst the nations of the world precisely, as Yoder would later put it, by being "a mediator or a

⁶⁴ Yoder to Trocmé, December 10, 1954, Box 81-21, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

⁶⁵ See, for instance, Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals: Pauline Theology Beyond Christendom and Modernity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 197-198; and more recently, Tommy Givens, *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* (Minneapolis, MI: Fortress Press, 2014), 75-105. Harink is surely right that Yoder did not reflect in any extensive way on Romans 9-11. Interestingly, when Yoder circulated a draft of a paper titled "Minority Christianity and Messianic Judaism" to colleagues in March of 1971 requesting feedback, William Storey, then Associate Professor of Liturgy and Church History at Notre Dame, passed on a note from Stanley Hauerwas concerning Romans 9-11. In relation to Yoder's claim in the paper that Paul's position concerning Gentile inclusion was a "faithful Jewish position," Hauerwas suggested that Yoder needed to "exegete Roman [sic] 9-11." See William Storey to John Howard Yoder, March, 1971, "Original Buenos Aires Draft with Feedback," Box 132, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. Nowhere, to my knowledge, does Yoder exegete Romans 9-11 in any of his published or unpublished material.

representative between the electing God and the nations.”⁶⁶ Israel, and later the church, is responsible for the world, according to him, by being different and separate from it. Here Yoder’s comments to Trocmé that “election cannot be separated from the obedience of faith, and that this conception is at the bottom of all the questions of Church-world relations” is of special note. For Yoder, the distinction between church and world is ultimately a distinction governed by the concept of election and, in fact, by pointing this out, Yoder implies that Barth too operates with a similar distinction.⁶⁷ The question that arises from this positive connection between Barth’s and Yoder’s understandings of election and the church-world distinction is, however, to what extent does Yoder follow Barth in terms of framing of Israel’s and the Church’s election as involving a twofold mediation of the representation of God’s judgment and mercy? In order to answer this question, I will now turn to a well-known essay of Yoder’s written in the same year as the above letter to Trocmé. This essay, entitled “Peace without Eschatology,” frames the distinctive witness of the church in part with reference to the historical movement in Israel towards the creation of the new community, the church. By attending to this essay, it will be possible to fill out the basic elements of Yoder’s doctrine of election.

Peace without Eschatology

Yoder does not frame the argument of “Peace without Eschatology” in terms of an engagement with Barth’s theology generally or his doctrine of election. Rather, Yoder frames the essay as an apologia for the theological robustness of the pacifist position. Nonetheless, the essay

⁶⁶ *Theology of Mission*, 49.

⁶⁷ In later published works, Yoder would praise Barth for articulating a strong distinction between church and world. See, for example, his analysis of Barth’s “innovative step” in distinguishing the christian community and the civil community in *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, 95 and his further discussion of this in his later essay “Why Ecclesiology is Social Ethics,” in *The Royal Priesthood*, 108. I will return to Yoder’s comments on Barth’s church-world distinction further below on page 175.

could be read as an answer to Barth's critiques of pacifism in *CD III/4*. Indeed, Yoder's title (derived in part from the prophet Jeremiah's critique of false prophets in 6:14; 8:11) and the subject matter of the paper, could be read as a creative response to the suggestive claim made by Barth in his 1950-51 lectures, that if Christianity were to have "fallen," the basis for that fall would be in a "degeneration of ecclesial eschatology and the resultant overestimation and misinterpretation of the events and laws of the present world."⁶⁸ Throughout his essay, Yoder employs the church-world distinction in order to describe two different understandings of "peace." Peace *without* eschatology names the identification of a particular nation or people's established means at making or keeping peace, with God's peace. Put in Barth's terms, this is peace sought by the church through an "overestimation and misinterpretation of the events and laws of the present world." Yoder argues that peace *with* eschatology, on the other hand, is a peace that is hoped for in the church as it exists in the time of tension between the "overlapping" of the "old aeon" and the "new aeon."⁶⁹

For Yoder, the old aeon "points backwards to human history outside of (before) Christ; the other points forward to the fullness of the kingdom of God, of which it [the new aeon] is a

⁶⁸ See *KD III/4*, 520; *CD III/4*, 455, where he cites critically J.G. Heering's claim made in his *The Fall of Christianity: A Study of Christianity, the State, and War* (New York: Fellowship Publications, 1943) that "the positive attitude towards war of the traditional Roman Catholic and Protestant churches and their ethics is to be described as 'the fall of Christianity.'" If Yoder did take Barth's comment to heart, "Peace without Eschatology," would be Yoder's way of meeting Barth on his terms, demonstrating how the pacifist position describes precisely the degeneration of ecclesial eschatology. As Yoder notes in "Peace without Eschatology," he was present at the lecture in which Barth made these statements. Note Barth's non-committal "were to have fallen." For Barth, the church can never "fall" given that the true church's being is secure in Jesus Christ. This is not to say that Barth did not think that the church as it lives concretely in history could radically fall away from Christ. Barth saw this firsthand in the Christian collaboration with the Third Reich and indeed his comments made above could be read as an implicit nod to that collaboration.

⁶⁹ "Peace without Eschatology," 55. Yoder's employment of the apostle Paul's old aeon/new aeon framework was shaped by the writings of Oscar Cullmann, another one of Yoder's Basel teachers. In Cullmann's *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (London: SCM Press, 1962), hereafter *CT* (German, *Christus und Die Zeit: Die Urchristliche Zeit und Geschichtsauffassung* (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1946) hereafter *CZ*), he argued that the New Testament's view of time is "linear...conceived strictly in terms of a time process." Cullmann further defines time as: "...unending extension, which is unlimited in both the backward and forward direction, and hence is 'eternity'" (*CT*, 48).

foretaste.”⁷⁰ The old aeon, according to him, is the age of the world as it remains under slavery to sin.⁷¹ The new aeon is the age of the church, the “faithful remnant” living with the knowledge that the whole world, in spite of its not acknowledging it, is now under the Lordship of Christ who has won the decisive victory.⁷² Yoder then introduces what he argues is the characteristic “social manifestation” of each age. The old aeon’s characteristic social manifestation is the identification of God’s plan of redemption with the “national hopes, prides, and solidarities” of particular nations. Here Yoder’s church-world distinction becomes an operative criterion for determining the difference between the old and new ages. The old aeon is characterized by an identity between church and world. In the case of the biblical story, Yoder looks to the Old Testament and finds the identification of church and world in the paganism of the nations surrounding Israel but also, importantly, in those moments in Israel’s history where Yoder thinks they adopted a pagan mixture of religion with state power.⁷³ When looking to the New Testament, however, Yoder sees the new aeon’s characteristic social manifestation revealed in Jesus, whose death on the cross gives the church its definite social shape in distinction from the world:

Christ is *agape*; self-giving, nonresistant love. At the cross this nonresistance, including the refusal to use political means of self-defense, found its ultimate revelation in the uncomplaining and forgiving death of the innocent at the hands of the guilty. This death reveals how God deals with evil; here is the only valid starting point for Christian pacifism or nonresistance. The cross is the extreme demonstration that *agape* seeks

⁷⁰ “Peace without Eschatology,” 55.

⁷¹ As Yoder puts it in the companion volume to his dissertation: “‘World’ is the concrete form of creation’s disobedience [*Welt ist die konkrete Gestalt des geschöpflichen Ungehorsams*]. This disobedience is not simply an attitude that invisibly hovers over all things and works unnoticed in every heart, but rather it is as visible as is the person. It is embodied in the state, worship, class, economics, and in the demonic nature of a culture that has become autonomous.” See Yoder, *Täuferium und Reformatoren im Gespräch*, 161; *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 265.

⁷² “Peace without Eschatology,” 58-59.

⁷³ “Peace without Eschatology,” 55. Yoder saw this social manifestation as first present in “the ancient Middle East” in the religions of “the tribal deity; a god whose significance was not ethical but ceremonial...[and this god’s] false prophets were supported by the state in return for their support of the state’s projects” (“Peace without Eschatology,” 64).

neither effectiveness nor justice, and is willing to suffer any loss or seeming defeat for the sake of obedience.⁷⁴

The church's social shape, its particular form of participation in the redemptive activity of God, is established by the crucified Jesus whose death is "the only valid starting point for Christian pacifism." For Yoder, Jesus's refusal to use political means of self-defense is the definitive revelation of how God deals with evil and as a result is a demonstration of the distinction between the "world's" methods of dealing with evil and God's methods. While this revelation had been prepared for in advance by Israel's prophets, it was given in full incarnate form in Jesus. Thus, while the church exists in continuity with the Old Testament prophets, it is nonetheless a "new people," the "body of Christ," whose life of obedience is only possible because of Christ. Yoder states the implications of such "newness":

In the Old Testament the prophets had been lonely men, cut off from their people by their loyalty to God (which was, in the deepest sense, their real loyalty to their people, even though the people condemned them as troublemakers). Then in the New Testament the body of Christ came into being, a new people in the prophet's line, replacing disobedient Israel as the people of the promise. Nationalism and pragmatism are both rejected in the life of the people of the new aeon, whose only purpose is love in the way of the cross and in the power of the resurrection.⁷⁵

This quotation is notable for a number of reasons, but principle among them is the statement that the "people of the new aeon" replace "disobedient Israel." When footnotes were added to this paper in 1970, around the time Yoder began a fuller study of the 'Jewish-Christian schism,'⁷⁶ this explanatory note was added:

The phrase 'replacing disobedient Israel' should not be understood as attributing to the N.T. writers the anti-Semitism of the second Christian century. The disobedience of Israel was a constantly recurring theme of the Hebrew prophets. The testimony of the

⁷⁴ "Peace without Eschatology," 56.

⁷⁵ "Peace without Eschatology," 58.

⁷⁶ In his *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*, 34, Yoder noted that the "core provocation" for the project began in the 1970s.

apostles is not that Israel is displaced but rather that Israel is restored or rediscovered in a new form which takes Gentiles into the covenant.⁷⁷

In a later version of this paper that appears in *The Royal Priesthood*, Yoder changed “replacing disobedient Israel” to “succeeding Israel.”⁷⁸ While Yoder uses the explanatory note from 1970 to suggest that he may have never intended to endorse traditional supersessionism, the changes do seem to indicate a growing consciousness on Yoder’s part regarding his theology of Israel.

At this point, it is helpful to ask where Yoder’s reflections on Israel and the church stick with Barth and where they depart from him. This is important, given that in his letter to Trocmé Yoder indicated much agreement with Barth on election. At this point, there are many features of the above passages that can be read as in step with Barth’s doctrine of the election of the community. The “old aeon” is “representative of human history under the mark of sin.”⁷⁹ Israel’s life in the old aeon was characterized by its disobedience, which its prophets pronounced judgment on and on account of which God consistently chastised Israel.⁸⁰ In *CD II/2*, §33-34, Barth did not speak so much of an “old aeon” but rather of the “passing form” of the community in the Old Testament, framing Israel’s history as a witness to the “No” or “the judgment” of God. The difference in language here is not, at this point, substantial.⁸¹ Barth and Yoder both

⁷⁷ “If Christ is Truly Lord,” in *The Original Revolution*, 180fn7. In a note included in this printing of the essay, Yoder writes that this version of the text “is left substantially in the form of the first pamphlet printing (1959).” The pamphlet Yoder is referring to is in the “Concern” series. One of the later reprints of this concern pamphlet in 1961 retains the language of “replacing disobedient Israel.”

⁷⁸ *The Royal Priesthood*, 149.

⁷⁹ “Peace without Eschatology,” 58.

⁸⁰ For a parallel account of Yoder’s understanding of the sense in which God chastened Israel, see Yoder’s *The Christian Witness to the State*, 16.

⁸¹ It is not as though Barth avoided Paul’s language of the “old” and “new” aeon. Indeed, in one of his early treatments of Israel in *CD I/2*, §14.2, 89, for example, Barth uses it often. In fact, he uses the language of “old” and “new” aeon in conjunction with the language of “passing” and “coming” in relation to Israel and the Church: “It [Israel] especially, the beloved, chosen, sanctified nation, the house of God, must be the place where the old aeon begins to pass in face of the coming of God and His new work.” Barth did differ, however, in his understanding of time from his Basel colleague, Oscar Cullmann, who interpreted the apostle Paul’s use of the old-new aeon framework in a way that Barth disapproved of. Barth criticizes Cullmann’s understanding of time as expressed *CT* in *KD III/2*, 524ff; *CD III/2*, 437ff. As Barth states: “It is wrong to suppose that the New Testament authors started with a particular conception of time as an ascending line with a series of aeons, and then inserted into this geometrical figure the event of Christ as the centre of this line” (*CD III/2*, 443).

recognize in Israel's witness the negative prophetic judgment against sin. Not only that, though, both also highlight Israel's positive prophetic call to covenant faithfulness that ultimately finds its definitive revelation only in Christ's obedience at the cross. Yoder puts it this way:

The cross was not in itself a new revelation; Isaiah 53 foresaw already the path which the Servant of Jahweh would have to tread. Nor was the resurrection essentially new; God's victory over evil had been affirmed, by definition one might say, from the beginning. Nor was the selection of a faithful remnant a new idea. What was centrally new about Christ was that these ideas became incarnate.⁸²

The old age, for Yoder, relates positively to the new age that is inaugurated with the cross and resurrection even as the latter brings the "doom of the old [age]." There is, no doubt, an echo of Barth's "passing" and "coming" forms of the community here and, the first chapter has already shown how in his own way Barth also had a positive conception of the relationship between the passing and coming forms of the community.⁸³ Indeed, one could say that Yoder works with a salvation-history framework that is similar to Barth's understanding of the teleological movement of Israel towards its goal in the church form of the community. With God's definitive revelation in Christ, the old form of the community has passed away, and there can now be no appeal to a previous form of witness as valid independent of the coming form. Yoder spells this consequence out for the Jews of Jesus' time:

The Jews had been told that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed and had understood this promise as the vindication of their nationalism. Jesus revealed that the contrary was the case: the universality of God's kingdom contradicts rather than confirms all particular solidarities and can be reached only by first forsaking the old aeon (Lk. 18:28-30).⁸⁴

For Yoder, as for the Barth of *CD II/2*, there can be no true "Judaism" that holds to a notion of an "independent election."⁸⁵ Israel's election is teleologically oriented towards the church, the

⁸² "Peace without Eschatology," 57-58.

⁸³ See Barth's account of the pre-existent Church in Israel on page 43 above.

⁸⁴ "Peace without Eschatology," 58.

⁸⁵ *CD II/2*, 196.

community of God as it has come to include the Gentiles in Israel's covenant. For Yoder too, there can be no election of the community in the sense of "one nation or people or government [that] can represent God's cause in opposition to other peoples..."⁸⁶ Indeed, Yoder's account of the new aeon emphasizes that it can only be reached by "forsaking" this characteristic social form of the old aeon. Considering Yoder's account of the movement from the old to the new aeon, one could say that Yoder, like Barth, does indeed have an account of the community's twofold mediation of "judgment" and "mercy" in its history.

Having said this, however, notable differences between Barth's and Yoder's understandings of the movement from judgment to mercy become apparent upon further examination and here Yoder's complaints about Barth in his letter to Trocmé are instructive. Barth's doctrine of divine and human freedom and, directly related to that doctrine, Barth's doctrine of universal, eternal election, led him directly to his account of the twofold unity of Israel and the church. Recall that for Barth, eternal election is an eternal pre-determination of all reality in Christ. Indeed, this pre-determination carries with it a universal election of all in Christ. Israel and the church exist as two forms of the one community of God in history that "mediate" (*vermitteln*) and "represent" (*darstellen*) to the whole world, the act of God in the one Jesus Christ to take upon Godself perdition and damnation while granting humanity salvation and exaltation. For Barth, that election is eternal means that it is established in advance of any human possibility for response; indeed, it is the "primal history" of God that determines all subsequent history. God in freedom has determined Godself and by doing so has also determined human

⁸⁶ "Peace without Eschatology," 68. In his 1964 *The Christian Witness to the State*, material originally prepared for a conference in 1955, Yoder wrote something similar regarding nationalism: "Whether dictated by foreign alliances and mixed marriages or by Israel's own superstition and smallness of faith, the service of alien gods was a special temptation for kings and the chief abomination of prophets... Today such idolatry can dispense with the ethereal deities of Babylonian faith and with the earthy ones of Canaan, for the nation itself has taken on the worship claims of both.... Nationalism sins against the first two commandments..." Yoder, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 15.

history in the person of God's son. As a result of his articulation of God's free determination, Barth then defines human freedom, not as the generic capacity to choose to accept or not to accept God's eternal determination, but rather, the human appropriation of that determination. Freedom is defined as the human choice that "corresponds" (*entspricht*) to God's pre-choice. For Barth, this "correspondence" (*Entsprechung*) between human choice and God's pre-choice is precisely what the one community of God in its form as Israel and the church makes "visible" (*sichtbar*). As was seen in Barth's doctrine of election, Israel's freedom is construed as its witness to Jesus Christ inasmuch as it witnesses to God's mercy ruling in his judgment; God's "Yes" in his "No." Nowhere in Barth's doctrine of election is Israel depicted as free independent of its correspondence to Jesus Christ; free that is, independent of the goal that it be raised into new life in the church. Crucially, however, the church's freedom is construed as its witness to Jesus Christ inasmuch as it also witnesses to God's mercy ruling in his judgment. Nowhere in Barth's doctrine of election is the church depicted as free independent of its origin in and unity with Israel. This unity of Israel and the church, for Barth, is essential if the unity of the divine will, the will to redeem humanity in Christ, is to be fully testified to. For Barth, the one community of God is obedient to its election only inasmuch as this twofold witness is embodied.

If a basic doctrine of election is at work in "Peace without Eschatology," it departs from Barth's specifically with respect to his conception of eternal election as a universal pre-determination of humanity in Jesus Christ. Consequently, for Yoder, the community is not "pre-determined" either. Yoder holds to a "salvation history" framework that avoids, as he puts it, "timeless" theological statements.⁸⁷ Here Cullmann's influence shows itself. Indeed, Cullmann critiqued Barth precisely in relation to Barth's concept of eternity as something that "embraces"

⁸⁷ "Peace without Eschatology," 54. Of course Barth would not have seen eternal election as "timeless" in any way.

time rather than eternity being the endless succession of time.⁸⁸ In this temporal framework, no reference to eternity is made. One could argue that, in “Peace without Eschatology,” this is due to Yoder’s particular focus, which he states is limited to the ethical calling of the church in the age “which extends from the resurrection to the final coming.”⁸⁹ Yoder acknowledged that there were previous stages of salvation history that had their own distinctive ethical forms.

Nonetheless, even if Yoder had given an account of earlier stages of salvation history, there is no evidence to suggest he would have followed them back to “eternity” or “primal history” as Barth did.⁹⁰ Election happens in history, according to Yoder, and that it does so carries with it a particular consequence, namely, that with God’s concrete call there is the possibility of concrete human refusal. Human freedom really is defined, for him, as the choice between obedience to the call of God in history and rejection of that call.⁹¹ That this true, for him, is reinforced when looking at Yoder’s endorsement of a “historical” doctrine of hell in “Peace without Eschatology.” He states it this way:

Just as the doctrine of creation affirms that God made man free and the doctrine of redemption says this freedom of sin was what led *agape* to the cross, so also the doctrine of hell lets sin free, finally and irrevocably, to choose separation from God. Only by respecting this freedom to the bitter end can love give meaning to history; any universalism which would seek, in the intention of magnifying redemption, to deny the unrepentant sinner the liberty to refuse God’s grace would in reality deny that human choice has any real meaning at all. With judgment and hell the old aeon comes to its end (by being left to itself) and the fate of the disobedient is exclusion from the new heaven and new earth, the consummation of the new society which began in Christ.⁹²

⁸⁸ Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, 63.

⁸⁹ “Peace without Eschatology,” 54.

⁹⁰ Again, Oscar Cullmann’s *Christ and Time* departed from Barth on just these points. As will become clear with Yoder’s critiques of Barth below, he would have rejected this type of reflection as “philosophical.”

⁹¹ In light of this, despite the risk of oversimplification, one could justifiably articulate the difference between Barth and Yoder with the classical labels of “Calvinist” and “Arminian.” Barth roundly rejects the Arminian position in *CD II/2*, 67-68. I note the risk of oversimplification because, for Yoder, disagreements about the doctrine of election are finally not important enough to divide Christians into two groups as such labels suggest. For his comments on this, see *JCSR*, 136, where he argues that in a Free Church, Calvinists and Arminians live together on the basis of a congregational, not doctrinal, unity.

⁹² “Peace without Eschatology,” 62.

There is hardly any question that Yoder has Barth in mind here with the mention of a universalism that seeks to magnify redemption.

It might seem as though Yoder's mention of the "doctrine of hell" is the closest he comes to metaphysical reflection although other evidence shows that something much more modest is being articulated here. In a January 31, 1961 letter to Roy Kreider, a Mennonite missionary in Israel, Yoder responded to a number of theological questions Kreider had posed to him in a previous letter.⁹³ One of those questions concerned what Kreider called the "ultimate triumph" trend in theology (again, an allusion no doubt to Barth, among others). Yoder describes it thus:

...omnipotence plus grace, is true insofar as it counterweights double predestination. Ultimate rebellion of the creature is 'contrary to nature' for the creature and counter to God's intent for every creature. The fall or the staying-fallen of any creature is never the result of God's will or God's weakness; the lostness of any creature can never be concluded by us on the basis of our observations. The grounds for accepting the reality of ultimate rebellion and thus of Hell are not logical or theological, but simply historical; such rebellion is a reality. It did not have to be and still need not be; it has no legitimate place in God's plans or ours; but it is nonetheless there and real.

But then we must add not only that this reality of ultimate rebellion is abundantly testified to scripturally, but that it might point us to a logical weakness in the 'omnipotent Grace' thought process. We assume that Grace which is omnipotent can and will save everybody, goes the argument. But might it not take *more* power to create a person capable of resisting God, and still more to *resist* bowling over that puny creature's resistances, than to treat that creature as after all a puppet, who in the end will be put back in the box anyway, however independently he may have acted during the game? Effective human freedom means more, not less, power on God's part.⁹⁴

⁹³ John Howard Yoder to Roy Kreider, January 31, 1961, Box 59-2, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. Roy Kreider and his wife Florence Kreider were sent by a committee representing the Elkhart, Eastern, and Virginia mission boards to Israel in 1953 to open the first Mennonite mission in Israel. Kreider's letter to Yoder was heavily focused on issues related to Christian-Jewish dialogue. Cf. Fretz, Clarence Y. "Jewish Evangelism." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1959. Web. 30 Nov 2019.

https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Jewish_Evangelism&oldid=82699. Yoder did not answer all of Kreider's questions at the time of writing. In the present context, it is unfortunate that one of those unanswered questions was: "Does election in any way still apply and operate with regard to Jews? Does NT election differ in any way from the OT pattern. How best can we state the concept of election to show consistency in both OT and NT."

⁹⁴ John Howard Yoder to Roy Kreider, January 31, 1961, emphasis in original. See also Yoder's *Preface to Theology*, 314-320 where he addresses these same questions, saying: "Universalism sees love and grace as God correcting or overruling history after it has happened. A 'biblical realist' position sees God as enabling, living, and suffering history" (320).

One of the basic differences between Yoder and Barth on election is taking shape: God's decisive act did not take place in an eternity that determined time, rather, God acted progressively in time, leading to the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection and the creation of a new, redeemed humanity. This new, redeemed humanity is an act of God in time apart from which no redemption would be possible.⁹⁵

One might wonder at this point whether or not Yoder has also transposed Barth's "universalism" into the first century CE such that with the establishment of the new humanity in Christ, everyone is new, they just need to come to a knowledge of this. Clearly this cannot be the case for Yoder. Reading him along the lines of his more "historical" analysis, the best description would be to say that the new humanity began concretely with the community that was gathered by the Holy Spirit in the power of Jesus' resurrection and who began, in their life together, to correspond in word and deed with the form of his humanity. Barth's "universalism" is thus still rejected. Does this mean, then, that Yoder's description of the new humanity places all the emphasis on the action of the disciples? Does Yoder, as Givens claims, uncritically accept the idea that ultimately "the people of God is *self-constituted*?"⁹⁶ While Givens is surely right to identify Yoder's emphasis on the voluntary nature of the church, his claim should be nuanced to prevent too simplistic a reading of Yoder in this regard. Yoder's reaction against Barth's "universalism" does not lead him to endorse an uncritical acceptance of the power of human volition either. It is not as if Yoder thought that the first disciples simply "chose" to become part

⁹⁵ In his essay "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," in *Consultation on Anabaptist Mennonite Theology: Papers Read at the 1969 Aspen Conference*, ed. A.J. Klassen, Yoder articulates in socio-political terms the significance of redemption in Christ for the new humanity: "He [Jesus] represented a pattern of life and thought, personal and social, different from all the available options which men had been committed to before and since." Yoder, "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," 22.

⁹⁶ Tommy Givens, *We The People*, 89. Emphasis in original.

of the new humanity as they might have chosen to join a social club.⁹⁷ Any instance of conversion from life in the old age into life in the new age is, for him, a result of both the love of God pursuing the human creature and the human freedom to accept (or reject) that love.⁹⁸

Nonetheless, it is not surprising that Yoder's emphasis on human freedom and on the possibilities for obedience in the new humanity are seen as a point of difference between him and Barth. In fact, from his notes on Barth, it is clear that Yoder thought that Barth's theology was lacking where it concerned the obedience made possible through Christ. In a telling comment, Yoder wrote:

KB [Karl Barth] synthesizes ML [Martin Luther] and Calvin; *Gnade* [mercy/grace] = *Gericht* [judgment]. AB [Anabaptism] and Bible otherwise; one more element, *Gnade* [mercy/grace] = *Menschen Gerechtigkeit* [human justice].⁹⁹

The sense in which Yoder understood Barth to “synthesize” Luther and Calvin is not clear apart from further explanation. It is notable, however, that the two categories that Yoder links with Luther and Calvin are the categories that correspond to Barth's framing of the twofold form of the community's mediation. There can be no doubt that Barth was heavily influenced by both reformers as is evidenced by his numerous reflections on Luther and Calvin throughout the *CD* and in independent books and essays.¹⁰⁰ What is more to the point here, however, is Yoder's

⁹⁷ This is Givens's critique of Yoder, namely, that Yoder finally is a voluntarist when it comes to the question of the establishment and maintenance of the people of God. For Yoder, however, “voluntarism” is not an uncritical endorsement of the church's “self-determination” or “self-constitution,” but rather quite simply “the renunciation of coercion” and respect for the dignity of the brother, sister, or the neighbor. For Yoder, this does not mean simply letting the neighbor (inside or outside of the church) determine themselves, rather “within my respect for the freedom of the other party to make his or her own decisions, I am still responsible to put issues to her or him.” Yoder, *The War of the Lamb: The Ethics of Nonviolence and Peacemaking*, ed. Glen Stassen, Mark Nation, Matt Hamsher (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2009), 144-145.

⁹⁸ Indeed, in “Peace without Eschatology,” Yoder critiques approaches to ethics that he believes “would be just as possible” even if “Christ had never become incarnate, died, risen, ascended to heaven, and sent His Spirit” (77).

⁹⁹ Notes on Barth, Box 184, Contemporary Barth Folder, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹⁰⁰ For Barth's thoughts on Calvin, in which he also covers the relationship between Calvin's theology and Luther's theology, see Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), especially pages 70-127; (German: *Die Theologie Calvins 1922. Gesamtausgabe II*. (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1993). For a helpful summary of Barth's appeal to Luther and Calvin, see Kimlyn J. Bender, “The Reformers as fathers of the church: Luther and Calvin in the thought of Karl Barth,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 72, no.4 (2019): 414-431.

comments regarding the distinctive element that Anabaptism contributes, namely “human justice” (*Menschen Gerechtigkeit*). The phrase itself invokes Zwingli’s 1523 sermon “On Divine and Human Justice” (*Von göttlicher und menschlicher Gerechtigkeit*). Yoder’s doctoral dissertation, which examined the dialogues between the Anabaptists and the Reformers, included an analysis of this work.¹⁰¹ Yoder argued that, on the one hand, broadly speaking Zwingli represented a re-emergence of “the idea of discipleship” for the common person, an idea that, according to Yoder, had been absent in medieval Christianity.¹⁰² Yoder states that

...in the humanism that Zwingli found in Erasmus, the idea of discipleship emerged again. It remained an important part of Zwingli’s world of thought until the time of the Anabaptist dispute. ‘Being a Christian does not mean prattling about Christ, but rather walking in the way that Christ walked.’ That is, ‘following him, in that we do what he did.’ A Christian changes ‘into the form of Christ.’¹⁰³

On the other hand, however, Yoder notes that at the time of the disputes with the Anabaptists, Zwingli took a position regarding human justice that would make discipleship secondary, only a matter of inner “attitudes” (*Gesinnung*).¹⁰⁴ According to Yoder, Zwingli argued that “[s]in...belongs so essentially to humanity that one can never speak of a transfer of divine justice to society.”¹⁰⁵ While divine justice is what is required of disciples, essential sin makes attaining that justice impossible. Notably, Yoder describes Zwingli’s position on divine and human justice with the formal term “non-correspondence:”

What interests us in the duality of divine and human justice is not the problem of political authority, nor is it the problem of sin, but rather a fundamental way of thinking that appears to be self-evident, that what ‘truly must be’ and what actually is realized are completely different; different in such a way that the practical criteria for the conduct of Christians ‘in the flesh’ can be obtained from any source—just not from revelation. We

¹⁰¹ Yoder would later publish an article with the same title as Zwingli’s sermon. See “‘Von göttlicher und menschlicher Gerechtigkeit,’ *Zeitschrift für Evangelische Ethik* 6, no.1 (1962): 166-181.

¹⁰² *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 285.

¹⁰³ *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 286.

¹⁰⁴ *Täuferium und Reformatoren im Gespräch*, 189; *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 287.

¹⁰⁵ *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 152.

would like to give this mirage [*Erscheinung*] the purely formal name of ‘non-correspondence’ [*Nichtentsprechung*].¹⁰⁶

Over against Zwingli’s account of the non-correspondence between divine and human justice, Yoder claims that the Anabaptists understood there to be just such a correspondence (*Entsprechung*) in the Christian community and that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ was the criteria for discerning the form of that correspondence.

Given the above brief analysis of the probable source for Yoder’s use of the phrase “human justice” in his note on Barth, it is now important to ask in what sense he thought Barth’s own thought lacking with regards to this element. What is of first importance here is that, unlike Zwingli as Yoder reads him, Barth cannot be faulted for having no account of the “correspondence” between Christ and Christ’s community. The community, for Barth, corresponds to Christ in that it witnesses to the divine judgment (*Gericht*) and mercy (*Erbarmen*) that has come upon the whole world in Christ. However, we might imagine Yoder asking, how do “judgment” and “mercy” relate concretely to the ethics of the new community? What is only suggested at this point but will become clearer in the analysis of Yoder’s *KBPW* and *PKB* below, is that Yoder thought Barth’s account of the community’s correspondence to Christ lacking, even if it was “slanting” in the right direction.¹⁰⁷ In this regard, a further comment in Yoder’s notes on Barth is telling: “Anabaptism is [the] true fulfillment of Barth as of Erasmus and Zwingli.”¹⁰⁸ Barth is like Zwingli after all, according to Yoder, not in that he denies any correspondence between Christ and the community, but in that he does not attend to the full extent of the

¹⁰⁶ *Täuferium und Reformatoren im Gespräch*, 18; *Anabaptism and Reformation in Switzerland*, 154.

¹⁰⁷ In Yoder’s notes, he says: “[The] question is not whether KB says it (he has room to say everything and his paradox lets him say anything) but which way the whole system slants” (Yoder, Notes on Barth, Box 184, Contemporary Barth Folder, The Yoder Papers, AMBS).

¹⁰⁸ Notes on Barth, Box 184, Contemporary Barth Folder, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

community's correspondence to Christ.¹⁰⁹ It is not that Zwingli or Barth were wrong to highlight the distinction between divine and human justice, particularly as it relates to the sin that weighs down the latter,¹¹⁰ but simply that both failed to consider sufficiently the extent to which the conduct of Christians could be discerned from and enabled by revelation in Christ. Both needed the "one more element" that Anabaptism offered, namely an account of "human justice" which has as its norm the revelation of God in Christ. While in Barth God's mercy and grace rule in his judgment, for Yoder, God's grace also makes possible human justice in conformity with Christ's example.

In his *POJ*, Yoder would later call the element which Anabaptism emphasized the "messianic element." In the chapter "Justification by Grace through Faith," Yoder argues that Paul's central argument concerning justification is not that grace has made one "just or righteous before God" in a way that is "radically disconnected from any objective or empirical achievement of goodness by the believer."¹¹¹ Rather, justification and righteousness involve the objective and empirical realities of social relationships and a transformed person who behaves differently as a result of divine action. In order to head-off criticisms that he had abandoned too many 'traditional' elements of Protestant theologies of justification, Yoder states further what this argument does not suggest:

The element of debate in the presentation may make it seem that the 'other' or 'traditional' element in each case—Jesus as sacrifice, God as creator, faith as subjectivity—is being rejected. It should therefore be restated that...no such disjunction is intended. I am rather defending the New Testament against the exclusion of the 'messianic' element. The disjunction must be laid to the account of the traditional view,

¹⁰⁹ In a footnote in *The Christian Witness to the State*, Yoder says as much with regards to Barth's use of the concept of "analogy." There, his basic critique is that Barth "is not fully consistent" in his use of analogy and that "the Church side of the analogy is less important to him and less carefully developed than the civil side..." See, *The Christian Witness to the State*, 18. More on this below (175ff.).

¹¹⁰ On the question of sin, it may well be that Yoder thought Barth all too Zwinglian. Yoder's notes do seem to indicate that he thought Barth's ecclesiology was still determined too much by "necessary sin" (Notes on Barth, Box 184, Contemporary Barth Folder, The Yoder Papers, AMBS).

¹¹¹ *Politics of Jesus*, 213.

not of mine. It is those other views that say that because Jesus is seen as sacrifice he may not be seen as sovereign, or that because he is seen as Word made flesh he cannot be seen as normative person.¹¹²

Yoder's comments regarding the "exclusion of the 'messianic element' are instructive for further interpreting the notes on Barth above. For Yoder, it is not as though Barth's synthesis of Luther and Calvin is problematic as such, just that such a synthesis does not enable him to emphasize enough the "messianic element" that Yoder himself advocates on behalf of. Based on this, one could say that part of Yoder's misgivings with Barth's understanding of election as a twofold predetermination is precisely the way that it makes "the justifying purpose of God... somehow eternally or universally relevant" and by doing so downplays the importance of an "objective" and "empirical" human righteousness that is included in that justifying purpose.¹¹³ One could say, therefore, that where Barth's account of the mediation of the community is twofold (judgment and mercy), Yoder's is threefold (judgment, mercy, and justice).

Summarizing the above, we can conclude that Yoder adds a new element, human justice, to Barth's notion of a twofold determination of the one community of God. In addition, the shape or form of the community is not determined timelessly as with Barth, but through redemptive history. To be sure, Yoder reads the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament as including a twofold witness to both judgment and mercy, to God's "no" and "yes," but this is not the case, for him, because of a predetermined twofold divine will and its corresponding creaturely representation. Rather, judgment and mercy are a part of an historical progression in the relationship between God and Israel through time and that historical progression leads also to "one more element," namely the human justice intended by God that is made visible in the obedience of the new community. According to Yoder, the unity of the divine will as it relates to

¹¹² *Politics of Jesus*, 226.

¹¹³ *Politics of Jesus*, 271.

the elect community is thus not, as he would argue in a later essay, an identity through time and neither, by implication, is it a timeless or predetermined unity.¹¹⁴ It is therefore also not discernable, as it is for Barth, through the act of looking “back over the Old Testament from the perspective of the New.”¹¹⁵ Rather, the divine will revealed in the scriptural narrative is revealed as “a purposeful movement” from the Old Testament to the New Testament. This means that the unity of the community within the divine will is not a predetermined unity, since the divine will for the community has become apparent through “an increasingly precise definition of peoplehood.”¹¹⁶ The definition of peoplehood that is to govern the church, for Yoder, is revealed at a particular historical moment in the life of Jesus and climactically so at the cross.

Here, with his comments concerning the “definition of peoplehood,” a comparison with Barth’s appeal to the language of “correspondence” is again in order. While Barth does not speak of the community’s “definition,” he most certainly speaks about the definite “form” given to the community by its inclusion in Christ’s eternal election. The “definition” of the community, if we can use Yoder’s term when speaking of Barth, is determined by its “correspondence” to Christ. In a 1957 essay, Yoder argued that “the human person corresponds to God [*der Mensch Gott entspricht*]” just at the point where the human person is commanded to “be holy” [*Seid heilig*] as God is holy.¹¹⁷ In both the Old Testament and the New, for Yoder, the human being corresponds to God by “following God” [*Gottesnachfolge*].¹¹⁸ While the Old Testament witnesses to God’s

¹¹⁴ Yoder makes this point clear in his essay “If Abraham Is Our Father” in *The Original Revolution*, which originated from course lectures in 1969-1970. Here an interesting parallel between Yoder and Jenson becomes evident. Neither want an account of the unity of the divine will that is located in eternity understood as a “timeless” point.

¹¹⁵ “If Abraham Is Our Father,” 94.

¹¹⁶ “If Abraham Is Our Father,” 101.

¹¹⁷ *Nachfolge Christi als Gestalt politischer Verantwortung* (Basel: Agape Verlag, 1964), 38. In order to keep as close to the historical context as possible, the German text I cite here comes from the first German edition, which was derived from a presentation in Europe in 1957 and then published in 1964. A later revised version of the German text was published in 2000 and this version was translated into English by Timothy Geddert and published in 2003 by Herald Press under the title *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*.

¹¹⁸ *Nachfolge Christi*, 38; *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, 51.

judgment of sin, surely an aspect of God's holiness attested to by the prophets, it does so within the historical progression leading to the New Testament witness to God's mercy and grace and also to God's justice visible in Jesus and in the new community. The form of the community revealed at the cross is thus not the community that witnesses only to God's eternal decision that mercy rule in judgment, rather the church-form of the community is revealed at the cross as the witness of the God who, in Christ, has dealt with evil in time through the just and obedient servant. In Jesus's death and resurrection God deals with evil and makes obedient discipleship in Jesus's footsteps possible. The church, from that point on, is defined as the community whose social form is to correspond to Christ's human righteousness. Furthermore, it is not as though judgment and mercy no longer play a role in the new community. Precisely in corresponding to Christ's righteousness, that is, precisely by participating in Christ, the church witnesses to God's judgment against sin and evil and God's mercy for all. Judgment, for Yoder, is witnessed to in the church through its righteous following of Christ, not just in rebellion. Here, Yoder cautions against interpreting this "following" in too "legalistic" a manner. One cannot help but see his caution as a response to critics of Anabaptism like Barth:

The essence of following Jesus is not grasped if we view it primarily as a commandment to become the same as Jesus, or to act the way Jesus did; rather following Jesus really means basing our action on our participation in Christ's very being... This is not about some legalistic approach to copying Jesus, but rather about participating in Christ. We are already part of his body; we do not become so through following him. Following Jesus is the result, not the means, of our fellowship with Christ. It is the form of our Christian freedom and not a new law.¹¹⁹

The above analysis of Yoder's understanding of election should make it clear that, for him, salvation history does not move by way of a twofold form of the eternally elect community chosen to attest to Jesus Christ. Given his alternative understanding of human freedom, along

¹¹⁹ *Discipleship as Political Responsibility*, 61.

with his desire to show the importance of the church's witness to the human justice made possible through Christ, Yoder poses the community's mediation in terms of judgment, mercy, and the justice of the Messiah. In turn, Yoder's articulation of both Israel's and the church's representative roles falls ultimately not only on what proves to be a point of solidarity with the world (sin), but what proves to be the point of departure (holiness, justice).

In concluding my analysis of the relationship between Yoder's comments in "Peace without Eschatology" and his letter to Trocmé, it is important to note that there are additional reasons that Yoder wished to frame the church's witness in terms of human justice and not only judgment and mercy. One of the other principle reasons is his historical assessment of the Constantinian church's role as active mediator of the judgment of God against evil and sin in the world.¹²⁰ Indeed, in the same essay Yoder argues that with the Constantinian attempt to achieve peace without eschatology, the "doctrine of hell finds its place" in history when "the purpose of exterminating, rather than subduing, evil is shifted from the endtime to the present."¹²¹ Given the Constantinian temptation to mediate judgment, the church that seeks peace with eschatology must witness only to the judgment of God through the nonresistant love of Christ, the messianic form of justice.

The Constantinian identification of church and empire is problematic for yet another reason, for Yoder, in that it makes election (belonging to the people of God) a formal societal or national given. Everyone in Christendom is elect. To be sure, Barth does not anywhere advance such a position. Nonetheless, one can see why Yoder might have been hesitant about Barth's "universalism" inasmuch as it could be taken to suggest that the distinction between the elect and

¹²⁰ "Peace without Eschatology," 62. I pick up Yoder's worries about Barth's appeal to the judgment of God again below (176ff).

¹²¹ "Peace without Eschatology," 67.

non-elect is finally a distinction only with respect to knowledge and not also with respect to the alternative shape of the church's visible witness.¹²² Yoder would later frame some of his criticisms of Barth's universalism in relation to what he saw as Barth's undue emphasis on "concepts" and "epistemology" in distinction from history and ethics in theology.¹²³ Again, taking the supposedly more "historical" approach, Yoder is inclined to say that, empirically speaking, all are not elect in Christ because all do not follow Christ.¹²⁴ There can be no abstract concept of election.¹²⁵ More will be said about this below when examining additional notes that Yoder took on Barth's doctrine of election.¹²⁶

For now, it is enough to say that the preceding analysis of Yoder's "Peace without Eschatology," aided by Yoder's later notes on Barth, helps to round out the basic logic at work in Yoder's linking of election, obedience, and the church-world distinction in his letter to Trocmé about Barth. It also gives a first glimpse into the areas of Barth's thought that provoked Yoder's appreciation and critique. Yoder appreciated Barth's refusal to subordinate sanctification to justification but saw this refusal as being in tension with his doctrine of divine freedom and his doctrine of universal election which both seemed to preclude human freedom understood as a choice between sin and obedience. Furthermore, Yoder worried that in Barth's account of the

¹²² As will become clear below, Yoder will in numerous places conclude that Barth is too preoccupied with epistemology and not enough with history and ecclesiology. In his essay "If Abraham is Our Father" in *The Original Revolution*, Yoder critiques the notion that the "outworking of God's purposes" occurs "at the point of receptivity in the learner, rather than in the God-driven course of events themselves" (102). Here again there may be a subtle shake of the head at Barth's account of revelation as the revelation of a reality decided from eternity.

¹²³ Similarly, in a paper presentation on *CD 1/2*, §14.2 in one of Barth's English language colloquia, Yoder wondered why Barth tended to focus so much on "time" in his theology rather than "space." Yoder's question in full reads: "Why are there such relatively large sections on time in the *KD*...? Doesn't the analogous tension of the individual and society or kingdom of God require a comparable section i.e. on space?" See Yoder's Notes on "The Time of Expectation," Box 184, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹²⁴ This gets at Yoder's critique of the notion of the "invisible church" as seen, for example, in his essay "Anabaptism and History," in *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 123-134.

¹²⁵ Again, it seems to me that Yoder follows Cullmann here. See Cullman's chapter "The Double Movement of the Redemptive Line According to the Principle of Representation," in *Christ and Time*, 115-118.

¹²⁶ See pages 170-173 of this thesis.

way that divine freedom relativizes all ethical principles, he missed some of the concrete ethical guidance present in the New Testament that gives objective shape to obedient discipleship.

Indeed, Yoder put his disagreement with Barth in even stronger terms in his letter to Trocmé:

Above [in Barth's account of the gift of freedom] is grafted [*se greffe*] the old idea that, since God is free, as well as the Christian, there can be no ethical principles. To tell the truth [*pour vrai dire*], there can be no ethics at all, because if we do not talk about principles we will only talk around ethics [*parler autour de l'ethique*].¹²⁷

Yoder's confidence, on the other hand, that one can find ethical principles in the New Testament appears in another article from the same year.

In "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society," Yoder notes that the church can look to the New Testament and "know the precise content of the obedience which is expected of us."¹²⁸ While Yoder was well aware of the dangers of appealing to "ethical principles," he nonetheless believed that such principles were not fundamentally incompatible with divine freedom. One can see the polemic with Barth coming out in full force here and why Yoder was not satisfied with Barth's *The Gift of Freedom*. In the context of the Algerian war, and with World War II still fresh in the minds of so many in Europe, Yoder was hoping specifically for an articulation of Christian ethics that could provide an account of Christian non-resistance as the proper form of the church's embodied responsibility. What it means for the church to be responsible, for him, is the same thing as what it means for it to be elect, namely, to be obedient disciples of Jesus, following his commands as articulated in the

¹²⁷ Yoder to Trocmé, December 10, 1954, Box 81-21, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹²⁸ "The Anabaptist Dissent: The Logic of the Place of the Disciple in Society," in *The Roots of Concern: Writings on Anabaptist Renewal 1952-1957*, edited by Virgil Vogt, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2009), 29. It is no coincidence that this article was written in the same year (1954) as the letter to Trocmé as many of the themes present in the letter appear there, including Yoder's critique of Barth on God's freedom (40).

New Testament. Yoder was confident that the church could, in face of those commands, choose obedience, a point on which he and Trocmé were strongly in agreement.¹²⁹

Here again Yoder displays his polemic with a view of responsibility that is based on what he says is a view of grace that is understood as “purely forensic justification by faith.”¹³⁰ For him, grace means, rather, “empowering grace” that understands “redemption as a brand-new dimension of possibility for discipleship given the new man through his participation in the body of the risen Lord.”¹³¹ According to Yoder, this type of grace does not prohibit but makes possible the discernment, with the help of the Holy Spirit, of “a set of instructions, commands, and prohibitions, which are objectively valid in that they translate the will of God adequately for all Christians at a given time and place.”¹³² In the context of the discussion of ethical principles, one might again see the way that Yoder seeks to supplement what he saw as Barth’s synthesis of Luther and Calvin by adding the element of “human justice” to the reality of God’s redemptive action in history. Human responsibility is not governed only by an understanding of God’s judgment and mercy but also by an understanding of human righteousness made possible by Christ’s death and resurrection. Yoder’s twofold confidence, that the church could know the “precise content” of obedience and could act on that knowledge, would be an occasion for yet another departure from Barth. As key documents from 1955 show, that departure occurs in their differing understandings of revelation. In the context of this study, this departure could be articulated in terms of differing understandings of the meaning of God’s self-determination.

¹²⁹ Indeed, Trocmé had already written confidently in a December 1953 article “The Politics of Repentance,” in *The Christian Century*, (December 1953): 1525-1527, that “...the church’s choice is between sin and God’s grace, and God’s grace is *hic et nunc* total forgiveness and total capacity to do good. The church’s existence is determined by God’s command: Go and sin no more.”

¹³⁰ “The Anabaptist Dissent,” 38.

¹³¹ “The Anabaptist Dissent,” 39.

¹³² “The Anabaptist Dissent,” 39.

Revelation and Divine Self-Determination

In 1955, Yoder participated in an English language colloquium with Barth which examined *CD I/1*.¹³³ In one of the colloquium meetings, Yoder took up a passage from *CD I/1* where Barth says that “[t]he revelation attested in the Bible is the revelation of the God who by nature cannot be unveiled to humans.”¹³⁴ A back and forth between Barth and Yoder ensued on this passage:

Yoder: Does the *Church Dogmatics* make transcendence epistemological, whereas the Bible makes transcendence ontological, causal, and ethical? You say, for instance, on page 368: ‘The revelation attested in the Bible is the revelation of the God who according to His nature cannot be unveiled to man.’

Barth: The German reads: ‘*Die in der Bibel bezeugte Offenbarung ist die Offenbarung des seinen Wesen nach den Menschen unenthullbaren Gottes.*’ What I mean is that man cannot unveil God. God is incapable of being unveiled by man. Otherwise, if God by His own nature could not reveal Himself, then we would have no Christianity. God is inaccessible, but this does not mean incapable. It was my task to find out an epistemological concept in the Prolegomena. Only then can I go to the whole of God’s action. I had to extract a concept of revelation from all of God’s action as event. One has to work with concepts.

Yoder: But why begin with a concept? Why not deal directly with the event?

Barth: The concept I use is a description of the event itself. The result of this investigation of the Doctrine of the Trinity is a *critical principle*.¹³⁵

In preparation for this meeting, Yoder had prefaced his questions in a manner that sheds additional light on his basic misgivings with Barth at this point:

The *Kirchliche Dogmatik’s* demonstration of the necessary threeness of God is based on an analysis of the concept of Revelation of the God who by His nature cannot be revealed. The fact of revelation is taken from the witness of scripture but this analysis of the *concept* of Revelation may still be called philosophical (as opposed to

¹³³ *KD* Discussion Questions, Box 81-15, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹³⁴ *KD I/1*, 338; *CD I/1*, 320.

¹³⁵ This discussion is found in John Godsey’s *Table Talk*, 48. Emphasis in original. Godsey’s text does not identify Yoder as the one asking Barth these questions. I am not aware of any publication in which Yoder identifies himself as the student asking the question here; however, this same question appears in Yoder’s own notes with a slightly different wording; so it is clear that this is Yoder asking the question. Godsey recollects the student (Yoder) citing *CD I/1*, 368, in his question; however, if the German edition is what Yoder was referring to, the citation is page 338. This passage appears on page 320 of the English translation.

historical). . . . Such a definition of God seems to propose a stable epistemological framework rather than a history of salvation.¹³⁶

Here it becomes clear that Yoder presumes an understanding of revelation that is different from Barth's and he has posed the difference as one between a "philosophical" concept and an "historical" concept. How might Yoder understand the essential difference between a philosophical concept and an historical concept?

The answer to the above question becomes clear in yet another letter, written in July 1955 to W. Alvin Pitcher. The immediate purpose of the letter was to respond to Pitcher's request (included in a previous letter) to attend a conference on "The Lordship of Christ Over Church and State" that was to take place in August of that year in Puidoux, Switzerland.¹³⁷ The purpose of that conference was to "attain a greater degree of unity in theological viewpoint among Christians who hold or sympathize closely with the Christian pacifist position, and to do this in the context of an ecumenical conversation on a broader scale."¹³⁸ Knowing that this was the purpose of the conference, Pitcher's original letter to Yoder evidently suggested that Barth would have a particular critique of pacifism and that it would begin with his appeal to the freedom of God. Yoder concurs with Pitcher's assessment and then proceeds to offer a critique of Barth's account of divine freedom, along with Barth's basic claims regarding ethics in §36-39 of *CD* II/2. Some of the same criticisms found in the letter to Trocmé and in his questions directed at Barth in his colloquium appear. This time, however, Yoder states much more plainly what he perceived as his differences from Barth on revelation:

¹³⁶ *KD* Discussion Questions, Box 81-15, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁷ Pitcher did end up attending the conference. For the list of attendees, cf. Mennonite Church Historical Committee John Horsch Mennonite History Essay Contest Records, 1949-2011. Mennonite Church USA Archives, Goshen, Indiana. Box 11, Folder 43: Jon Meyer: "Conversation at Puidoux: Mennonites Rethink Church and State", 2003. Also available online at <https://brandon.multics.org/stuff/puidoux/>

¹³⁸ This description is found in *On Earth Peace: Discussions on War/Peace Issues Between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren and European Churches, 1935-1975*, edited by Donald F. Durnbaugh (Elgin, IL: The Brethren Press, 1978), 122.

If the effort were to hold God to a philosophical pattern, then the affirmation of His [God's] freedom to refuse the pattern [given in scripture] is legitimate. If however the effort is made to have no pattern but scripture, the affirmation that God is free to contradict what He said in Christ or in Scripture is of dubious theological value. The Incarnation means basically that God has abandoned, in historical reality, the freedom which He had theoretically (and philosophically) to be self-contradictory. He will never correct what He has said to the world in Christ. He might correct my exegesis—but only through a better exegesis of the same Christ and the same scriptural witness, not by contradicting them. It is not the pacifist who ties God down to what He has said in Christ, it is God Himself.¹³⁹

The above passage makes it clear that Yoder has followed his critique of Barth's doctrine of divine freedom back into Barth's doctrine of the Word of God, evidently labelling the former as a "philosophical pattern." Barth can say what he does about God's freedom to call a Christian to war because his doctrine of divine freedom prohibits any move from the event of revelation to a principle. Revelation is not true knowledge of God in the sense of historically delineable information but in the sense of a self-giving of God that must always be received anew. Revelation is always, for Barth, an event. That the event gives knowledge is not denied, for Barth, but that knowledge is never, as it were, appropriated by the one to whom it is revealed in such a way as to possess it apart from the initiating action of the giver.¹⁴⁰ Scripture, as witness to God's revelation, must similarly never be read so as to extract principles from it. While Yoder would certainly agree with Barth on this, he would rather err on an understanding of revelation that leaves much less room for interpretive "gymnastics" where clear patterns appear in God's revelation.

Having read Yoder's initial question to Barth together with his letter to Pitcher, Yoder's complaint about Barth's doctrine of divine freedom can be seen as simultaneously a critique of

¹³⁹ Yoder to Alvin Pitcher, July 1955, Box 229, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹⁴⁰ As Barth puts it in *KD* II/1, 251; *CD* II/1, 223 in the context of a discussion of the human being's reception of revelation: "In awe we gratefully let grace be grace, and always receive it as such. We never let reception become a taking [*werden wir aus dem Empfangen nie ein Nehmen werden lassen*]."

his doctrine of revelation. Barth's account of divine freedom leaves too much 'epistemological' control in the hands of the individual ethical agent in the concrete situation and it does so because it is based on an account of God's transcendence in his revelation that is too philosophical. For Yoder, however, God's way of remaining transcendent in revelation is to give Godself so completely as to leave little to no question as to what obeying God looks like with respect to the question of violence. That he thinks this way about the relationship between Barth's view of revelation and divine freedom is evident, for example, in statements that he would go on to make in his paper "The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State" at the Puidoux conference discussed in the letter to Pitcher. In his paper, Yoder asked whether or not there could be "valid generalizations (*gültige Lehrsätze, Denksätze, or Prüfungsmaßstäbe*) concerning the 'good?'"¹⁴¹ He continues:

To be blunt we would ask whether there are 'principles,' if the word had not been given such a bad taste. But unless we are simply going to condemn ourselves to following the fashions of German theology like sheep, we have no right to accept this bad reputation the word 'principles' has acquired as a consequence of the way it has been misused in certain circles... God is free in the sense that I cannot tie Him down. But God has expressed His freedom in tying Himself down. There is no second Word, no second Christ, and no second Spirit. God said, 'This is my Son; listen to Him.' God has committed Himself, and *there is a certain consistency in that commitment, which is the basis for certain generalizations*. For we are permitted and commanded to search out the main lines in God's Self-Revelation. We must also look for those places where the general lines of God's Revelation limit themselves and their realm of application. But to say that there are no main lines is simply to extinguish all conversation.¹⁴²

The difference between Barth and Yoder is clear, and in the context of this study could be justifiably articulated as a difference between the meaning of divine self-determination for each theologian. For Barth, God has determined Godself in Jesus Christ, but that he has done so does not mean that his revelation in Jesus Christ is given to human conceptual control. Consequently,

¹⁴¹ "The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State," in *On Earth Peace*, 137.

¹⁴² "The Theological Basis of the Christian Witness to the State," 137-138. Emphasis mine.

Barth relativizes ethical principles, since no aspect of God's revealing Word is ever a human possession. Quite the contrary, for Barth, it is always a divine self-presentation (*Selbstdarstellung*). As a result, ethics can never be more than theory, never presuming to work with principles that could possibly stand-in for God's self-presentation in the concrete situation of human action (what Barth called the field of *ethos*). Yoder thought that the Barth who so strongly advocated the definitive revelation of God in Christ should never have come up with a distinction between "ethics" and "ethos." In the same letter to Pitcher, he noted:

...by capsuling off the field of 'ethos' from all theological critique, he [Barth] denies the ultimate relevance of theology for the reality of history; the '*Gebot der Stunde*' [the order of the day] which hits you when you stand before your responsibility and look for the best possible solution is really, if not subject to the judgment of Christ in Scripture, a second source of revelation. This Barth would of course deny, but it is the real consequence of his ethical line, which he hides only by the linguistic, and theologically worthless, trick of distinguishing ethics and ethos. I'm all for the freedom of God; but the freedom of Barth impresses me less. He's no longer himself, no longer a theologian, when he pulls such a trick.¹⁴³

For Yoder, that God has "tied" Godself down means that God gives his revelation to the church in a manner of such fullness in the person of Jesus Christ, that the "main lines in God's Self-revelation" can be looked to when seeking an answer to the ethical question. Yoder is operating with a different conception of revelation than Barth that can best be described as an undialectical unveiling of God or, in Yoder's terms, a "historical" revelation. Jesus Christ is, for him, God unveiled in history. This unveiling is the revelation of God's decision to "tie himself down" in Christ and in such a manner that the human decision when faced with this revelation is either to be obedient to what is commanded or to be disobedient to it. Given this difference between Barth and Yoder, it is instructive to turn back again to the question of election, for if Yoder has traced his concerns with Barth's doctrine of divine freedom back into their source in his doctrine of

¹⁴³ Yoder to Pitcher, July 1955, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

revelation, what further effect might Yoder's critique of Barth's doctrine of revelation have on his view of election?

Most of what needs to be said about Yoder's critique of Barth's doctrine of election has already been discussed above. The full extent of Yoder's critique of Barth's doctrine of election/predestination can be fleshed out in even greater detail, however, through a consideration of the influence of secondary texts on Barth that Yoder read, along with seminars he took under other Basel faculty members during 1954-1955. Many of the above criticisms Yoder leveled against Barth have, if not their origin, then at least their refinement in these texts and seminars. Two primary examples will suffice to make this clear, especially as it concerns the question of how Yoder's critique of Barth's understanding of revelation and divine freedom relate to his different understanding of election from that of Barth.¹⁴⁴

First, Yoder's course notes from 1954-55 show that he encountered Barth's doctrine of predestination through the Swiss pastor and then University of Basel faculty member Fritz Buri.¹⁴⁵ Buri critiqued Barth's account of the eternal predestination of Christ in *CD II/2*, claiming that it made salvation in Christ "a purely internal divine process" [*einem rein innergottlichen Prozess*].¹⁴⁶ Such an account threatened, according to Buri, to make salvation something that has

¹⁴⁴ As already indicated, Oscar Cullmann was a major influence on Yoder, especially with respect to Yoder's polemic against "philosophical" thought patterns. In his *Christ and Time*, Cullmann critiqued Barth's understanding of the relationship between time and eternity, calling Barth's conception of eternity "philosophical." Cf. *Christ and Time*, 63.

¹⁴⁵ Typescript Course Notes with the title "13. Kap. Die Praedestinationslehre," Box 81-15, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. It is not clear whether these are seminar notes written by Yoder or a handout given by Buri. Other notes in the same series appear in a folder titled: "Buri, Gott & Welt, Natur & Gott." I have been unable to find a published work by Buri that goes by either title or that reproduces the material contained in these notes exactly. That being said, these notes examine themes that were central to Buri and include a reference to one of Buri's other published works on Barth's doctrine of predestination. With this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that they are either Buri's notes (a handout?) or Yoder's notes on Buri's seminar. For a brief historical account of Buri's theological career during the time Yoder was in Basel, see Harold H. Oliver, "Fritz Buri: A Chronology of his Theologizing," in *Journal of Bible and Religion* 34, no.4 (Oct 1966): 346-357.

¹⁴⁶ Buri, Fritz. "Das Problem der Praedestinationslehre," 49. This essay is cited in the typed document in Yoder's notebook.

“nothing to do” [*nichts zu tun*] with human history, with the further consequence that salvation “excludes” [*ausschliesst*] human freedom. In either case, says Buri, “the reality of evil is denied” [*die Realitat des Bösen geleugnet*].¹⁴⁷ For Buri, Barth’s Christological account of predestination presented Christ “as a cipher of actual existence” [*als Chiffre eigentlicher Existenz*].¹⁴⁸ In a later essay, Yoder would note that in the early volumes of the *CD*, “‘Jesus Christ’ is a *Chiffre*...for revelation” whereas in the later volumes on sanctification, Barth turns more pointedly to “the human Jesus...in his full humanity and lifestyle.”¹⁴⁹ Given Yoder’s use of the term *Chiffre* in this context, a term he uses nowhere else in his writings, Buri’s critique is surely in the background here and illustrates the link between what Yoder saw as Barth’s undue emphasis on the revelation “concept” and Barth’s account of universal predestination of all in Christ. For Yoder, if “Jesus Christ” is only a cipher, a philosophical concept, and not instead the concrete human form in which God has “tied” Godself down in history, then revelation can provide no basis for ethics.

While studying in Basel, Yoder also took notes on a pamphlet by Eduard Buess titled “On Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Predestination,” which includes an analysis of Barth’s account of the election of the community.¹⁵⁰ Buess’s chastening critique of Barth centered on the extent to which Barth’s doctrine of predestination subordinated exegesis to systematics, specifically with respect to the question of the relationship between God’s “No” and “Yes.” For Buess, because

¹⁴⁷ Author unclear, Box 81-15, Typed document with the title “13. Kap. Die Praedestinationslehre,” The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹⁴⁸ Fritz Buri, “Das Problem,” 62. Buri actually sought positively to appropriate the notion of the cipher (*Chiffre*) in his later work on Dogmatics. Taking over the concept from his Basel colleague Karl Jaspers (from whom Yoder also took one course), Buri incorporated it into his own *Dogmatik* which he was in the process of writing during Yoder’s years in Basel. Ironically, in a 1962 Letter to Buri, Barth complained to him precisely about the extent to which Buri’s *Dogmatik* turned Christ into a “cipher” (*Chiffre*) for Christian faith. Cf. Barth, *Letters*, 79-81.

¹⁴⁹ “The Basis of Karl Barth’s Social Ethics,” in *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*, 141.

¹⁵⁰ Eduard Buess, “Zur Prädestinationslehre Karl Barths” in *Theologische Studien, Heft 43*, Zollikon, Evangelischer Verlag, 1955.

Barth made the No of God fundamentally overcome in Christ, he did not give adequate attention to the “temporal tension” (*zeitliche Spannung*) attested to in the biblical witness to divine election.¹⁵¹ Put in Yoder’s terms, Barth’s doctrine of election had no place for dealing with the concrete reality of human rebellion in history and so no doctrine of hell. There were many people who levelled similar criticisms against Barth during that time period and all of these critiques came down, in one way or another, to what was perceived as Barth’s “universalism.”¹⁵²

That Buri’s and Buess’s concerns influenced Yoder is made especially clear in his own handwritten notes for a course on Barth that he would teach in 1958 and then again in 1961 when back in America.¹⁵³ On those notes, Yoder listed a number of concerns and criticisms with respect to Barth’s thought that echoed the criticisms of both Buri and Buess. Echoing Buri (although not mentioning him explicitly), in one note Yoder wrote that the concept of Christ as revelation was more an “axiom” than an account of the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁴ In the same note, Yoder wrote that creation and redemption are, in Barth, so “tied” that there is “no room for sin” in his system.¹⁵⁵ In two other similar handwritten notes, Yoder mentions Buess, specifically as it relates to the concern that Barth at times put “systematics before exegesis.”¹⁵⁶ Barth’s (apparent) universalism, according to Yoder, comes from a “philosophical prestructure” that is too concerned with “consistency.” The implication of Barth’s universalism, for him, is that “the whole human history is thrown out.”¹⁵⁷ Perhaps summing up the basic criticism of the above

¹⁵¹ Eduard Buess, 63. Barth would come to address the types of criticisms leveled against him by theologians like Buess later in CD IV/3, 174ff.

¹⁵² This critique was levelled most systematically in Berkhouer’s *Triumph of Grace*. Barth later denied that he was a universalist (CD IV/3, 477-478).

¹⁵³ Yoder taught a course entitled “Contemporary European Theology: Karl Barth” in the summer of 1958 when he was Professor of Theology at Goshen Seminary.

¹⁵⁴ Of course, “cipher” and “axiom” have different meanings but perhaps one could say they suggest different aspects of the same problem Yoder finds in Barth: that the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth and his actions are not the basis for theological reflection.

¹⁵⁵ Notes on Barth, Box 184, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

¹⁵⁶ Notes on Barth, Box 184, The Yoder papers, AMBS.

¹⁵⁷ Notes on Barth, Box 184, The Yoder papers, AMBS. Again, Cullmann’s critique may also be at play here.

notes, Yoder wrote in yet another note: “Systematization [is] wrong in predestination and universalism. Lordship [is] read so as to identify Christian ethics with ethics for society.”¹⁵⁸

Immediately below, I will examine this last statement in more detail in relation to Yoder’s engagement with Barth in *KBPW* and *PKB*. For now, it is enough to point out that all of this evidence suggests that Yoder was very aware of Barth’s account of election/predestination and had his own particular arguments for and against it. The above survey of the years 1954-1955 has been an attempt at demonstrating the specific ways that Yoder appropriates and departs from Barth’s doctrines of divine and human freedom, election/predestination, and finally his doctrine of revelation as well. Yoder would consolidate these many strands of appreciation and critique into his engagement with Barth’s treatment of war in *KBPW* and *PKB*.

“Shooting” at Barth: Yoder’s *Karl Barth and the Problem of War* and *The Pacifism of Karl Barth*

In June of 1957, Yoder sent a spirited letter to Barth discussing his written critique of him in material that would later become *Karl Barth and the Problem of War*. The letter makes it clear that Barth had read the critique and responded with his own provocations. Yoder wrote:

The work, though literarily unfinished, is meant theologically, that is, binding [*verbindlich*]. You call that 'bellicos' [sic]. So be it [*Soit*]! Apart from the fact that the attempt to laugh at the people who reject war because they are also disputatious in other ways allows you to miss the originality that you are used to, I do not see why my understanding of Christ necessarily commits me to a particular kind of femininity [*Weiblichkeit*] or wimpishness [*Weichlichkeit*]. The statement that I 'shoot' [*'schiess'*] in theology I cannot understand as a censure from the author of the *Romerbrief* and the article *No!*¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Notes on Barth, Box 184, The Yoder papers, AMBS.

¹⁵⁹ John Howard Yoder to Karl Barth, June 15, 1957, Box 229, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. This letter is also cited in Marco Hofheinz, *Er ist unsere Freude*. Hofheinz cited from the letter from the Barth Archiv. I am unaware of any letter from Barth to Yoder in which he makes the criticisms of Yoder’s work that Yoder refers to in this letter. It is possible Barth’s letter to Yoder is lost or that Yoder is recounting Barth’s critiques from an in-person meeting. In his unpublished 2016 Duke University dissertation “The History of Interpretation of Karl Barth’s Ecclesiology from 1927 to 2015,” 191, Andrew Rowell reproduces the “legend,” which seems to have been communicated to him by Stanley Hauerwas, that Barth had once joked to Yoder: “You Mennonites are bellicose.” As the above letter shows,

The striking language of this letter calls for comment, especially Yoder's defensive claim that his view of Christ should not commit him "to a particular kind of femininity or wimpishness." Was this a criticism leveled against Yoder by Barth himself or was this Yoder's interpretation of Barth's criticisms of pacifism?¹⁶⁰ In the absence of a corresponding letter to verify this, what such language suggests regarding Yoder's or Barth's views of the relationship between pacifism and "femininity" will remain unclear. What was it that Yoder had said that had provoked Barth to call him "bellicose?" An answer to this question is more forthcoming. In July of 1957, an early version of the second preface to *KBPW*, when it was still in the form of a working paper, makes it clear that while Barth was happy with Yoder's descriptive account of him in this work, he was not happy with his "critical" appraisal.¹⁶¹ Given the preceding analysis, this summary statement of Yoder's criticisms of Barth in *KBPW* should not be surprising:

One of the things which theologians have learned from Barth, in his critique of all philosophies of religion and all theologies which did not start with revelation, is to respond with a great deal of suspicion when presented with a timeless truth which can be abstracted from the concrete work of Christ. The theologian will be wary of importing philosophical, rational criteria of truth from somewhere other than salvation history. Yet in his discussion of the problem of war, this is precisely what Barth does.¹⁶²

The severity of this critique should not be underestimated, for what Yoder is ultimately saying here is that Barth defends the possibility of war through natural theology. Barth's negative reaction is thus unsurprising. The "timeless," "philosophical, rational criteria of truth" that Yoder claimed Barth imported into his discussion of the problem of war was the concept of the

this is no legend. He also mentions an encounter at one of Barth's colloquia that almost certainly was between Barth and Yoder. See footnote 25 above.

¹⁶⁰ The fact that Yoder does not explicitly state that Barth used those words and the fact that he did not place them in quotes makes the source of that criticism unclear. That said, it is possible that Yoder had encountered characterizations of pacifism as "feminine" from other sources.

¹⁶¹ Yoder, Box 229, AMBS. In all later publications of *KBPW*, the statement by Yoder regarding Barth's disapproval was omitted. The full statement in this early version of the second preface reads as follows: "The following text in its present form has been read and criticized by Professor Barth, who finds that the descriptive first section is acceptable but that the critical second section is not."

¹⁶² *KBPW*, 84.

Grenzfall, the “limit” or “extreme case.” According to Yoder’s analysis of Barth’s use of this concept, at no point could Barth justify such a concept Christologically. Rather, according to Yoder, Barth could only justify the *Grenzfall* concept through his doctrine of divine freedom, a concept that, as has already been shown above, Yoder saw as too “philosophical.”

Yoder brings the above critique to bear upon yet another aspect of Barth’s thought. In Barth’s 1946 “Christian Community and Civil Community” (*Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*), he advanced several arguments that Yoder himself favoured. For example, Barth argued that “we are entitled and compelled to regard the existence of the Christian community as of ultimate and supremely political significance [*allerletztlich hochpolitischen Bedeutung*].”¹⁶³ Barth also argued that it is imperative that “[t]he Church must remain the Church,” never becoming integrated into the civil community since “[t]he Christian community has a task [*Aufgabe*] of which the civil community can never relieve it and which it can never pursue in the forms peculiar to the civil community.”¹⁶⁴ Finally, Barth argued that “the activity of the State is...a form of divine service [*Gottesdienst*]” and must therefore be understood as related to the Kingdom of God.¹⁶⁵

While Yoder agreed with Barth on the above claims, he objected to the way Barth explained the relation between the State and the Kingdom of God. Barth explained this relation through the concept of “analogy” (*Analogie*) and its attendant term “correspondence” (*Entsprechung*) among others.¹⁶⁶ As has been attested to at numerous places above, these terms are used by Barth in his description of the witness of the church community. For Barth, there is

¹⁶³ Barth, *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*. Theologische Studien, Heft 20 (Zollikon-Zurich: Evangelischer Verlag AG, 1946), 8; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” in *Community, State, and Church: Three Essays by Karl Barth* (New York: Doubleday, 1960), 154.

¹⁶⁴ *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 11; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 157.

¹⁶⁵ *Christengemeinde und Bürgergemeinde*, 10; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 157.

¹⁶⁶ Barth defined the specific limits of his use of the concept of analogy in *KD* II/1, 254ff; *CD* II/1, 225ff.

thus a point of commonality between these two communities despite their significant differences: both provide analogies of, correspond with, or provide a reflection of the kingdom of God. One key difference (among others) between the two communities, however, is that the church “has knowledge” of the kingdom of God, where the civil community does not.¹⁶⁷ According to Barth, the church can thus understand the civil community or the state as an allegory of the Kingdom of God or a “reflected image” (*Spiegelbild*) of the truth that Christians proclaim.¹⁶⁸ This means that as the church takes up its “share of political responsibility” in relation to the civil community, “it will choose those [political possibilities] which most suggest a correspondence [*Entsprechung*] to, an analogy [*Analogie*] and a reflection [*Spiegelbild*] of, the content of its own faith and gospel.”¹⁶⁹ Yoder appreciated the payoff of Barth’s use of these concepts when the use of analogy was governed by his “Christological concentration.”¹⁷⁰ Yoder critiqued Barth’s use of analogy in this essay, however, when he took up the political analogy of “divine judgment” and “divine mercy.” Given Yoder’s comments (above) concerning the additional element that Barth missed, namely “human justice” (which recall, set the shape of the church’s witness to divine judgment for Yoder), it is not hard to see why he would see a problem with Barth here. Barth argued that “[t]he Church knows God’s anger [*Zorn*] and judgment [*Gericht*], but it also knows that His anger lasts but for a moment, whereas His mercy [*Gnade*] is for eternity.”¹⁷¹ For Barth, the political analogy to be found in this Christian truth is that “violent solutions of conflicts in

¹⁶⁷ “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 170. So, Barth says in the same essay on page 179: “The translation of the Kingdom of God into political terms demands Christian, spiritual, and prophetic knowledge on every side.”

¹⁶⁸ *Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde*, 23; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 169.

¹⁶⁹ *Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde*, 24; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 170.

¹⁷⁰ Indeed, Yoder said as much in his *Christian Witness to the State*, 17: “This demonstration [of what love means in social relations] cannot be transposed directly into non-Christian society, for in the church it functions only on the basis of repentance and faith; yet by analogy certain of its aspects may be instructive as stimuli to the conscience of society.” Also see page 18fn2 where Yoder mentions Barth’s use of analogy and his worry about Barth’s inconsistency in using it.

¹⁷¹ *Christengemeinde und Burgergemeinde*, 32; “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 178.

the political community... must be approved, supported, and if necessary, even suggested by the Christian community.”¹⁷² For Yoder, the weakness of the concept of analogy shows itself in this kind of argument in that it can be so easily bent to fit any political possibility. Yoder puts it this way:

...whereas for the other examples the analogy was drawn between the political demand and the Christian community, this time the parallel is with divine vengeance. Thus in order to explain the right of the state to have recourse to violence, which every classical doctrine of the state has considered as the definition *sine qua non* of the state, Barth is obliged to abandon the Christological terrain and the parallel with the community of grace.¹⁷³

With this critique it also becomes clear why Yoder saw Barth’s doctrine of a twofold universal election in *CD* II/2 as a problem. For, if all are elect in Christ from eternity to be witnesses only of the judgment and the mercy of God revealed in Christ, and if the life of both the civil community and church community reflect that, then Christian ethics can be too readily identified with ethics for society.¹⁷⁴ With Yoder’s added element of “human justice,” which he understood to frame the church’s witness to God’s judgment according to Christ’s nonresistant victory, Christian ethics remains distinct from the state.

In spite of the above critiques, it is important to note again that Yoder thought that, taken as a whole, Barth’s social thought in the *CD* was in “movement,” that it was a “continuing story,” and that the direction it was heading in the later volumes, specifically as it concerned discipleship and the question of war, was close to Yoder’s and that given enough time, he might have come around to a more decidedly pacifist position.¹⁷⁵ Whether or not Yoder’s judgment in this regard is valid is beside the point. What is instructive in the present context is that Yoder

¹⁷² “Christian Community and Civil Community,” 178.

¹⁷³ *KBPW*, 117.

¹⁷⁴ Recall the note quoted above on page 173, in which Yoder wrote with respect to Barth: “Systematization [is] wrong in predestination and universalism. Lordship [is] read so as to identify Christian ethics with ethics for society.” Notes on Barth, Box 184, The Yoder papers, AMBS.

¹⁷⁵ *KBPW*, 88-89, 93.

thought that Barth's later thought contained resources for a theological ethics that would move beyond appeals to an 'abstract' notion of divine freedom or to concepts he thought were derived from natural theology.

In *PKB*, Yoder described other areas in Barth's thought that, if adequately utilized, could replace Barth's previous "solutions":

There are in the thought of Barth other launching pads for a possible social ethic; the liberty of proclamation, the analogy between the church and civil society, *the significance of Israel for the nations*, *the exemplarity of Jesus Christ*, etc. Several of these platforms have been tried but none has been utilized to the point of being able to replace the former solutions as we might have hoped.¹⁷⁶

There can be no question that Yoder would go on to develop his own social ethics on the basis of all of these "platforms," especially the "exemplarity of Jesus Christ." This much is clear from the book that would bring Yoder's work to the mainstream theological world, namely, *The Politics of Jesus*. As a part of explicating that platform, however, starting in the 1970s Yoder would write about the significance of the witness of Israel, as well as rabbinic Judaism, and in a manner that departs from Barth's account of Israel's witness to Jesus Christ. In those writings, Yoder revisits the "messianic element" in the New Testament as he takes up the significance of Israel and Judaism for the nations in terms of the church-world distinction, the apostasy of the 'Constantinian' church, and the pacifist stance as rooted in salvation history. It is to an analysis of these writings on Israel and Judaism that I now turn.

¹⁷⁶ *PKB*, 28. Emphasis mine.

Chapter Five

“One Foundational Corrective:” Fragments of Yoder’s Theology of Israel and Judaism

In the summer of 1996, a little more than a year before he died, Yoder put together a collection of essays that he had written and revised between 1970 and 1996 in the belief that their unifying thesis concerning the historic schism between Judaism and Christianity constituted a theological corrective with wide-ranging implications, even for systematic theology.¹ Prior to the 2003 posthumous publication of these essays under the title *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited* (hereafter *JCSR*), Yoder self-published and circulated this collection, calling it the “Shalom Desktop Packet.” Notably, in the preface to this collection, Yoder described his intention in the project by comparing it to Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Acknowledging the fragmented nature of the project, he nonetheless argues that if the overriding thesis of the essay collection were correct, it would, in like manner to Barth’s corrective of liberal Protestantism, “call for redefinitions all across the board.”² To quote Yoder:

I have...resolved after all to submit to the reader a thesis which I have not the special skills nor the time to expand into a *summa*. Karl Barth began to publish theology in the early 1920s, saying that he had no intention to cover the field. All that was needed, he wrote, was one foundational corrective. Yet before death cut him off, Barth’s near-complete *Kirchliche Dogmatik* was the nearest thing Protestant theology had seen to a

¹ Although it would be revised numerous times over the course of two decades, the earliest essay of the collection is “It Did Not Have To Be.” Yoder notes (*JCSR*, 130fn1 and 130fn2) that it was first presented to the Seminario Rabinico of Belgrano, Buenos Aires on September 16, 1970. In January, 1971, Yoder circulated a draft of this article under the title “Minority Christianity and Messianic Judaism.” Somewhat confusingly, the editors to *JCSR* do not point this out but rather state that this essay originated as a lecture at Notre Dame in 1977. As early as 1972, Yoder had begun to conceive of his thesis regarding the Jewish-Christian schism as part of a much larger study project. See “Description of a Study Project, Draft of October 1972,” Box 201, The Yoder Papers, AMBS. In this early draft of the study project that would eventually become *JCSR*, Yoder listed a number of potential outcomes of the study. One of them was projecting “the difference it would make for normative Christian systematic theology, in an age when ‘secularization’ and ‘historicism’ have cast a shadow over most dogmatic tradition.”

² *JCSR*, 35.

summa in centuries... The fragments which follow are sure not to expand even into one real book; yet their intent is something like what Barth said his was.³

What did Yoder see as the “one foundational corrective” that was needed in the discussion of the historic schism between Judaism and Christianity and in what sense did he understand it to be akin to Barth’s corrective to liberal Protestantism? It is the primary aim of this chapter to examine several essays from Yoder’s *JCSR* in order to answer these questions, particularly as they relate to the analysis of the last chapter.

As will become clear in the analysis below, Yoder does not appeal to Barth’s doctrine of Israel as his starting point in *JCSR*. Nonetheless, as the last chapter demonstrates, Yoder knew Barth’s account. Indeed, in his essay “Judaism as a Non-non-Christian Religion” in *JCSR*, Yoder summarizes it.

The first thesis is that the election of Israel is irrevocable. Not even outright rebellion against the gracious call of God can withdraw the elect from that privilege. In fact, once the fulfillment of the meaning of the election of Israel has come in Christ, the ongoing existence of Jewry is only possible because of the refusal to accept that fulfillment (i.e. only in revolt against the meaning of its election). That revolt becomes the most dramatically paradoxical sign that the Grace of God persists, maintaining the rebel’s identity despite the elect’s rejecting it. The very survival in unbelief is a [sign] of the grace in whose fulfillment Jews refuse to believe.⁴

Yoder believed that Barth was one among only a few whose “theological respect for their [the Jews] distinctive mission in salvation history” was “profound” because it was, as he puts it, based on “biblical and theological renewal, rather than from the mere dilution of Christian specificity or from an esoteric eschatology.”⁵ Yoder just as well might have said that Barth’s

³ *JCSR*, 35. Yoder’s friends would see to it that these “fragments” would become a “real book,” and despite the fragmentary nature of the material, these essays nonetheless make theological claims that demand further engagement. This much is clear given, for example, the Editorial comments provided by Michael Cartwright and the inclusion of commentary by Peter Ochs’s after each chapter.

⁴ *JCSR*, 150.

⁵ *JCSR*, 149-150. Yoder here is contrasting Barth’s theology with Liberal theology on the one hand (“the mere dilution of Christian specificity”) and Fundamentalist dispensationalist theology on the other (“an esoteric eschatology”).

account of the Jews was profound because of its Christological point of departure (“the fulfillment of the meaning of the election of Israel has come in Christ”), and indeed it will become clear that Yoder saw his one corrective as offering something similar to Barth’s corrective of liberal Protestantism at this same point of departure. The analysis of the last chapter has already made it clear, however, that Yoder took issue with several theological claims central to Barth’s Christological account of the doctrine of election, as well as his doctrines of divine and human freedom, and revelation. The question is, then, what shape do these departures give to Yoder’s own theological respect for the Jews and their mission in salvation history? In what sense does Yoder’s *JCSR* offer a theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth?

To make this clear, I will begin with a basic description of the one corrective Yoder sought to make regarding the historic ‘schism’ between Judaism and Christianity. This will be done through an analysis of Yoder’s programmatic essay, “It Did Not Have To Be.” Here I will show how Yoder’s understanding of human freedom is to be seen in his construal of the historical contingency of the Jewish-Christian schism and the ecclesiological “options” that were available for Jewish and Christian unity in the first few centuries after the death of Christ. Following this, I will examine key theological claims he makes throughout two of the essays, “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist” and “Paul the Judaizer,” which bring into full view the Christological and ecclesiological basis Yoder provides for his corrective. For him, Jesus reveals and makes possible (or empowers) the normative (i.e., authoritative) form of Israel’s witness among the nations which, Yoder argues, is “Jewish pacifism.” According to Yoder, Paul then works out the full implications of Jesus’s messianic identity by proclaiming Jesus to be the basis for the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles in the Messianic age that results in a new body.

With Yoder's account in place, I will draw Barth back into my analysis, demonstrating the central differences between his and Yoder's understandings of the historical schism between Israel and the church, as well as their differing accounts of the theological basis for Jewish-Christian unity. While Barth locates the source of the schism with unbelieving Israel's "sectarian self-assertion" (*sektiererische Selbstbehauptung*)⁶ which nonetheless continues to witness to the judgment of God revealed in Christ, Yoder locates the schism's source with Gentile apostasy, which he frames as a rejection of the witness to the revealed will of God in Christ. I then will show how this argument is related to the key departure Yoder made from Barth's doctrine of eternal election, which I identified in the last chapter. I will argue that Yoder's understanding of election as including an account of human justice (the "messianic element") allows him to move beyond Barth's typological account of the witness of rabbinic Judaism's as a repetition of Israel's witness to the judgment of God, to an account of the historical existence of diaspora rabbinic Judaism as a powerful, yet incomplete witness to the pacifism of the Messiah. I will conclude by showing how Yoder appeals to the pacifism of the Messiah as the basis for new possibilities for a renewed relationship between Jewish and Christian communities in an age when both communities wrestle with Western history's imperial legacy.

It Did Not Have to Be

Throughout the 1970s, Yoder explored the implications of a thesis that is, on the level of historical description, now widely accepted in the fields of both biblical and theological studies.⁷ Christianity, said Yoder, did not begin as a new religion reacting against a monolithic religion

⁶ *KD* II/2, 230; *CD* II/2, 209.

⁷ The study of the "fluid" reality of Jewish and Christian identity in the first three centuries continues apace today. See, for example, *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Adam Becker and Annette Reed (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

called ‘Judaism’ but rather began as a first-century Jewish movement, co-existing for some time among many other Jewish movements of the first century. Two corollary claims follow from this, for Yoder. Jesus, Paul, and the early Christians did not reject ‘Judaism’ (because there was no one Judaism to reject), and the Jews did not reject ‘Christianity’ (because there was no monolithic Christianity, defined as an alternative belief system, to reject).⁸ Everything, said Yoder, from the messianic claims of the early Christians regarding Jesus to the different approaches to the law taken in different communities were acceptable forms of diversity that Jews of the time could and did tolerate. He then states the basic implication: “To be a Jew and to be a follower of Jesus were not alternatives. *Tertium datur.*”⁹

Had Yoder’s “corrective” to the scholarly discussion of the early history leading to the eventual schism between Judaism and Christianity stopped here, it would probably not have garnered the attention that it did in both Christian and Jewish circles.¹⁰ Controversially, Yoder would go on to argue that the eventual separation of Christianity from its Jewish roots did not have to have happened. What is one to make of this claim? At a basic level, Yoder presents his argument as a counterclaim against historicism:

We...do violence to the lived reality of history as it really was, if in our concern to make sense of it after the fact we let our explanatory schemes rob its actors of the integrity of their indecision as well as of their decision-making.¹¹

Here Yoder appears simply to be asking historians who study the first century to consider other possible historical directions that might have been taken. On the other hand, however, as will

⁸ *JCSR*, 49-51.

⁹ *JCSR*, 51. The Latin adverb *tertium* along with the third-person passive form of the verb *do*, could be translated as: “a third [possibility] is given.”

¹⁰ Michael Cartwright and Peter Ochs offered significant Christian and Jewish responses to Yoder’s thesis in their editorial essays included in *JCSR*. Jewish scholar Daniel Boyarin also responded to Yoder’s *JCSR*. See “Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*,” *CrossCurrents* 56, no.4 (Winter 2007): 6-21.

¹¹ “It did not have to be,” in *JCSR*, 44.”

become clear throughout this chapter, Yoder's argument that "it did not have to be" is more than a general comment about good historical method. Rather, it is fundamentally a theological claim about the meaning of history, human freedom, and the reality of sin.¹² Indeed, with respect to the Jewish-Christian schism, Yoder explicitly links the phrase "it did not have to be" with the concept of sin "as something that shouldn't have been":

...interpretations of the inexorability of what actually happened [in the Jewish-Christian schism] fall short, if as biblical faith does, we take seriously the conceptions of sin as something that shouldn't have been, and the trust in God's capacity to bring to pass the unexpected.¹³

Throughout *JCSR* it becomes clear that Yoder's basic thesis about the Jewish-Christian schism, that "it did not have to be," is a theological claim that specific instances of "indecision" and "decision-making" by those whose actions resulted in the eventual split between Jews and Christians should be characterized as sinful, departing from the divine intention, and so requiring repentance. This theological claim begs several questions, of course: Who is to blame for the schism? What particular sin does Yoder believe his analysis has exposed and what is the nature of that sin? What alternative path of obedience should have been taken? What path of repentance and obedience may be open today for Christians seeking a renewed relationship with Jews?

An analysis of Yoder's answers to these questions will take up the last section of this chapter. Before getting to that, however, it is important to provide a more in-depth analysis of his argument for why the reason for the schism cannot be derived, as it commonly was throughout Christian history, from the message of Jesus and Paul. Yoder does this through an account of

¹² Yoder makes it quite clear that he intends his study regarding the schism, and in particular his claim that it did not have to be, to be "theological, interpreting the notion of 'theology' especially in the ethical and pastoral modes." *JCSR*, 62

¹³ *JCSR*, 44. This is not the only context in which Yoder presents this kind of construal of rebellion. Notably, in the 1961 letter that Yoder wrote to Roy Krieder (which I cited in the last chapter), he says the following about rebellion: "The grounds for accepting the reality of ultimate rebellion and thus of Hell are not logical or theological, but simply historical; such rebellion is a reality. *It did not have to be* and still need not be." See John Howard Yoder to Roy Kreider, January 31, 1961, Box 59-2, The Yoder Papers, AMBS, Emphasis mine.

Jesus's significance as the Jewish Messiah and an account of Paul's proclamation of Gentile inclusion in the covenant. Yoder's arguments for why Jesus and Paul cannot be reasonably appealed to as the primary sources of the schism rest, in other words, on specific Christological claims and on the (Pauline) ecclesiological claims that follow from them. Structurally, this ordering corresponds to Barth's own ordering in his doctrine of election: Christology as the basis for ecclesiology.¹⁴ Any difference between Yoder and Barth on the witness of Israel and Judaism will become apparent first, therefore, at the level of Christology, with the effects on ecclesiology following suit. In the last chapter I began to demonstrate the differences between Barth and Yoder in these areas. Now that analysis must be extended into Yoder's accounts of Jesus and Paul in *JCSR*. I occasionally will be drawing on material outside of *JCSR* when necessary to draw some of the "fragmented" elements in this collection of essays into the larger picture of Yoder's theology.

Jesus the Jewish Pacifist: The Messianic Revelation of the Will of God

Jesus and Paul, according to Yoder, lived and taught within a diversity of "Judaisms," and each of them made particular arguments about "the normative vision for a restored and clarified Judaism," not for its rejection or replacement.¹⁵ This is the simplest form of Yoder's argument for why Jesus and Paul cannot be appealed to as the key figures who precipitated the Jewish-Christian schism. Here it is important to ask, however, first with respect to Jesus, what Yoder means by his "normative vision" for a restored Judaism? The language of "normative" for him is linked with the notion of Jesus' claim to authority; his claim to know and to be the

¹⁴ Barth would maintain this order throughout the *CD*. For example, in *CD IV.3.2*, 786, he notes: "All ecclesiology is grounded, critically limited, but also positively determined by Christology..."

¹⁵ *JCSR*, 49.

embodiment of the will of God. Elsewhere, Yoder defines Jesus's normativity, his authority over the Jewish tradition, in connection with his messianic identity:

To say that Jesus is the Messiah is to say that in him are fulfilled the expectations of God's people regarding the coming one in whom God's will would perfectly be done.¹⁶

This of course raises yet another question, namely, what is the will of God that Jesus, as Messiah, claimed to know and embody, according to Yoder, and what implications does it have for the elect community? These questions are the most important questions to ask with respect to the difference between Barth and Yoder's approaches to Christology since they both claim that Jesus is the one in whom the will of God is accomplished, but the arguments they give for this claim and for the implications it has for the elect community, are very different. There will be occasion below to review Barth's answer to this question, but only after Yoder's answer has been elucidated. To do this, it is helpful to turn to his essay "Jesus the Jewish Pacifist" in *JCSR*. Before doing that, however, some brief comments on Yoder's overall approach to Christology is in order.

In general, Yoder does not work with a systematic account of Christology governed by traditional patristic themes such as, for example, the two natures of Christ.¹⁷ One could argue that this is simply part and parcel with Yoder's disciplinary focus, which was Christian ethics and not systematic theology, but it is also a result of his hermeneutic preference to approach the scriptural texts about Jesus with the assumption that in those texts there is "specific and concrete content in Jesus' vision of the divine order which can speak to our age."¹⁸ Yoder believed this approach to scripture to be akin to the movement called "biblical realism," which he associated

¹⁶ *Nevertheless: Varieties of Religious Pacifism* (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1992), 133-134.

¹⁷ This is not to say that Yoder is unaware of the key Christological issues in the patristic literature. Indeed, he thoroughly examines those issues in his *Preface to Theology: Christology and Theological Method*.

¹⁸ *The Politics of Jesus*, xi.

with a diversity of figures such as “Hendrik Kraemer, Otto Piper, Paul Minear, Markus Barth [Barth’s son], and Claude Tresmontant.”¹⁹ In the second preface to his *The Politics of Jesus*, Yoder describes the basic characteristics of the biblical realism of the above figures as “an approach [to scripture] which sought to take full account of all of the tools of literary and historical criticism, without any traditional scholasticism, yet without letting the Scriptures be taken away from the church.”²⁰ In another essay called “The Message of the Bible on It’s [sic] own Terms,” Yoder describes biblical realism as a “style of reading” which sees reality as “from the outset personal and social” and not “ideal,” “metaphysical,” or discernable through “essentialist” categories.²¹

If one were to label Yoder’s Christology in light of the above, one perhaps might simply call it, Christological realism.²² Thus, while Yoder often talks about, for example, the incarnation, he does so through this “biblically realist” approach, seeing the meaning of incarnation in personal and social terms—by which he means terms that relate to particular individual historical events and actors—without being burdened with how to reconcile such terms with patristic understandings of the incarnation.²³ So, in his *Politics of Jesus*, when Yoder

¹⁹ *The Politics of Jesus*, x. In his book *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: Harper & Bros, 1938), Hendrik Kraemer defines biblical realism along these lines: “The Bible offers no religious or moral philosophy, not even a theistic or Christocentric one. It is rebellious against all endeavours to reduce it to a body of truths and ideals about the personality of God, the infinite value of man, the source of ethical inspiration...It does not intend to present a ‘world view,’ but it challenges man in his total being to confront himself with these realities and accordingly take decisions...It could not be better expressed that the essential message and content of the Bible is always the Living, eternally-active God, the indubitable Reality, from whom, by whom and to whom all things are” (64-65). Yet again: “This religion of Biblical realism is void of all speculative, metaphysical and philosophical trends of thinking” (83).

²⁰ *The Politics of Jesus*, viii.

²¹ “The Message of the Bible on It’s Own Terms,” in *To Hear the Word*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 139.

²² While I came to this designation myself, a brief search of relevant material on Yoder and biblical realism has made me aware that the designation of “Christological realism” has been made many times before. For a recent example, see Scott Thomas Prather *Christ, Power and Mammon: Karl Barth and John Howard Yoder in Dialogue* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 71.

²³ Yoder makes the reason for this clear in numerous essays, but in my estimation he does it best in his *Preface to Theology* and his essay “But We Do See Jesus: The Particularity of Incarnation and the Universality of Truth,” in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 46-62. The patristic understanding of the incarnation developed out of Christianity’s missionary venture in the Greek world, encountering as it did the Greek world’s basic categories (eg. nature/*phusis*)

brings up the importance of Jesus' status as the revelation of God and the importance of affirming his full humanity, he does so not principally in relation to metaphysical questions of divine and human natures, but in relation to the question of whether or not the historical "career" of Jesus can be looked to as the "normative" model for the social ethics of the church.²⁴ There are times when Yoder does seem implicitly to affirm patristic categories such as the full divinity of Jesus, as well as his identity as "the second person of the Trinity." In those instances, however, Yoder will often pose a contrast between, on the one hand, what he sees as a lack in "Greek" conceptualism and its inability "to deal with personality and individuality [here Jesus's] otherwise than by reducing them to the application of general categories," and on the other hand, the specificity of Jesus's humanity as a first-century Palestinian rabbi.²⁵

Yoder's basic complaint with Greek conceptualism, and in particular with the effect that conceptualism had on the debates of "the early Christian centuries" surrounding Christ's two natures and the Trinity, is thus that it does not take the full historical reality of the human Jesus of Nazareth in his socio-political context seriously (here one can already begin to see how this might come to bear upon a "revisiting" of Jesus's Jewish identity).²⁶ As Yoder puts it with respect to one of the most influential scriptural texts in patristic reflection on the two natures of Christ, namely Philippians 2:

This hymn is then not, as some would make it, simply a Hellenistic mystery-religion text about a mythical Christ figure, coming down from heaven and returning thither; it is *at the same time* the account of the human Jesus whose death was the very political death of the cross. The renunciation of the claim to govern history was not made only by the second person of the Trinity taking upon himself *the demand of an eternal divine decree*;

and worldviews. Yoder assumed that the Gospel writers placed Jesus above all culturally specific cosmic frameworks and thus as the Gospel entered each new cultural framework, it had a transformative effect on the central categories of those cultures.

²⁴ *The Politics of Jesus*, 10. Of course, a basic reason for this is because the primary question Yoder explores in *POJ* is whether there is such a thing as a messianic ethic in the New Testament.

²⁵ *To Hear the Word*, 138.

²⁶ *To Hear the Word*, 138.

it was *also* made by a poor, tired rabbi when he came from Galilee to Jerusalem to be rejected.²⁷

Again, with the language of “at the same time” and “also” in the above quote, Yoder implicitly affirms the patristic categories for the way that they make Jesus normative for understanding both divinity and humanity. What is most important, for him, however, given his desire to attest to the “messianic element” in the New Testament, is the fact that even as divine or Son of God, Jesus’ uniqueness “is still a human uniqueness, still something he has in common with us.”²⁸

Note how in the above quotation Yoder’s point of contrast for the demand placed on the human Jesus is the demand of an eternal divine decree placed upon the second person of the Trinity. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this is at the very least a reference to the Reformed tradition in general, if not Barth in particular. Yoder’s point here is that an appeal to an eternal decision should not take the place of or preclude an appeal to the historical uniqueness of the renunciation of Jesus of Nazareth. The key question that arises from the above passage is, what exactly is the nature of the divine will and decree which Jesus takes upon himself (be it an eternal one or one also heard in first century Palestine)? This question leads us out of this brief excursus on Yoder’s approach to Christology and back to his account of Jesus as the revelation of the will of God in his essay “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist.” Given the above reflections, it should not be surprising to see Yoder’s Christological realism reflected in his answer to the question we are posing regarding the will of God or the divine decree.

In “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist,” Yoder begins by reinforcing the points he made in “It Did Not Have To Be,” arguing now that the messianic claims of the church, that Jesus was the anointed one—the one in whom the will of God was perfectly done—did not immediately cut

²⁷ *The Politics of Jesus*, 236. Emphasis mine.

²⁸ *Preface to Theology*, 71.

them off from their fellow Jews, but that a considerable “overlapping” of the church and the Jewish community existed for “generations.”²⁹ Messianic claims, according to Yoder, were certainly not unheard of among Jews at the time and would not have been an occasion for a primitive schism between a community of that “messiah” and the rest of a very diverse Judaism. But, if the general claim of his messianic status was not reason enough for a division between the church and the wider realm of Judaism, then perhaps Jesus’s messianic ethic was the true cause of offence? Did he simply depart too radically from the ethical prescriptions of the Torah? On the level of ethics as well, however, Yoder claims that Jesus demonstrated his positive relation to Jewish tradition. Jesus’s call to enemy love, for example, is not a point of departure from a “violent God” of the Old Testament but is a proper interpretation of the law and the prophets.³⁰ Here Yoder’s claim regarding what he sees to be Jesus’ “normative vision,” his claim regarding the will of God for Judaism, comes into view. The label Yoder attaches to Jesus’ vision is “Jewish pacifism,” but the adjective “pacifism” must be understood here to carry a very concrete sense derivable from the relationship between Jesus, key figures in Israel’s history preceding him, and the development of Israel’s covenant through history. In other words, “Jewish pacifism” must not be understood in terms of a generalizable ethical ideal but rather in terms of particular dimensions, both personal and social, of Israel’s history as narrated in scripture. The last chapter has already provided the outlines of Yoder’s understanding of Israel’s history in his essay “Peace without Eschatology.” In “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist,” Yoder fills in these outlines with greater detail.

²⁹ *JCSR*, 70.

³⁰ *JCSR*, 70. See Yoder’s essay “If Abraham is Our Father,” 85-104 in *The Original Revolution*, for a more detailed account of the sense in which he sees continuity between the Old Testament and Christ.

Yoder's account is as follows: Jesus's message is rooted "in the particular heritage of Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah," all of whom saw the mission of the people of God as their very existence as a people of peace and blessing among the nations; a people whose covenant with God encouraged them to trust that God would provide for them without the need to secure their own place in history.³¹ Standing in this heritage, Jesus "prolonged the critical stance" present there towards national independence and royal power as a means of self-preservation.³² In fact, the testimony to the "warrior" God of the Old Testament, rather than being a point of contrast with Jesus' message, was precisely the impetus in the Old Testament for "rejecting, not accepting, the notion that Israel should adopt the institution of kingship."³³ Israel need not fight for itself since God would fight for it.³⁴ Israel would, of course, go on to elect royalty and become an independent nation. At the very outset of that development, however, the prophet Samuel made it clear that this was a divine concession, not the divine intention.³⁵ God let Israel try kingship as an experiment, but it turned out to be a failed experiment.³⁶ Throughout Israel's history, this independence would eventually be lost and prophetic figures would appear, like Jeremiah, who would testify again to an identity for God's people that would be sustained without kingship.³⁷ With Jeremiah's prophetic judgments, "God abandoned kingship as a vehicle of his people's identity."³⁸ After Jeremiah, covenant identity would be sustained apart from

³¹ *JCSR*, 75.

³² See Yoder's interpretation in *The Politics of Jesus* of the temptations faced by Jesus for one example of this.

³³ *JCSR*, 70. Here Yoder has research by Millard Lind in mind. Lind's work on holy war in the Old Testament influenced Yoder. Cf. "Paradigm of Holy War in the Old Testament," *Biblical Research*, 16, (1971): 16-31; *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1980).

³⁴ Yoder makes this argument most succinctly in the chapter "God Will Fight For Us," in *The Politics of Jesus*.

³⁵ *JCSR*, 84-85.

³⁶ *Nevertheless*, 123.

³⁷ *JCSR*, 71.

³⁸ *JCSR*, 71. Whether or not this interpretation of Jeremiah is a valid interpretation is up for debate and indeed, it is with strong claims such as this one by Yoder that Peter Ochs worries that he has closed down Jewish-Christian conversation. Ochs wonders both whether Jeremiah can be interpreted so one-sidedly and what kind of approach to scripture Yoder assumes by making such a direct claim. In my conclusion, I will return to Ochs's concerns with Yoder.

royalty and even the temple. Observance of Torah rather than nationalism would be the vehicle through which Israel's identity would be maintained. Jews confessed Torah to be "transcendent, coming from beyond our system and from above our king." In this way, Jewish "moral life" was not "rendered serviceable to the present power structure."³⁹ This "anti-royal" and "egalitarian" basis for Jewish identity is at the core of what it has meant for the people of God to be in "covenant" with God from the beginning, trusting God alone to sustain and uphold them.⁴⁰ The covenant is lived in history, however, and history is patently filled with both rebellion and obedience, infidelity and promise. It is thus unsurprising that Israel often failed to live up to its covenant calling (and indeed, as was shown in the last chapter through an analysis of Yoder's "Peace without Eschatology," he did characterize Israel's history—as Barth did before him—as consistently "disobedient."). The principle form of Israel's disobedience was the pursuit of Israelite nationalism as the means of securing identity and peoplehood through history. The prophets continually called Israel to a different way to live in the covenant, but the inclination towards national identity was so systemic and deeply rooted, that something new was needed.

One moment in Israel's history stands out as a crucial turning point in the search for a new beginning for Israel, and that is the fall of Israel to Babylon and its subsequent exile. During that exile, the prophet Jeremiah spoke about both Israel's failure to keep the covenant, as well as the coming of a "new covenant" that would be written on the hearts of the people of Israel (Jer. 31:31:33). This new covenant came with the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who opened "a new range of possibilities for obeying the will of God."⁴¹ Jesus fully embodied, and so "fulfilled," the identity and calling of the Jews that Jeremiah had prophesied about following God's rejection of

³⁹ *JCSR*, 73.

⁴⁰ *JCSR*, 71.

⁴¹ *JCSR*, 72.

kingship. Jesus revealed what the Law and the Prophets previously “must have been reaching, pointing toward,” namely, the renunciation of violence and the love of enemy as “an original intent” of the Torah itself.⁴² Torah, as that transcendent measure by which the Jews are called to live, is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth whose particular embodiment of Torah ushers in a new beginning in history with new possibilities for obeying the will of God. The New Testament language of baptism in the Spirit, the nearness of the kingdom, the new birth, and resurrection are various ways of describing the same “new beginning” or “new possibility” that Jesus opened.⁴³

Here it is helpful to stop the summary of what Yoder means when he appeals to “Jewish pacifism” in order to ask several important questions. What exactly is the new possibility that Jesus opens in history and how does Jesus affect it? These are important questions, for what is at stake here are ultimately matters central to Christology. Who is Jesus and why does he matter? Is he just a Jew who knew better than all other Jews how to follow Torah as the will of God? Is he comparable to Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah or is he in some way superior to them? Is he a Jew specially empowered and adopted by God to be his representative or is he the Messiah as God incarnate, come to save his people from their sins? I am intentionally posing these questions together to illustrate the debate that accompanies theological analyses of Yoder’s writings on

⁴² *JCSR*, 70. A summary statement of the preceding description of what Yoder meant by “Jewish Pacifism” can be found in Yoder’s draft of the paper titled “Minority Christianity and Messianic Judaism,” material that would later be used in several of Yoder’s essays in *JCSR*. See page 6 of “Original Buenos Aires Draft with Feedback,” Box 132, The Yoder Papers, AMBS where Yoder says: “Jesus rejects the sword not out of some kind of new legalism or because of an unconcern for historical continuity; he rather rejects the sword in the name of the faith of Abraham and in the name of the law and the prophets properly understood. The position of Jesus and the rejection of the Maccabean and Zealot option should therefore most properly be called the ‘Jewish pacifism of Jesus.’ It had theological roots in the prophetic tradition and in the perspective of the editors of the book of Chronicles as well as in the experience of Judaism.”

⁴³ *JCSR*, 72.

Jesus' Jewish pacifism. Does Yoder reduce the significance of Jesus to his ethical example?⁴⁴ Do Jews or Christians really need Jesus once his ethical model has been given in history?

Contrary to claims that would read Yoder as reducing Jesus to his ethical example, what Yoder is arguing is that Jesus is God incarnate and that the newness that Jesus brings in Israel's history is ultimately salvation from the reality of fallenness, of sin, and of rebellion. To be sure, Yoder understood the salvation that Jesus brought from fallenness in terms of his Christological realism and not in terms of what he sometimes called "Greek conceptualism." Consequently, whatever "fallenness" indicates will be articulated, for him, in social terms and the same goes for salvation. The meaning of salvation in Jesus is not then something best described in "essentialist" terms, such as an invisible transformation of human "nature," a forensic verdict on unrighteous sinners, or an eternally accomplished act revealed in time.⁴⁵ Rather, the salvation of Jesus was a visible, social, and political new beginning in history; even a "new moral option" in history.⁴⁶ To put it in slightly different terms, atonement, for Yoder, is God "suffering, accepting, enabling and healing history" in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth rather than God in Jesus Christ remaining transcendent of history, determining history in advance, or healing only humanity's sinful nature through a substitutionary acceptance of the wrath of God deserving of humanity.⁴⁷

But the above account of the newness that Jesus brings in history just begs the question, what about reality is 'fallen' and how does Jesus address this? I must now make clear how this

⁴⁴ There can be no question that Yoder believed that the history of theology had largely undervalued the humanity of Jesus in favor of his divinity. For this reason, Yoder could rightly be said to have sought to counterbalance what he saw as an overemphasis on, as well as regnant definitions of, divinity through a strong emphasis on the full humanity.

⁴⁵ Again, Yoder will often clarify that he does not intend in any way to discount these other accounts, but only wishes to show how they do not entail the exclusion of socio-political understandings of salvation. See, for example, his comments regarding justification in *The Politics of Jesus*, 215fn2.

⁴⁶ *Nevertheless*, 134.

⁴⁷ *Preface to Theology*, 320. Here Yoder's discussion of atonement in *Preface to Theology* (281-327) is helpful.

reading of Yoder's understanding of salvation fits with his historical understanding of the reality of rebellion that holds creation in slavery and sin. To do so, I must briefly turn to the chapter "Christ and Power" in *The Politics of Jesus*. There, Yoder offers what is probably the closest thing to an account of "the fall" as one will find in his writings. He does so through an analysis of a variety of New Testament passages, especially those from Paul, on the question of "powers" (*exousia*).⁴⁸ As Yoder puts it there, "Society and history, even nature, would be impossible without regularity, system, and order," and this is what the "powers," created by God, had been commissioned to provide.⁴⁹ The problem is, these powers "have rebelled and are fallen" and now mediate idolatrous forms of regularity, system, and order.⁵⁰ Instead of serving God's sovereign purposes, these powers have sought sovereignty for themselves. Jesus's significance in relation to these fallen powers is that he broke their sovereignty "by living a genuinely free and human existence."⁵¹ The implication, of course, is that Israel and the nations before Christ had been captive to these powers; they had been unfree. Indeed, the above reflections on Yoder's negative evaluation of Israel's desire for a king and national independence make it clear that he saw these types of political structures as forms of regularity, system, and order that are "fallen" and thus inappropriate means by which to live in covenant.⁵² Appealing to the Christ hymn in Philippians 2, Yoder argues that Jesus is victorious over the powers not because he exercises sovereign power over them, but "precisely [in] his renunciation of lordship, his apparent abandonment of any obligation to be effective in making history move down the right track."⁵³ Yoder continues:

⁴⁸ Yoder's analysis is a summary and interpretation of the Dutch scholar Hendrikus Berkhof's work *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 1977).

⁴⁹ *The Politics of Jesus*, 141.

⁵⁰ *The Politics of Jesus*, 142.

⁵¹ *The Politics of Jesus*, 144-145.

⁵² See also "If Abraham Is Our Father," in *The Original Revolution* where Yoder identifies the definition of peoplehood by "kingship and territorial sovereignty" as a past phase of Israel's history which Jesus departs from definitively (103).

⁵³ *The Politics of Jesus*, 235.

But the judgment of God upon this renunciation and acceptance of defeat is the declaration that this is victory. ‘Therefore God has greatly exalted him and given him the title, which every creature will have to confess, *the Lord*.’ ‘Lord’ in the earliest Christian confessions was not (as it is in so much modern piety) a label to state a believer’s humility or affection or devotion; it is an affirmation of his victorious relation to the powers of the cosmos.⁵⁴

In light of statements such as the above, Yoder argues that Jesus’s “obedience unto death is in itself not only the sign but also the firstfruits of an authentic restored humanity.”⁵⁵ It hardly needs to be said that “authentic humanity,” for Yoder, means human obedience to the divine intent for the human vocation or, as in the last chapter, “human justice.” This obedience and justice is possible, according to him, only through the victory of the Messiah over the fallen powers.

Here it is instructive to return to “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist,” to see the parallel way that Yoder describes the problem that Jesus addresses and so the newness that he brings in that context:

This new possibility [that Jesus brings] frees the followers of Jesus from the manipulative consequentialist reckoning, within the assumptions of a closed causal system, which modern ‘realistic’ Christians use to explain their rejection of his pacifism. Jesus inserted his call to a new kind of life into the announcement that the kingdom of God was at hand.... That kingdom presence is justice and peace. It is imperative but it is also empowerment. One does not then ask why one should behave that way, or whether if one tries to, one can bring it off, or whether, if one does do it, it will be successful. One has entered into another world which just is that way. We are liberated from enmity as part of the law of the old world.⁵⁶

Read together with the above reflection on the “powers,” the new possibility brought by Jesus appears not just as a reduction of Jesus to his novel ethical example. There are not only new “possibilities” that Israel and the nations can now simply be educated about in order to implement. The new possibilities Jesus brings arise because followers of Jesus find themselves in

⁵⁴ *The Politics of Jesus*, 235-236. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁵ *The Politics of Jesus*, 145.

⁵⁶ *JCSR*, 72.

“another world,” governed by a different sovereign. Old systems and patterns of thinking and living that have exercised control over both Israel and the nations (the powers) have been broken, and new ones have been revealed. Not only have new patterns been revealed, the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost also brings the power needed to live under them.⁵⁷ There remains an overlap of “worlds” or “ages,” to be sure. The decisive victory, however, has occurred in the resurrection of Jesus, declared Messiah and Lord. This language is apocalyptic and, in many ways, follows Yoder’s description in “Peace without Eschatology” of the transition from the old world to the new world.

Yet, while the sovereignty of the powers has been broken and a new world and a new community has come on the scene with Jesus, this is not to say that the “newness” he brings is totally disjunctive with the calling of Israel under the old covenant. There is continuity and that continuity persists in the meaning of Israel’s covenant as trusting in God’s sovereign control of history. Indeed, for Yoder, the very meaning of Israel’s covenant was, from the beginning, that Israel was to be an instrument for the will of God. The primary way Israel was called to be an instrument for the will of God was through servanthood and submission to God. In his course on theology of mission that he taught from 1964 to 1983, Yoder claimed that this servanthood and submission would be “the tool of election.”⁵⁸ What is new about the new covenant inaugurated with Jesus is not this basic meaning of the covenant and Israel’s calling under it (which remains the same) but instead a new moment in God’s sovereign action in history to save Israel and the nations from captivity to fallen powers through Jesus the Messiah. The kingdom’s nearness is the Messiah’s inauguration of a new age in history with possibilities for fulfilling the will of God

⁵⁷ Yoder makes the link with the importance of Pentecost in his essay in *JCSR* called “The Forms of a Possible Obedience,” 123.

⁵⁸ *Theology of Mission*, 58.

that, while anticipated in Israel's past, now appear with unparalleled possibility in him. With the Messiah, the will of God has been definitively revealed in the particular form of the fully human life of Jesus of Nazareth as he lived and died in first century Palestine. Jesus not only reveals the will of God in his "rejection of bloodshed" and his pursuit of "reconciliation" with enemies, however, he also empowers those who follow him to imitate him in obeying that will in that he is the Lord.⁵⁹

Yoder's most basic claim in "Jesus the Jewish Pacifist" can now be stated. Jesus's teachings of nonviolence and reconciliation, he claimed, preceded as they already were in Israel's history of covenant with God, are "specifically Jewish ways to reason," and so cannot be construed as the basis for leaving the Jews behind.⁶⁰ There is no abrogation, nor a superseding, of the covenant, there is rather a confirmation and fulfillment. True, Jesus makes a messianic (authoritative) claim with respect to the tradition and so does present the possibility of offense and the occasion of stumbling (1 Pet. 2:8). Jesus does present a "normative" vision for Judaism, but inasmuch as his normative vision, his claim to "Lordship," is tied to his willingness to suffer and trust in God's reconciling mission in history, his gospel cannot justifiably be used as an excuse for schism, especially within the elect community.

The Ecclesiological Correlate: Paul and the Politics of the Messianic Community

So, what about the Apostle Paul? Is he at fault for the schism? After all, did he not take what was Jesus's Jewish message and turn it into a "Gentile" religion? Is Paul, with his supposed negative evaluation of the law and his dualism between body and spirit, not the great divider

⁵⁹ *JCSR*, 72.

⁶⁰ *JCSR*, 72.

between Jew and Gentile? In “Paul the Judaizer,”⁶¹ Yoder sought to counter claims put forward by scholars such as Adolf von Harnack, who claimed that Paul transformed the Gospel into a Hellenistic religion that was hostile to Jewish law.⁶² Paul was no “Hellenizer,” but rather brought a Jewish message about the law “as a privilege of covenantal grace, as divine enablement” to the Gentiles.⁶³ Paul’s opponents were not “the Jews” but “either Gentiles trying to act like Jews, or Jews estranged from the deep roots of their own heritage.”⁶⁴ Nor, argues Yoder, was Paul unique in preaching to Gentiles. What made Paul’s preaching unique, according to him, was “its place in salvation history,” namely its place within the messianic age.⁶⁵ Jewish and Gentile unity was to be a feature of this age. The way to achieve that unity, however, was neither through Jewish rejection of Torah observance nor through Gentile practice of Torah observance. Rather:

Precisely because the messianic age has dawned, Gentiles do not need to become Jews in order to come under the Torah of the Messiah. Yet because Jesus is the Messiah of the Jews, there is no reason either for Jews to renounce their observant custom.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Modern scholars who seek to read Paul within Judaism, while in agreement with Yoder’s point about Paul not being a Hellenizer of Judaism, might be leery of a title such as Yoder’s for its potential to suggest that Paul wanted to make Gentiles into Jews. Much of the recent scholarship on Paul makes precisely the opposite claim: that Paul’s polemic against the law, for example, was a polemic against those who were attempting to ‘Judaize’ the Gentiles. See, for example, Paula Fredriksen’s *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (London: Yale University Press, 2017). That said, Fredriksen also sees Paul as “Judaizing” the Gentiles by asking of them to abandon worship of foreign gods.

⁶² In his *What is Christianity*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (London: Williams and Norgate, 1902), von Harnack states baldly: “It was Paul who delivered the Christian religion from Judaism” (190). In another way, however, Yoder puts forward his own Hellenization thesis in that he characterizes the development of doctrine in ‘establishment’ Christianity as a Greek distortion of Jewish Christianity. There are some scholars of Yoder who would question this characterization of his attitude to the development of Christian doctrine, especially with respect to the historic creeds. Alain Epp Weaver, for example, argues for a more nuanced understanding of Yoder’s approach to the creeds. He states that Yoder had a “two-pronged strategy of appealing to the creeds in ecumenical conversation while simultaneously relativizing their centrality for theological work.” See Alain Epp Weaver, “Missionary Christology: John Howard Yoder and the Creeds,” *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 74, No.3 (July 2000):423. There can be little question that while Yoder’s attitude to doctrinal development was at times mixed, he generally held a negative attitude toward what he called “Hellenistic ontology,” the discussion of which he once said made one a “bad Christian.” See John Howard Yoder to Steven Schwarzschild, November 8, 1972, Box 132, The Yoder Papers, AMBS.

⁶³ *JCSR*, 94.

⁶⁴ *JCSR*, 95.

⁶⁵ *JCSR*, 95.

⁶⁶ *JCSR*, 95.

To rephrase Yoder's argument: because Jesus fulfills Torah without abrogating it, Jewish observance of Torah remains valid, even if its goal has been fully revealed with Jesus; at the same time, because Jesus's fulfillment of Torah as Messiah has broken the sovereignty of the powers that had previously enslaved humanity in systems of division and violence, he has ushered in a new possibility for reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles. This reconciliation is a feature of the Messianic age and it carries with it the implication that there can be no calling the Gentiles to a form of identity—to a "body"—derived from the pre-Messianic age. What has come with the Messiah is the ingathering of the Gentiles into Israel's covenant "into a new kind of body."⁶⁷ Thus, for Yoder, rather than enabling the schism between Jews and Gentiles, Paul tries to preserve their unity by "combating those who would precipitate schism by forcing believing Gentiles out of their fellowship."⁶⁸

The above account of Paul demonstrates Yoder's historically open-ended reading of the concept of election and covenant. Paul was declaring the fulfillment of the covenant with the ingathering of the Gentiles at this new moment in history which, according to Yoder, was framed specifically in terms of reconciliation between enemies.⁶⁹ With the dawn of the messianic age, Paul believed that Gentiles have a share in Israel's covenant. Thus, Paul was "the great Judaizer of Hellenistic culture."⁷⁰ But again, this does not mean that the Jews or their law have been rejected. This would be to understand the fulfillment of the promise as the end of history rather

⁶⁷ *JCSR*, 96.

⁶⁸ *JCSR*, 95.

⁶⁹ See Yoder's chapter "Justification by Grace Through Faith," 212-227 in *The Politics of Jesus*.

⁷⁰ *JCSR*, 95. In other words, the pagans from the Greek world were being drawn into the covenant and in such a way that demanded changes from their old pagan ways. A recent approximation of what Yoder is saying here regarding Paul's "Judaizing" can be found in Fredriksen's *Paul: The Pagans' Apostle*. Fredriksen claims that while Paul understood the Gentile entry into the covenant not to involve an adoption of Jewish Law, he did understand it to involve pagans turning from their idols to exclusive worship of the God of Israel. As Fredriksen puts it, the "Jewish Jesus movement's nonnegotiable proviso to interested pagans" was "their absolute cessation of traditional [pagan] worship" (*Paul*, 89).

than a new beginning in history or as “an ongoing organic development,” as Yoder puts it elsewhere in the same essay.⁷¹ According to him, fulfillment “is a permanently open border between what went before and what comes next.”⁷² This imagery of an “open border” is significant because it means that the messianic age is characterized by a refusal to close down entry-points for discussions between Jews and Gentiles about the messianic age and its implications for the covenant people. The problem, according to Yoder, is that the eventual schism between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity’ institutionalized, even ritualized, such a closure, and did so often by force. While Paul’s vision was for “a new kind of body” made up of Jews and Gentiles in the messianic age, the eventual schism would make such a body seem like an historical impossibility, and this in spite of the fact, as Yoder frequently points out, that it was for some time a reality. All of this suggests, for him, that Paul’s teaching about the Messiah could not have been the impetus for the schism. Jewish-Gentile unity in Christ is, for him, the ecclesiological correlate of Jesus’ messianic fulfillment of Torah. Or, said differently, Jesus’s normative embodiment of “Jewish Pacifism” is the Christological basis for an ecclesiology in which Jews and Gentiles are united in one body. Paul’s gospel proclaimed this unity and so he, no more than the Messiah that he proclaimed to the nations, could have precipitated the schism.

With Yoder’s account of Jesus and Paul in place, it is now possible to ask in what way Yoder has moved with Barth and in what way he has moved beyond him in the process of “revisiting” the Jewish-Christian schism. This will be done through examining their different understandings of who was to blame for the schism, what particular sin that schism exposed and

⁷¹ Here Yoder alludes to Paul’s metaphor of the root and the wild olive branches in Rom. 11:16ff. While Yoder primarily uses this phrase as an offhanded remark and point of contrast to Rosemary Radford Reuther’s claim that in Rom. 9-11 Paul “says...that the mosaic way of knowing God has been cut off and replaced by the Church as God’s only instrument,” the notion of the covenant’s “organic development” in history certainly accords with Yoder’s overall account. *JCSR*, 97.

⁷² *JCSR*, 97.

what alternative path of obedience should have been taken. Finally, I will end by summarizing Yoder's suggestions for a path of repentance and obedience open today for Christians seeking a renewed relationship with Jews.

It Should Not Have Been, or A Christological Basis for Jewish-Christian Unity after Barth

What might Barth have thought of Yoder's basic argument that the schism "did not have to be?" Barth might, in fact, have agreed at the most basic level of the statement. The schism did not have to be, for after all, Jesus was the fulfilment of Israel's covenant. Had Israel as a whole accepted Christ in faith, they would have testified to God's grace within the church rather than in, as he saw it, stubborn independence from it. Barth, however, would argue (and indeed did argue) that the schism happened because Israel did reject Jesus just when they should have seen him as the will of God, the one in whom the covenant of grace is fulfilled. Working exclusively within scripture, and in particular within Romans 9-11, Barth locates the reason for the schism with "unbelieving Israel" (Rom. 11:23). Here it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Yoder's lack of engagement with Romans 9-11 has allowed him to avoid some of the difficulty of accounting for unbelieving Israel in terms of a "mystery" (Rom. 11:25) that caused Paul "great sorrow" and "unceasing anguish" (Rom. 9:2). Where Yoder saw Israel's unbelief in Paul's generation and in the generations following as "tense but tolerable" diversity, Barth most certainly saw it as tied to the mystery of election in which unbelieving Israel remains together with the church the community of God witnessing to both God's judgment and mercy.

At the same time, part of Yoder's argument for respecting the Jews after Barth is to point out that, despite its profundity, the basic weakness of Barth's theological respect for the Jews was that he was too ready to associate unbelieving Israel with a "stable and autonomous entity"

called “Judaism” that was “identical with itself through the ages.”⁷³ Here several of Yoder’s departures from Barth appear. “Judaism” names a people whose past and present history is simply far too diverse to be correlated with a biblical hermeneutic of “the people who rejected Jesus,” or the people whose mysterious survival paradoxically testifies to God’s mercy ruling in his judgment. In this context, Yoder’s reliance upon historical-critical study of the first few centuries becomes especially important, for he points out that in spite of many in Israel not believing, this historical data suggests that “the social fences remained down between church and synagogue for two to three more generations [after Paul] at the least.”⁷⁴ If the social fences remained down, the claim that unbelieving Israelites were the original schismatics is discredited, Paul must be re-interpreted as more willing to abide Jewish unbelief, and the witness of a rabbinic Judaism living independently of the church must be re-visited.

This leads to Yoder’s argument for who is finally to blame for the schism becoming more definitive. It is not unbelieving Israel, as with Barth, but instead Gentile Christians who have lost sight of the meaning of inclusion in Israel’s covenant. According to Yoder, the schism would only really begin in earnest in the second century with Christian apologists, such as Justin Martyr, who Yoder claims turned “their back on the Jews in the interest of making more sense to the Gentiles.”⁷⁵ It would intensify with some Jews responding to that Gentile rejection with their own rejections of Christianity. Finally, the schism would reach its apex in the fourth century

⁷³ *JCSR*, 150.

⁷⁴ *JCSR*, 151. While he was not by any means against historical-critical methodology generally, Barth’s doctrine of Israel simply did not utilize historical-critical study of the first few centuries as a key interpretive determinant. His text was scripture and he used scripture as the lens through which to view world-history.

⁷⁵ *JCSR*, 54. Yoder does not spend much time providing textual evidence for claims such as these, but one can presume that he has in mind Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*, which indeed portrays Jew and Christian in conflict. In support of Yoder’s thesis, one could point to Daniel Boyarin’s “Justin Martyr Invents Judaism,” *Church History*, Vol. 70, No. 3 (Sep., 2001): 427-461, or to his more in-depth study *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

when Christianity became allied with a political power hostile to Jews.⁷⁶ At this point, the loss incurred in the schism, and so also the chief sin of the schism, becomes apparent for Yoder. In separating itself so decisively from the Jews, the church lost its identity and mission in history as a light to the nations, as a witness to the peace and enemy love revealed in Christ. He describes this loss as the loss of the church's "otherness:"

This [otherness] is what Christianity largely lost when they settled into provincial establishment. They lost it in terms of social base by becoming imperially provincial; that freed them to lose it intellectually by becoming theologically provincial. What Christians borrowed from Plotinus through Augustine, and from Cicero through Ambrose, nailed shut the door which Justin had begun to close.⁷⁷

Yoder's claim that the church lost its "otherness" in Christendom is a different way of saying what he said in his 1954 essay "Peace without Eschatology," namely, that the distinction between the church and the world was lost in Christendom, with far-reaching effects. The blame for the Jewish-Christian schism can thus be laid largely on the Gentile Christians who rejected the Jews in order to secure a national basis in the world for ecclesial reality. The sin of these Gentiles was ultimately their apostasy from the very meaning of covenant; their refusal of the identity and mission of God's people "to be different...to be doing something else amidst the world's power arenas."⁷⁸ Notably, while in the view of Barth, the Jews fail to respond to the very meaning of the covenant by rejecting their messiah, in Yoder's view it is actually the Gentile Christians who fail to uphold the meaning of covenant and seek independence from the one community of Jews and Gentiles. The reason for this should be clear, for if Jesus's messianic

⁷⁶ *JCSR*, 57.

⁷⁷ *JCSR*, 81. The exact details of what Yoder is alluding to by speaking of the "borrowing" from Plotinus and Cicero is not entirely clear. What Yoder meant by borrowing from Cicero becomes clearer in his essay "The Authority of Tradition," in *The Priestly Kingdom*. Speaking to the heritage of the Just War Tradition, Yoder notes: "Ambrose and Augustine did the best they could. They did not mean to sell out, but they did buy into a system whose inherent dynamism they could no longer control...They knew they were borrowing from Cicero." *The Priestly Kingdom*, 75-76.

⁷⁸ *JCSR*, 85.

politics broke the sovereignty of the powers that order “social human relations” according to the fallen principles of nationalism, then the identification of the church and the nation represents a willingness to live again under a false sovereign.⁷⁹ On this reading, the Jews did not reject Jesus, but the Gentile Christians did by rejecting the Jews to whom he belonged.⁸⁰ Barth was in his own way certainly willing to abide this kind of argument when it concerned the legacy of antisemitism, and as was shown in the introductory chapter on Barth, he argued that “[w]hoever has Jesus Christ in faith cannot wish not to have the Jews. He must have them along with Jesus Christ as His ancestors and kinsmen.”⁸¹ Notably, however, even here Barth characterizes Anti-Semitism as the Gentile form of what is originally the synagogue’s rejection of the Messiah.

For Yoder, however, if the Gentile rejection of the Jews in favor of greater social power constituted its apostasy, the Jewish maintenance of Torah observance and its acceptance of the minority status that came with life in Christendom placed it much more in line with the sovereign reign of Messiah Jesus who, after all, came to fulfill the law. As Yoder puts it, “for over a millennium the Jews of the diaspora were the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus existing on any significant scale anywhere in Christendom.”⁸² This is, again, a striking claim to make in comparison with Barth for whom the existence of the synagogue was heading toward an empty future inasmuch as its fulfillment had already come. It is not entirely clear, however, how Yoder squares his claim that the obedience called for in the messianic age is possible only through participation in the messianic body with the claim that the rabbinic Judaism of the diaspora was

⁷⁹ *The Politics of Jesus*, 145.

⁸⁰ This view was also held by van Buren. See chapter 3, 117-122.

⁸¹ *CD II/2*, 289.

⁸² *JCSR*, 81-82. The Jewish sources that Yoder relies on to justify this claim are limited. At one point when formulating his own summary of “Jewish pacifism” he quotes the Babylonian Talmud (*JCSR*, 82). In this same summary, he notes in a footnote that in formulating his summary he relied heavily upon sources that he was led to by Steven Schwarzschild and Everett Gendler, Daniel Smith-Christopher (*JCSR*, 89fn17). Unfortunately, in his summary of Jewish Pacifism (*JCSR*, 82-87), Yoder does not always specify which “sources” he relied upon when, for example, he makes a claim about what the “Rabbis” said.

the closest thing to the ethic of Jesus. Yoder's use of the phrase "closest thing" might suggest his unwillingness to claim that rabbinic Judaism actually participated in the Messiah's body; after all, the Jews rejected Jesus's claim to be Messiah. If this is the case, perhaps Yoder simply assumed that diasporic rabbinic Judaism's willingness to accept minority status and trust in God for survival was a repetition of Israel's legitimate yet incomplete testimony to this aspect of the covenant before the revelation and decisive transformation brought in the Messiah. On the other hand, part of Yoder's argument is that Jewish institutionalization of the rejection of Jesus' messianic claims happened only after the schism had been begun with intensity from the Gentile side and so only after the meaning of Jesus' messianic claim had been transformed into something foreign to Israel's original covenant calling.⁸³ In other words, according to Yoder, rabbinic Judaism's rejection of Jesus was more a rejection of the idolatrous messianism of Christendom than a rejection of the normative vision of the Jewish Messiah. If no legitimate messianic community existed to dialogue with non-messianic Jews concerning the meaning of the covenant in the messianic age, how could Jews possibly be judged as rejecting the message of Jesus when, in actual fact, Jewish communities carried on practices that demonstrated trust in the sovereignty of God rather than the sovereignty of nations? Put differently, in light of Christendom's apostasy, how could righteous rabbinic Jews possibly even consider that the messianic age, in which Gentiles were to be brought into the covenant, had come, if the Gentiles approached the Jews as if they were either enemies of the covenant or outside the covenant needing to come in?

The key manner in which Yoder develops his theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth can now be discerned. Barth's account of the witness of Israel and Judaism in his doctrine of

⁸³ Again, this same claim is made by van Buren. See fn.80 above.

election was, according to Yoder, typological, and its basic structure was derived from a dogmatic framing of the unity of the Old Testament and the New Testament as a witness to Jesus Christ as the universal redeemer. When Barth engaged the past and present history of what he called “the synagogue,” it was not by way of historical data concerning the diversity of Judaisms in the first three centuries. When Barth did engage the history of Judaism as it moved through the centuries, he did so as a mystery of survival that was the closest thing to a natural proof of the existence of God. Yoder, on the other hand, reads scripture, together with historical study of the first three centuries, as a testimony to an open history in which God has, at a decisive point in time, revealed to his elect people the fullness of their calling, which was made possible in the life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah. This calling is the messianic pacifism of the community that witnesses to God’s peace, reconciliation, and also judgment, among the nations through nonviolence.

That history is open, for Yoder, means that the calling of the Messianic community remains possible, even if testimony to it has often been absent or sporadic throughout history. The alternative path of obedience open to the Gentiles who precipitated the schism could have been to maintain their relationship with Jews, tense and complicated though it was, and to refuse to adapt the message and messianic ethics of the covenant in the interest of wider relevance, security, and social status.⁸⁴ Put differently, Gentiles apostasized, but it did not have to be. But if it did not have to be, then what could have been? Or, better, what can be? One of the more significant moves Yoder makes in *JCSR* is that since it is the case that Jews, Jewish Christians,

⁸⁴ To be clear, Yoder did not deny the need for some adaptation and translation. In fact, Yoder saw the New Testament writings as a testament to this process of translation and adaptation and understood it to be a necessary part of Christianity being missionary. See, for example, his essay “But We Do See Jesus,” 46-62 in *The Priestly Kingdom*. It is also clear, however, that Yoder thought there were acceptable forms of adaptation and unacceptable forms.

and Gentiles fostered a tolerable form of unity in the past, there is no historical necessity standing in the way of Jews and Christians today beginning a conversation about “who we want to be together” in the present, especially given the fact that two millennia of intervening history has produced a considerable level of diversity within each community.⁸⁵ Yoder points to a number of new socio-political realities that provide for new possibilities for Jewish-Christian relationships.

First, there is the post-Holocaust shift in Christian circles to accept complicity in the anti-Judaism of western history and to repent from it. There is also, however, the fact that modern Jews have entered into a new period of “establishment and of empire” inaugurated and sustained by modern politicians of the State of Israel.⁸⁶ Finally, there is the fact that there “are Christians who never approved of establishment and empire.”⁸⁷ Reflecting on these realities on the ground, Yoder draws his most provocative conclusion regarding present day relationships between Jews and Christians in an era when their common origins as well as shared western history have been recognized: “the spectrum of differences *within* each of the faith communities is now broader than the distance between their centres; the terrain of their overlap may again become substantial.”⁸⁸ This last claim warrants significant reflection, for it begs the question, what constitutes the “centre” for each faith community? It is with Yoder’s proposed answer to this question that his project is most original and most fraught, for it is one thing for him to make a claim about the “centre” of the Christian community, and a whole other matter to make the same or similar claim regarding Judaism. It is precisely with Yoder’s claims regarding the “terrain of

⁸⁵ *JCSR*, 62.

⁸⁶ *JCSR*, 62. In this context, Yoder shows his disapproval for the prime minister of Israel, Menachem Begin (who served from 1975-1981), by calling him a “zealot.”

⁸⁷ *JCSR*, 62.

⁸⁸ *JCSR*, 62. Emphasis in original.

overlap” between Christianity and Judaism, however, that the full extent of his theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth—can be discerned. The reason that this is the case is that, like Barth, the terrain of overlap is Jesus the Jew but because of their different framings of this one Jew’s significance as the will of God, they arrive at different conclusions regarding the unity of Israel and the church.

The above analysis of Yoder’s argument in “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist” and “Paul the Judaizer” should make it clear that, like Barth, Yoder saw Jesus Christ as the centre of the community of God. For him and for Barth, therefore, the basis for the unity of Jews and Christians, both past and present, is Jesus Christ.⁸⁹ By the time Yoder took on his research project, the claim that Jesus Christ was the basis of Jewish-Christian unity was still not commonly held, however. Indeed, the reason Yoder had to argue for Jesus’s positive relation to Judaism was because the opposite claim, that Jesus was the basis for division, prevailed. While Yoder saw liberal Protestants of his generation engaging ancient and modern forms of Judaism sympathetically in ways they had not done before, what stood out to him about this was that few of these figures did so on the basis of their “confessional traditions.”⁹⁰ In these traditions, Jesus and Paul still remained the point of departure from Judaism, not a source of unity for Jews and Christians. Indeed, many confessional traditions, be they Reformed, Lutheran, or otherwise, were steeped in a history of anti-Jewish bias, and so lacked a theological language with which to

⁸⁹ Although, as will become clear, Barth and Yoder’s respective explanations of the nature or form of the “unity of Jews and Christians” in Christ are quite different.

⁹⁰ Yoder mentions G.E. Lessing, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Roy Eckhardt as modern examples, *JCSR*, 30. He also mentions modern forms of philo-Judaism in his essay “Judaism as a Non-non-Christian Religion” which will be treated in detail below. In “Paul the Judaizer,” he also mentions Rosemary Radford Ruether’s *Faith and Fratricide* as an example of a critique of antisemitism. Yoder notes how Ruether makes critical judgments on significant elements of the New Testament witness on the assumption that they are antisemitic and so possible sources of modern antisemitism. Yoder questions the assumption and then wonders, “Is it [antisemitism] in any other sense ‘theologically’ wrong?” (*JCSR*, 97).

express that sympathy.⁹¹ Furthermore, many of those traditions perpetuated the interpretation of Judaism as a monolithic “religion” of works-righteousness, and so refused to attend to concrete forms of diverse Jewish life and thought. For Yoder, it is no wonder that with such traditions, few resources were available for a sympathetic engagement with Jews and Judaism.

In response to the development of non-confessional forms of sympathy for Jews and Judaism, Yoder argued for a sympathetic engagement with Jews and Judaism from what he understood as “the centre of Christian identity rather than from its liberal margin.”⁹² The “centre” he assumes, of course, is Jesus of Nazareth in the full concreteness of his humanity, which Yoder sought to capture with the label “Jewish pacifist.” Such a description of this “centre” makes it clear that Yoder did not presume to arrive there from nowhere. His sympathy was framed by the confessions inherent to his own Free Church tradition. Yoder, the Anabaptist-Mennonite, saw Jesus’s obedience unto death as the revelation of non-resistance and pacifism as the social “style” mandated for the church of the new age.⁹³ As already indicated above, Yoder saw this revelation in continuity with Abraham, Moses, and Jeremiah, who testified to that social “style,” even though it was not fully defined under the old age and even though its full expression was not possible under slavery to the fallen powers.⁹⁴ What changed with Jesus was that this way of living in the world was made manifest and manifestly possible through his resurrection and the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost on both Jews and Gentiles alike. The

⁹¹ This is what made Barth’s theological formulation of the unity of Jews and Christians so novel in the history of doctrine.

⁹² *JCSR*, 34.

⁹³ Yoder often referred to Jesus’s social ethics as a “style.” Yoder’s use of this noun in this way is, in my estimation, his way of trying to meet the critique that taking Jesus’s social ethic, as Yoder understands it, as normative, is just another form of legalism. Presumably “style,” understood in the sense of “manner,” allows Yoder to affirm both the definitiveness and normativity of Jesus along with the necessity of the church’s contextualization and discernment in ethical decision-making in a way that “legalism” is supposed to preclude.

⁹⁴ Yoder clearly believed that obedient discipleship was only made fully possible after Christ’s coming. As he put it in the essay “The Forms of a Possible Obedience” in *JCSR*: “...I have to offend my Jewish friends, by describing a possibility which could only become real if in Jesus and Pentecost the messianic age in fact began....Because the Messiah came and poured out God’s spirit, obedience is possible.” (*JCSR*, 123)

Gospel, according to Yoder, declares that with the resurrection of Jesus, Jew and Gentile are empowered for obedience and brought together in a form of unity that was not previously possible before Christ. Once enemies, Jew and Gentile have been united by the one who loved his enemies.⁹⁵ Redemption, on this reading, is not only a realized forensic forgiveness of sins, but a historical process of social transformation made possible through the inauguration of the messianic age that breaks the sovereignty of the fallen powers that define friend and enemy according to nation and race. The non-resistance and pacifism of Jesus the Jew is the revealed shape of this redemptive process of social transformation and so in this way the centre from which he thought to engage sympathetically with Judaism. As Yoder saw it, where the magisterial traditions lacked language with which to sympathize with Judaism, due especially to their theological rooting in the ‘Constantinian’ heritage, Anabaptists did have a language, and that was the language of following Christ (*Nachfolge Christi*) in imitating his particular social “style;” his “Jewish pacifism.”⁹⁶

Beyond the theological questions such an account of the redemptive significance of Christ might raise, note the significant implication that follows from the above construal with respect to *Jewish* self-definition: Yoder’s claim that Jesus reveals ‘Jewish pacifism’ to be the definitive shape of God’s redemptive relationship with Israel and the nations is simultaneously a claim about what it means to be a good Jew. While Yoder recognizes the audacity of a Christian making a claim like this regarding the Jews of his own day,⁹⁷ especially given the history of

⁹⁵ Yoder makes this case most strongly in his chapter “Justification by Grace Through Faith,” in his *The Politics of Jesus*, 212-227.

⁹⁶ Yoder makes this argument in his essay “The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision,” in *JCSR*, 105-119.

⁹⁷ For a fuller account of how Yoder understands the problem and promise of appropriating Jewish theology, see his essay “The Jewishness of the Free Church Vision” in *JCSR*.

Christian imperialism, he nonetheless finds an ally in his Jewish friend Steven Schwarzschild, who Yoder quotes as saying:

‘No one can speak for Judaism. On the other hand, I believe, on the basis of intense, lifelong, and professional study, that pacifism is the most authentic interpretation of classical Judaism.’⁹⁸

Yoder’s use of this quotation is indeed strategic, as it is here that he encounters a modern Jew whose conviction about “classical Judaism” is that it is most authentic when it is most pacifist. According to Yoder, Jesus and Paul were essentially making the same type of claim, and in this way they must be situated together with all Jews, past and present, in the debate concerning what counts as faithfulness under the covenant.⁹⁹ More than that, however, because the gospel of the Messiah includes an invitation to Gentiles, Jesus is also the link between the Jews of the past and the present and the Gentiles who he has invited in to have a share in the “glories of the Law as Grace.”¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

It is necessary again at this point to take stock of what the analysis of this and of the preceding chapter means for understanding Yoder’s theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth. The analysis of this chapter is enough to suggest that it was with his decision to make a “foundational corrective” within the theological tradition concerning the Jewish-Christian schism

⁹⁸ *JCSR*, 95. The footnote to this citation refers to Yoder’s reference to Steven Schwarzschild’s “The Theology of Jewish Survival” which he makes in the essay “Jesus the Jewish Pacifist,” 89fn19. This quotation does not appear there, however, but in Schwarzschild’s article titled “Shalom,” *Confrontation*, no.21 (Winter 1981): 169. The quotation appears in almost the same form with minor differences as shown here: “The majority of Jews at least today are not, of course, pacifists. What I shall say from here on in must be understood as the views of a Jewish pacifist, who cannot necessarily speak for all, or even the bulk, of Jewry. (No one, indeed, can speak for Jewry or Judaism—also not those who disagree with me.) On the other hand, I believe, on the basis of intense, life-long, and professional studies, that pacifism is the best, the most authentic interpretation of classical Judaism.”

⁹⁹ *JCSR*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ *JCSR*, 95.

through a focus on Jesus as the “centre,” as the basis for Jewish-Christian unity, that Yoder saw himself writing in the spirit of Barth, who indeed resolved to make his entire dogmatics, including his doctrine of Israel, an exercise in Christology.¹⁰¹ Christians can and should sympathetically engage with Jews, for Yoder, not because liberal values show that tolerance is good and anti-Judaism is bad. Rather, Christians can and should engage sympathetically with Jews because the Messiah Christians proclaim was a Jew whose inauguration of the Kingdom of God opened the possibility of peace between Jews and Gentiles. Theologically speaking, anti-Judaism is bad, for Yoder, because it is thoroughly anti-Christ. On this basic level he follows Barth.

However, it is also clear that Yoder is working with a Christology and so an account of the unity of Israel and the church that is different from Barth’s. For Barth, the unity of Israel and the church is a reality in the eternal will of God, understood as the election of all in Jesus Christ. For Barth, prior to the second coming, there need be no Christian mission to the Jews or even debate with the Jews over the meaning of the messianic age to attest to that unity. The will of God is fulfilled independently of a visible unity of Jew and Christian, regardless. From Yoder’s vantage point, this construal will not do for a number of reasons. First, given his rejection of typologies, Yoder does not assume that there is such a thing as “Judaism” and “Christianity,” or “Israel” and the “church” as ideal realities.¹⁰² Such terms are too often, for him, defined by

¹⁰¹ *CD I/2*, 883: “...in the most comprehensive sense of the term dogmatics can and must be understood as Christology.”

¹⁰² Givens’s claim that “Yoder’s theological historiography of the people of Israel is typological in the sense that it tells the developing story of one type of people among other political types” that he then commends “as normative” is worthy of consideration here (Givens, *We the People*, 99). It is hard not to read Yoder as idealizing one “Judaism” above all others. That said, matters may not be quite so clear. If one understands Yoder’s appeal to “normative Judaism” as an idealized or absolutized political program (“Jewish pacifism”), then the critiques of Givens, and before him Ochs and Boyarin, are right. If one understands Yoder’s appeal to “normative Judaism” as the rejection of any idealized political program (including an Anabaptist-Mennonite one) in favor of a continually open process of discerning faithfulness in light of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, then the above critique loses some of its edge. In my estimation, it is the latter interpretation that better approximates Yoder’s overall intent. Admittedly,

establishment forms of the church that have already abandoned core teachings of Jesus. For Yoder, Jews and Gentiles in ever-new given historical contexts are called to be “the one people of God” because Jesus inaugurated the messianic age and proclaimed the nearness of the kingdom of God. Here the implications of Yoder’s denial of Barth’s universalistic account of election become apparent. The Messiah’s life, death, and resurrection broke the sovereignty of the powers that kept Israel and the nations apart in enmity. The witness to this redemption occurs, however, only when there is an actual visible community that obediently embodies that reality. There can be no witness to Jesus Christ, for Yoder, where division between peoples is assumed as a given until the eschaton. As he puts it in his essay “Judaism as a Non-non-Christian Religion,”

“The truth of the claim that Jesus is Christ, or the Messiah has come, is inseparable from the functioning of a community in which the two kinds of people [Jew and Gentile] have become one.”¹⁰³

For Yoder it is not that Jesus is only the Messiah when Jews and Gentiles are united; rather, the truth of Jesus’s messianic identity—its meaningfulness as a “realistic” description of the Gospel and so as a witness to the Gospel—cannot finally be divorced from that visible unity. Put differently, the proclamation is unusable as a form of witness to the world, apart from a visible body in which the claim finds its historical form.¹⁰⁴

Barth’s construal of Jesus Christ as the eternal will of God, on the other hand, frames the mediation of the community in terms of its twofold witness to God’s judgment and mercy. For him, therefore, while the schism between Israel and the church did not have to be, there need be

tension nonetheless remains. By rejecting political absolutism, Yoder in his own way threatens to absolutize nonviolence in the name of rejecting absolutism.

¹⁰³ *JCSR*, 151. Yoder puts it similarly in a slightly different context in his essay “The Imperative of Christian Unity,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. Michael G. Cartwright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 291. There he says: “Where Christians are not united, the gospel is not true in that place.”

¹⁰⁴ In other words, the “truth” of something, for Yoder, cannot be present without its historically visible reality.

no attempt to “revisit” or “heal” the schism in order for the one community of God to witness to Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁵ The schism within the one community of God is ultimately overcome only in the reality of Christ, for Barth, and the absence of a historically visible example of that overcoming detracts in no way from the witness to that overcoming in the history of Israel and the church. As he puts it in *CD II/2*: “...God does not wait till Israel is obedient before employing it in His service. This is settled and completed in and with its election as such, so that Israel cannot in any way evade it, whether it is obedient or disobedient.”¹⁰⁶ Yoder’s construal of election as including also a witness to human justice, however, frames the mediation of the community in broader terms as a witness to the God who has not only overcome division in the eternal, transcendent reality of Christ, but in the concrete form of the messianic community. At just this point, Yoder’s theology of Israel and Judaism departs from Barth’s.

Again, it might be asked what Barth might have thought of Yoder’s “corrective” to the standard account of the Jewish-Christian schism. In avoiding the Scylla of anti-Judaism, did Yoder fall prey to the Charybdis of a natural theology? Clearly Yoder’s corrective to the standard account of the Jewish-Christian schism was not based on a concept of election abstracted from Jesus Christ. For him, the church’s estrangement from the Jews was precisely an estrangement from Jesus, the exemplary elect one. Perhaps Barth’s primary complaint with Yoder’s attempt to correct the standard account of the schism would have been that in emphasizing Jesus’s “Jewish pacifism” he did not witness sufficiently to Jesus’ saving passion and the human misery that it healed. Jesus Christ is not only the obedient servant to be followed, for Barth, but also the judge judged in our place, and this aspect to Jesus’s election must shape

¹⁰⁵ This is not to say, of course, that Barth was not concerned with the Church’s relationship, both past and present, with the Jewish people.

¹⁰⁶ *CD II/2*, 207. While Yoder might be able to say the same thing about the rebellious powers, he would not say it concerning the elect.

the mediation of the community. As Barth put it: “It [the Church] cannot voice its witness to Jesus Christ and its summons to faith in him without a confession of His saving passion, and therefore without a confession of the human misery that in His passion He has taken upon Himself and taken away.”¹⁰⁷ Of course, as I argued above, Yoder’s account of Jewish pacifism in no way intended to downplay the significance of Christ’s sacrifice but simply to attest also to the objective, empirical significance of that sacrifice and its victory for the ethical shape of the church. Here, no doubt, it is important to remember the fact that Yoder offered his corrective in “fragments” and that he recognized that the full systematic implications of his corrective would have to be worked out by others who came after him. In any case, I suggest that there is no way to fully appreciate the promise and perils of Yoder’s corrective without placing him into creative tension with his Reformed teacher.

¹⁰⁷ *CD* II/2, 206.

Chapter Six

An Eternal Unity Achieved in Time: Jenson’s Early Engagement with Barth’s Doctrine of God as Foundational Source for his Later Theology of Israel and Judaism

Robert Jenson’s approach to a Christian theology of Israel and Judaism charts a very different path from both van Buren and Yoder. Like the previous two, Jenson would also come to see the Christian teaching of supersessionism as a problem. Unlike van Buren and Yoder, however, he only began writing on the topic of a non-supersessionist Christian theology of Judaism late in his career and when he did turn to the topic in earnest, he consistently posed his own writings on the topic in strict opposition to van Buren’s (he did not have much to say about Yoder’s).¹ What were van Buren’s errors, according to Jenson? This is an important question to ask, because methodologically Jenson shares with van Buren, and indeed Yoder as well, a concern with demonstrating the theological significance of ongoing “history” and “temporal existence” in contrast to theologies that seek to ground history in timeless realities.² As will become clear in the analysis below, however, Jenson appeals to these categories for different theological ends from both van Buren and Yoder, and in a way that attempts more seriously to uphold the classical Christian doctrines of the Trinity and Christology. Indeed, in Jenson’s estimation, van Buren’s errors are precisely Trinitarian and Christological ones:

The standard work [that attempts to overcome supersessionism] by Paul Van Buren, *A Theology of the Jewish Christian Reality*...seems to me to take a fundamentally wrongheaded approach. Developing a less trinitarian Christology is precisely how not to repent of supersessionism.³

¹ In his “A Theological Autobiography to Date,” *Dialog* 46, no.1 (Spring 2007): 46-54, Jenson notes that it was not until the late nineties that he began to “lecture and write on Christian theology of Judaism” (53). With respect to Jenson’s few comments on Yoder, see his *A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live*, 104.

² *DW*, 4-5.

³ *ST* 2, 193fn29.

Much recent theology has been determined to overcome ‘supersessionism.’ Those most thematically involved have commonly supposed that their effort is incompatible with belief that the advent of Jesus Christ definitely fulfills the promises to Israel. Since the identity of Christ as the Son is the same fact as his finality in God’s history with his people, this supposition further implies that supersessionism can only be avoided by repristinating a Christology in which Jesus is not quite identical with the Son, that is, by repristinating Arianism or Nestorianism...⁴ So, notably, Paul M. Van Buren, in numerous books and articles.⁵

As might be supposed by the above citations, Jenson’s own attempt at articulating a non-supersessionist theology of Israel and Judaism proposes to start with a “trinitarian Christology” in which Jesus Christ is identical with the Son whose advent is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. How he makes this argument, what bearing it has upon his view of post-biblical Judaism, and in what way it might be construed as a form of theology after Barth, is the subject matter to be taken up in this and the next chapter.

As with the initial chapter on van Buren, in this first chapter on Jenson I begin by describing Jenson’s early engagement with Barth in his days as a graduate student and some of the principle theological concerns that would colour his work thereafter. The first matter to make plain in this regard is that unlike van Buren, for whom Barth was a *Doktorvater*, Jenson did not study directly under Barth for most of his graduate work. It was in Heidelberg and not in Basel, that Jenson began his graduate work in 1957, some four years after van Buren had left Basel to return to America.⁶ Through the influence of the conservative Lutheran Peter Brunner, however, Jenson came to write his dissertation on Barth’s doctrine of the election of Christ⁷ and when the time came for Jenson to write, he and his wife Blanche⁸ moved to Basel in the summer of 1959

⁴ *ST* 2, 336.

⁵ *ST* 2, 336fn83.

⁶ For more details about Jenson’s entire theological biography, see “A Theological Autobiography, to Date.”

⁷ Jenson did not choose this topic but was assigned it by his *Doktorvater*. When he first arrived in Heidelberg, Jenson initially intended to write on Rudolf Bultmann, but Brunner “would hear nothing of Bultmann; work on Karl Barth’s doctrine of the election of Christ was needed...” “Theological Autobiography,” 48.

⁸ Jenson rarely speaks about his own theological biography without consistent reference to his wife Blanche, “the mother of all his theology.” I replicate the pattern here to be consistent with Jenson’s own self-description.

so that Barth could act as an “informal adviser” and Jenson could sit in on Barth’s seminars and colloquia.⁹ The fruit of that time in Basel was Jenson’s 1959 dissertation, “Cur Deus Homo?: The Election of Jesus Christ in the Theology of Karl Barth” (hereafter “CDH”), in which Jenson identified his task as that of “a Lutheran critic” setting up Luther and Barth for “mutual questioning.”¹⁰ This text would be published four years later in a revised and condensed form as *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (hereafter *AO*).¹¹ Six years after *AO* was published, Jenson would publish *God after God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (hereafter *GG*).¹² Both of these early works established Jenson as a theologian whose work was done self-consciously after Barth and in a way that touches on the subject matter of this study.¹³ For this reason, these two texts are the most thematically appropriate place to begin. Exactly how these works relate to this study, however, must be made explicit in advance.

Neither *AO* nor *GG* take up Barth’s treatment of Israel and Judaism. Indeed, even later in Jenson’s career when he turns to the task of articulating a Christian theology of Judaism in his *Systematic Theology* (hereafter *ST*) and in numerous essays, Barth’s account in §34 of *CD II/2* is not appealed to, either positively or negatively, as a point of reference.¹⁴ This is, of course, very different from van Buren who took up the task of articulating a Christian theology of Israel and

⁹ “Theological Autobiography,” 49.

¹⁰ “Cur Deus homo? The election of Jesus Christ in the theology of Karl Barth,” Heidelberg Dissertation, 1959, 220fn14, 303fn150. While I will mostly cite Jenson’s *Alpha and Omega* throughout, I will occasionally refer back to relevant material in “CDH” that did not make it into *AO*. Jenson did not, for example, include in *AO* his exegesis of the New Testament material used to make his argument. In addition, many explanatory footnotes were excised.

¹¹ *Alpha and Omega: A Study in the Theology of Karl Barth* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1963).

¹² *God After God: The God of the Past and the God of the Future, Seen in the Work of Karl Barth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1969).

¹³ Around the same time as the publication of *GG*, Jenson published *The Knowledge of Things Hoped For* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), hereafter *KOTHF*. While this book’s primary subject matter does not deal directly with Barth—indeed, it does not contain even a single reference to Barth—I will occasionally cite it below when it is helpful for clarifying material within *AO* and *GG*.

¹⁴ The closest he comes is in volume 2 of *ST* when he affirms much of Barth’s doctrine of the election of Christ.

Judaism in his time explicitly in relation to Barth's formative account.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Jenson's early engagement with Barth does indirectly relate to Barth's account of Israel and Judaism in *CD II/2* inasmuch as *AO* treats Barth's doctrine of the eternal election of Christ (and its material outworking in the subsequent volumes of the *CD*) and *GG* offers a "dogmatic proposal" for what "God" means for the Christian faith through a critical analysis of Barth's answer to that question beginning with his *Commentary on Romans* and ending with the *CD*.¹⁶ It is Jenson's sustained engagement with Barth's doctrine of God that is thus the point of connection, and we recall that it is from Barth's doctrine of God that he builds his theology of Israel and Judaism.¹⁷ Like Barth, Jenson's late-career theology of Israel and Judaism is also built upon his doctrine of God. Thus, by first examining where Jenson diverges from Barth in his doctrine of God, it will then be possible to articulate the ways that his theology of Israel and Judaism is in its own way after Barth.

In this first chapter on Jenson, I begin by presenting Jenson's disagreements with Barth's doctrine of God seen principally in *AO* and *GG*.¹⁸ Barth's key terminology in §33 and §34 will be a continual reference point for highlighting these differences as they arise. From that, it will become clear that the core of Jenson's critique of Barth is that Barth's doctrine of God—and his doctrine of eternal election in particular—relies too heavily on the concept of analogy and its

¹⁵ As seen, for example, in his letter to Franklin Littel where he discusses Barth's doctrine of Israel and its relation to his doctrine of God.

¹⁶ "Foreword," in *GG*. Jenson's Heidelberg dissertation also included an analysis of Barth's *Romans* commentaries (see "CDH," 177-212). These sections did not make it into *AO*, however.

¹⁷ This connection has also been made—and with Jenson's approval at that—in Sang Hoon Lee's *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel in Robert W. Jenson's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016). See especially pages 13-32 where Lee helpfully describes Jenson's engagement with Barth in *AO* and *GG*. While there are similarities between my own analysis below and Lee's, the primary difference between Lee's analysis and my own is the extent to which I frame my engagement with these key texts of Jenson's entirely around Barth's account in *CD II/2*, §33 and §34.

¹⁸ When illuminating for the subject under consideration, I will refer to other works Jenson published early in his career. Relevant works here include: *KOTHF*, *The Futurist Option* (New York: Newman Press, 1970), and *Story and Promise: A Brief Theology of the Gospel About Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1973).

attendant account of the mediation of eternity and time. For Jenson, the concept of analogy, employed as a metaphysical doctrine, is inadequate for the Gospel proclamation which attests to God's history with humankind inasmuch as it assumes an account of divine eternity as timelessness. For Jenson, this eternity is not that of the biblical triune God and neither can it adequately address the questions of a humanity aware of its own 'historicity.'¹⁹ After making this critique plain, I provide an initial account of Jenson's alternative doctrine of God with reference to his analysis in *GG* and in his first attempt at writing a systematics in *Story and Promise* (hereafter *SP*).²⁰ With this in place, the stage will be set for a brief analysis, in the next chapter, of Jenson's restatement of his alternative doctrine of God in the first volume of *ST*. Following that, it will then be possible to show how Jenson's doctrine of God maps directly onto his Christian theology of Israel and Judaism in the first and second volumes of *ST*. Chapter seven will thus examine the ways that Jenson's theology of Israel and Judaism in *ST* and in a number of other essays, articulates a theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth. I will argue that Jenson—inasmuch as he grounds his theology of Israel and Judaism in a Trinitarian Christology—improves substantially on van Buren's attempt, while nonetheless leaving a number of unanswered questions to be explored further in the concluding chapters.

Towards a Metaphysics for the Gospel: Theology as Testimony to Timeless Reality or to the History of God-in-Christ with Us?

While this chapter primarily investigates Jenson's engagement with Barth in terms of the specific key terms found in §33 and §34 of *CD II/2*, it is necessary to provide some additional

¹⁹ I will unpack the significance of the concept of 'historicity' for Jenson more below.

²⁰ Since between *GG* and *ST I*, there are many other works where Jenson picks up and expands on the same themes, I will occasionally refer to those as well. Notable among these earlier works are *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982) and his contributions to the multi-authored *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

details regarding Jenson’s formative academic experiences and how they relate to his reading of Barth.²¹ As was stated above, Jenson studied at Heidelberg, but before that he studied classics at Luther College in Decorah, Iowa. This early education would have an enduring impact on Jenson, as is evidenced by his consistent engagement throughout his career—most often in a critical mode—with classical figures like Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle.²² For Jenson, one of the problems with the metaphysics of the Greeks is what he sees as their definition of time and eternity through mutual exclusion. According to Jenson, Parmenides defined time as “an illusion” and, by contrast, eternity as “[r]eality...without before or after.”²³ The goal for Parmenides was thus to offer the path of salvation out of the illusion of time into the reality of eternity.²⁴ Socrates, through Plato, then repeated the same pattern. Socrates was an icon “of life as the journey from time to eternity, of life propelled by their contradiction.”²⁵ Aristotle, says Jenson, “completed the pattern” begun by Parmenides and continued by Plato with his answer to the question at the core of Greek philosophy—“[c]an it be that all things pass away?”—with the answer: “[b]eing itself neither comes to be nor passes away.”²⁶ Jenson states the metaphysical implications of these claims for theology: “God is the absolutely *present* being...He is the purely Present to himself and all things, without past or future. He is the exemplary fulfillment of all

²¹ Lee, *Trinitarian Ontology and Israel*, also provides a helpful account of Jenson’s key sources.

²² “A Theological Autobiography,” 46. Although, as will be pointed out below, Jenson’s engagement with these classical figures, especially concerning questions of ontology, would only be reinforced in Heidelberg through a variety of figures, among them Pannenberg, Jungel, and Heidegger. Jenson’s reading of Barth in relationship to the Greek heritage was influenced significantly by Eberhard Jungel. Jungel’s *Habilitationschrift*, titled *On the Origin of Analogy in Parmenides and Heraclitus (Zum Ursprung der Analogie bei Parmenides und Heraklit* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964]) as well as his 1962 article on Barth’s use of analogy, “The possibility of theological anthropology on the ground of analogy” (“Die Möglichkeit theologischer Anthropologie auf dem Grunde der Analogie: Eine Untersuchung zum Analogieverständnis Karl Barths’,” *Evangelische Theologie*, Vol. 22, No.10 (Feb.1934): 535-556) were also pivotal influences on Jenson’s reading of Barth’s use of analogy in the *Römerbrief* and the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*.

²³ *GG*, 11.

²⁴ *GG*, 12.

²⁵ *GG*, 13.

²⁶ *GG*, 13.

beings: never not to be.”²⁷ God’s eternity, on this model, is persistence and it is contrasted with the reality of time which is subject to change.

Jenson’s time studying in Heidelberg under figures such as Peter Brunner, his Lutheran *Doktorvater*, Gerhard von Rad, the Old Testament scholar and theologian whose *Theology of the Old Testament* was making waves in Heidelberg at the time, and Pannenberg, from whom Jenson notes learning about Schelling, Schleiermacher, and Hegel, would provide a crucial foundation for his views on the inadequacy of the Greek metaphysical construal of time and eternity for Christian theology.²⁸ According to Jenson’s reflections later in life, Brunner shaped Jenson’s thinking by his claim that “God’s history with his people is just so his *own* history.”²⁹ Jenson notes that “von Rad’s construal of the Bible’s unity as an historical unity, constituted by leap-frogging promise, fulfillment, new promise, and so on,” was equally formative.³⁰ One of the fundamental agreements Jenson claims he maintained with Pannenberg stemming from his time in Heidelberg was that “if there is one God and he is triune, reality must be historical, history must be a whole with an outcome, and revelation must be God’s inner-historical *anticipation* of that outcome.”³¹ It is clear that Jenson’s descriptions of these influences stand in marked contrast

²⁷ *GG*, 13. Emphasis in original.

²⁸ “A Theological Autobiography,” 49. Indeed, for a time Jenson was sceptical about engaging in *any* form of metaphysics. In his “Preface” to the *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics: Essays on God and Creation*, ed. Stephen John Wright (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), vii, Jenson notes that “[f]or a time I shared the German supposition that the tradition culminating with Hegel was identical with metaphysics as such, and that we were past all that. This was an error on my part, of which I hereby publicly repent.” By the time of *GG*, Jenson had come to see metaphysics as inescapable, while nonetheless assuming the importance of challenging metaphysical systems with the gospel proclamation.

²⁹ “A Theological Autobiography,” 49. Emphasis in original.

³⁰ “A Theological Autobiography,” 49.

³¹ “A Theological Autobiography,” 49. Emphasis mine. Pannenberg appears consistently in the footnotes of Jenson’s early work, including in *GG*. The importance of the language of “anticipation” in Jenson will be explored below but it is clear that Jenson’s use of the concept was heavily influenced by Pannenberg as he himself notes in his 2004 essay “Christ as Culture 3: Christ as Drama” in *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics*: “...the most celebrated development of the notion [of anticipation] was Wolfhart Pannenberg’s” (203).

to his description of the God who is all present, “without past or future,” even if at this point it is unclear how he argues for such positions throughout his theological corpus.

Beyond these immediate influences, however, Jenson’s early (and late) theology also displays indebtedness to the work of Heidegger and one of his most well-known pupils, Bultmann. Throughout his early theology, Jenson appeals to the pressure that Christian theology is under given the modern awareness of “the inescapable temporality of the whole human conversation” or of “the historicity of man’s being” and, as a critical component of that temporality and historicity, the question of the open “future.”³² With the language of the “historicity of man’s being” and with the language of the “future” Heidegger and Bultmann are invoked respectively as points of departure.³³ With respect to the former, only minor substantial engagement is present in Jenson’s corpus. That said, Heidegger’s inquiries into the meaning of being show their marks on Jenson’s writings.³⁴ With respect to Bultmann, Jenson’s autobiographical reflections are illustrative:

The specific point of my departure from Bultmann is worth mentioning, since it continues to move my theology. Faith, said Bultmann, is “openness to the future.” Good, but what is the content of that future? The Bultmannian answer had to be “openness to the future.”

³² *SP*, 103; *KOTHF*, 96. Also, on page 235 of *KOTHF*, Jenson describes this pressure in terms of the “cultural forces” of “natural science and the historical attitude.” Jenson sees the presence of these cultural forces as both “language-building and destroying.” (237) Indeed, in *GG*, Jenson argues that “since the fifteenth century” Christianity has been struggling to maintain the coherence of its story and that, in modernity, it has lost this battle and so has lost “its old language.” (23)

³³ Although, to be sure, such concepts were ‘in the air’ in Europe during Jenson’s time studying in Heidelberg. See, for example, Jurgen Moltmann’s *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 231 (In the German: *Theologie der Hoffnung*, Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1965), where he locates the shift towards a more historical viewpoint in the French Revolution and its aftermath. With respect to the language of the ‘historicity of man’s being,’ one could, of course, point to earlier figures such as Hegel as precursors that are perhaps also foundational. In a late essay, Jenson notes: “In my case, the attraction is Hegel’s acute discernment of the *sort* of sense *history* makes, as against the sort a machine or an inductive system or a non-dissipative system makes.” Cf. “The Great Transformation,” in *The Last Things: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Eschatology*, edited by Carl Braaten and Robert Jenson, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 33-42 (40).

³⁴ As Steve Wright notes in his “Introduction” to the essay collection of Jenson’s work titled *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics*, xi, Jenson stated that even late into his life he continued to take a copy of Heidegger’s *Intro to Metaphysics* with him when he would travel.

One day this regress struck me as absurd, which left me with the abiding question: “What describable future does the gospel open?”³⁵

Below, when summarizing Jenson’s understanding of theology at the end of this chapter, I will return to this statement. For now, these autobiographical comments made by Jenson later in life are enough to indicate some of the key influences driving Jenson’s critique of a metaphysical construal of time and eternity that defines these terms through mutual exclusion. Much of Jenson’s career would involve formulating a doctrine of God that answered the question provoked by rejection of this construal: If God is not the God who is to be identified as the one who is “constant Presence, then what?”³⁶ How the above questions had an impact on Jenson’s reading of Barth’s doctrine of God, and his doctrine of the eternal election of Christ in particular, must now be articulated.

Jenson’s Appreciation and Critique of Barth’s Doctrine of the Electing God

At the outset of *AO*, Jenson begins by arguing that Barth’s Christological doctrine of election offers a “pioneering answer” to the challenge of relating the concrete historical reality of modern human beings to “the final nature of reality.”³⁷ Jenson argues that while in the past human beings had long been accustomed to seeing the fleeting nature of time as anchored in “timeless reality,” this was no longer the dominant view after the mid-nineteenth century. According to Jenson, “[t]he basic fact of our lives is that we do not live from day to day over against a timeless structure of reality, sustained and judged by unchanging certainties.”³⁸ Jenson

³⁵ “Theological Autobiography,” 48. Jenson originally makes this critique of Bultmann in *GG*, 126.

³⁶ *GG*, 48.

³⁷ *AO*, 16, 17.

³⁸ *AO*, 15. In this same context, Jenson calls this a “commonplace observation” and feels no need to “substantiate it.” He does, however, note contemporary figures such as Eliade, Poulet, and Auerbach, who he claims come to the same conclusion (15fn3). As noted above, in *KOTHF*, Jenson is more specific regarding factors that he believes have caused this shift in viewpoints: “the triumph of scientific method and the discovery of the historicity of man’s being.” (96) With respect to the former factor, not a lot needs to be said. With respect to the latter factor, one can

wonders how one could “exhibit, to *this* man, one of these events [of history, namely the life of Jesus Christ,] as finally decisive for all his days and weeks?”³⁹ In many ways the entirety of Jenson’s theological labours can be seen as one vast attempt at answering this question. In *AO*, however, he takes up Barth’s answer, and by calling it “pioneering,” Jenson foreshadows what he will later show to be both his appreciation of Barth’s theology and his conviction that Barth charted a theological course that hit certain dead-ends.

Jenson begins his exegesis of Barth in *AO* by posing three questions which set the basic structure of his analysis of Barth’s doctrine of election:

(1) To what end does God rule human history, and what is the course of the history of salvation? (2) In what sense does God have a history, and what is the relation between this history and ours? That is, *how* does God guide human history? (3) What is the reality to which talk in the Church bears witness?⁴⁰

These questions were, in many ways, already covered in the exegesis of Barth in chapter one above. For the most part, Jenson will answer them along lines similar to what I set out there. The end to which God rules human history—that is, God’s determination of history—is that God “should become one with sinful man in the person of Jesus Christ.”⁴¹ The course of salvation history is the covenant which is established in the eternal decision of God—this decision being identical with Jesus Christ, who in himself is the unity of God and human beings. In this decision, God determines Godself for perdition and humanity for salvation. The “course” of salvation history thus does not only begin with creation. Why? Because God’s eternal decision is not first a decision concerning created reality, but a decision within the very life of the Triune

only assume that in part Hegel is being invoked. Also, see my comments above regarding the influence of Heidegger and his investigation into the meaning of Being.

³⁹ *AO*, 16. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁰ *AO*, 17-18. Emphasis in original.

⁴¹ *AO*, 54.

God—indeed, it is God’s “primal history.”⁴² In determining Godself, God wills a history that will correspond, and so witness to by mirroring or repeating his own “primal history,” his own self-determination.⁴³ The relation, for Barth, between God’s “primal history” and created history is thus the relation between God’s eternal act and its temporal creaturely witness, between God’s self-revealing act—his self-presentation—and its corresponding creaturely representation.⁴⁴ The reality to which talk in the church bears witness is thus the eternal reality of Jesus Christ, the Word of God who, as the Word that turns towards humanity and redeems it, is the unity of God and humanity. All of this should be familiar by now. What is unique to Jenson’s account of Barth, however, is the attention he pays to Barth’s appeal to the term “history” to speak of God’s eternal self-determination. Jenson sees his appeal to this term as Barth’s “pioneering move” with respect to the doctrine of God.⁴⁵

What might it actually mean to speak, though, of God’s “history?” Is not God eternal? And if so, does this kind of talk about God’s history not amount to speaking of an “eternal history?” Is such a locution a contradiction in terms? Jenson notes that, for Barth, the close inter-connection of these two terms is possible because God’s eternity is not characterized negatively in relation to that which characterizes history, namely change through time. Eternity is not defined, that is, as “timelessness,” even if it would be incorrect to equate eternity and time. But then how does one express their relation without equating them? Jenson comments thus on Barth’s treatment of God’s eternity in *CD* II/1:

...God is not timeless [for Barth] but rather the Lord of time. The time which He has in His eternal aliveness is the possibility and model of created time. But there is this fundamental difference between God’s time and created time: In God past, present, and

⁴² *AO*, 78. Accordingly, Jenson on Barth a little further along on in *AO* (110) writes, “It is thus a weak expression to say that God ‘guides the history of salvation’; He *is* that history in its primary and most truly historical reality.”

⁴³ *AO*, 90-92.

⁴⁴ *AO*, 87.

⁴⁵ Much of the material in *AO* analysed below can also be found in *GG*, 123-135.

future are not separated. In merely creaturely time they fall apart into a succession of separate ‘times.’ In God the past is present as the eternally past, as the, so to speak, qualitatively past. For man the past is that which is no more. And so with God that which He rejects is *always* past, qualitatively past. But when this rejection is repeated in man’s time, this past acquires a time of its own...In human time it becomes a succession of events—with a ‘before’ when this triumph has not yet happened.⁴⁶

His [God’s] eternity is at once pre-, super-, and post-temporal...⁴⁷

In perhaps one of his more well-known statements on the topic of God’s eternity, Barth argued that the “theological concept of eternity must be set free from the Babylonian captivity of an abstract opposite to the concept of time.”⁴⁸ Rather than describe eternity as an “abstract opposite” to time, Barth asserts that distinctions like “present, past and future” can be rightly used of God’s eternity when the distinction is made that the difference between God’s eternity and created time is that “[e]ternity simply lacks the fleeting nature of the present, the separation between before and after.”⁴⁹ Time is “first and foremost God’s time,” and as such it is “the prototype and foreordination of [our] time.”⁵⁰ God’s time is, however, “pure duration,” whereas our history is characterized by broken succession.⁵¹

How does this relation of eternity and time relate to eternal election? For Barth, to speak of God’s eternal election or decision is not to speak of an event of the “eternal past” (*ewige Vergangenheit*).⁵² Predestination is not “an exhausted work” but rather “a work which still takes place in all its fulness to-day” as a “happening;” as “spirit and life;” as the “event” and “act”

⁴⁶ *AO*, 61-62. Emphasis in original. Barth puts it this way: “...it is a poor and short-sighted view to understand God’s eternity only from the standpoint that it is the negation of time...In it and from it, in and from eternity everything is which is, including all beginning, succession and end. To that extent it is and has itself beginning, succession and end.” *CD II/1*, 610.

⁴⁷ *AO*, 76.

⁴⁸ *CD II/1*, 611.

⁴⁹ *CD II/1*, 613.

⁵⁰ *CD II/1*, 611, 613.

⁵¹ *CD II/1*, 608ff.

⁵² *CD II/2*, 181. The language of “eternal past” will become a key polemical phrase for Jenson in his analysis of Barth in *GG* and in the construction of his own dogmatic alternative.

which is the “principle and essence of all happening everywhere.”⁵³ At this point, one might rightly ask: how can eternal election be said to ‘happen?’ Put differently, how can God’s eternity be so described as to ground it in language so rooted in the human experience of “time” and “history?” Jenson provides further insight on these matters through an analysis of Barth’s use of the term “history” (*Geschichte*). What, besides being a reality involving some kind of configuration of time (pure duration in the case of God or broken succession for fallen humanity), is history, for Barth? Appealing to a passage from Barth’s doctrine of creation, Jenson notes that Barth’s fundamental conception of history is “self-transcendence” made possible “in confrontation with another” in time, a conception that Jenson himself endorses.⁵⁴ Where does Barth derive such a definition of history? Surely not from a general conception of history. Would this not be tantamount to natural theology? Jenson’s answer: Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is the doctrinal foundation of such a claim.⁵⁵ Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity presents God as “eminently historical being” inasmuch as all the aforementioned aspects to this definition of history or historical being are present in God as God’s very being. The difference, then, between God’s “historical being” and our being in history is that while God “pre-eminently *becomes*” in God’s own “interpersonal history,” we transcend ourselves only in encounter with

⁵³ *CD* II/2, 183-184, 186.

⁵⁴ *AO*, 74-75. In “CDH,” 303fn147, Jenson calls this a “fine” definition of history. The passage Jenson refers to is as follows: “The history of a being begins, continues and is completed when something other than itself and transcending its own nature encounters it, approaches it and determines its being in the nature proper to it, so that it is compelled and enabled to transcend itself in response and in relation to this new factor. (III/2, 189; 158)” Those who hear echoes of Hegel here are not mistaken. In a telling passage from *The Triune Identity*, 123, Jenson notes that Hegel defined spirit “as the relation between self and not-self, which just so is the being of the self.” The key difference, according to Jenson, between Barth and Hegel, is the object of the “not-self” in this formulation. Barth, says Jenson, “put *Jesus* in place of Hegel’s ‘world...’” (136).

⁵⁵ For the similar account of Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity as the basis for his claims about God’s “history,” see *GG*, 128-129.

another; while “God has time,” “we are had by time;” while God “*is* communion,” we only have or fail to have communion.⁵⁶ Jenson summarizes his understanding of Barth accordingly:

...God’s being as the Triune is itself a history, the history of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit among themselves. But more important for our considerations, all of His works outside Himself are but the overflow of this eternal animation of God, and therefore are also history.⁵⁷

God is an eminently historical being in the concreteness of God’s triune being as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Humans are historical beings inasmuch as they are created in the image of God.

Jenson notes that the particularly modern notion of historical being that Barth appeals to here could indeed be used to indict Barth for using a general definition of history to define the triune God. Given Barth’s concerns to avoid natural theology, this would indeed be a major indictment.

Jenson notes, however, that he is “prepared to argue that the contemporary concern for history...is a secularized version of an insight of faith” and that Barth should not be so indicted.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ *AO*, 75-76. Emphasis in original. Here, with these descriptions, it is hard to not hear echoes of Hegel’s discussion of “Divine Self-Determination and Representation” in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion, Vol II: Determinate Religion*, 3 Volumes. Ed. Peter C. Hodgson, trans. R.F. Brown, P.C. Hodgson, and J. M Stewart with the assistance of H.S. Harris. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007–8), 565, where he writes, “God is the absolute subject, which remains the absolutely first. Here the fundamental definition of God is this: subjectivity that relates itself to itself.” While Barth and Jenson clearly approach the topic of divine self-determination on different terms, the self-relating of the “absolute subject” which Hegel posits may well be a source of inspiration for both. Indeed, one of the concepts that Jenson will affirm with significant modification, is that of process thinker Charles Hartshorne, namely “dipolar theism.” According to Jenson, dipolar theism asserts that “God has relatedness and absoluteness as two poles of his being.” (*GG*, 149) The key, for Jenson, is that where process theology identifies “the Son with the world” and so makes God’s relation to the world a part of God’s absoluteness, his own project seeks to make “God’s relatedness...first his innertrinitarian relatedness” such that “*this* relatedness is his absoluteness over against all other being.” (*GG*, 149, 151) In taking this route, Jenson sees himself carrying on Barth’s own approach.

⁵⁷ *AO*, 77. Jenson’s use of the word “overflow” here seems misleading as it implies an emanationist view of God’s relationship to created reality, a view Barth could hardly be said to endorse.

⁵⁸ *AO*, 77fn11. Again, here one can see how Jenson is willing to give some priority to modernity over against those who would see in modernity a fundamental error and seek instead to recover a language not burdened by the problems of modernity. This is not to say, however, that Jenson uncritically *favors* modernity’s questions. While this will be covered more in detail below, it is worthwhile to signal here that Jenson’s willingness to give the benefit of the doubt to “the contemporary concern for history” is part and parcel of what he will later claim is one of the decisive things he learned from Barth, namely, that “systematic theology is willy-nilly metaphysics, to be engaged on a *level* field with such as Aristotle or Hegel.” In other words, history may be a particularly “modern” concern, especially in Hegel’s usage. But, to make history, even in a Hegelian frame, a theological concern need not imply *favoring* ‘Hegelian’ theology over against the tradition. See “Theological Autobiography, to Date,” 50. Barth

How, according to Jenson, does Barth's account of God's triunity relate to his doctrine of Jesus Christ's eternal election? In *CD II/2*, the eternal triune history is articulated in terms of the concreteness of the eternal decision of God to be for the human Jesus of Nazareth. God's triune history is the "model and source of our time" precisely in that it is a decision for one human's history with God from all eternity.⁵⁹ God's primal history is, to return to the language examined in chapter one, God's self-determination and that self-determination includes the determination of all created reality outside of Godself. For Barth, a Christian doctrine of God that wishes to assert God's predestining activity must do so in terms of the "actual relationship in which God has placed Himself."⁶⁰ According to Barth, the determination of creation outside of God is ordered according to this relationship and this relationship has a form and a name from all eternity: the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. This relationship, elected by the triune God from all eternity, thus establishes God's relationship to humanity before the foundation of the world. As Barth powerfully puts it: "The being of God is His [Jesus Christ's] being, and similarly the being of man is originally His being."⁶¹ In the eternal decision—the "primal history" of God to be for the human Jesus—creation is determined for redemption. The determination of creation, in other words, rests upon an entirely prior and effective reality: the pre-existence of Jesus Christ in the bosom of God.

himself made comments that corroborate Jenson's claim. In a conversation recounted by Busch in his biography of Barth, Barth speaking with pastors and lay people from the Pfalz in 1953, maintained that "As Christians we must have the freedom to let the most varied ways of thinking run through our heads. For example, I can entertain elements of Marxism without becoming a Marxist... Today we are offered existentialism, and it too doubtless has important elements... I myself have a certain weakness for Hegel and am always fond of doing a bit of 'Hegeling.' As Christians we have the freedom to do this... I do it eclectically." Busch, *Karl Barth*, 387. While Barth was fond of 'Hegeling,' he also noted his particular concerns with Hegel in his *Protestant Theology*, 304 where he complained that Hegel finally made God "his own prisoner." In this context, Barth also notes that Hegel's failure was that he lacked an appropriate understanding of "double predestination."

⁵⁹ *AO*, 75.

⁶⁰ *CD II/2*, 7.

⁶¹ *CD II/2*, 94. Here is, one can see, a similar move made as was made with respect to the concept of time above: where time is first "God's time" before it is created time, the being of man is originally God's being.

Here, for Jenson, the question of the nature of this pre-existence arises: how does Jesus Christ exist before his life in time?⁶² As far as Jenson is concerned, Barth affirms the eternal pre-existence of the life-history of Jesus Christ which just is “the self-humiliation of the Son of God” and “the elevation of the Son of man” accomplished in God’s eternal self-determination.⁶³

Jenson refers to Barth’s claim that

[b]etween the eternal Godhead of Christ which needs no election and His elected humanity, there is a third [*Drittes*] possibility...[a]nd that is the being of Christ in the beginning with God, the act of the good-pleasure of God by which the fulness of the Godhead is allowed to dwell in Him, the covenant which God made with Himself and which is for that reason eternal, the oath which God swore by Himself in the interests of man.⁶⁴

Jenson states the potential consequences of such a view of Christ’s pre-existence in the starkest possible terms:

Everything that happened in Jesus Christ’s history on earth happened in eternity, and in God’s pretemporal eternity at that.⁶⁵

⁶² It lies beyond the scope of this study to fully address the debate in Barth studies in America concerning this question. Jenson’s interpretation could be seen in many respects (although not all) to accord with what is typically seen as the “revisionist” interpretation of Barth on this question (most often associated with the work of Bruce McCormack) inasmuch as Jenson asserts that Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity and its specific relation to *CD II/2* involved him in developing a novel ontology of God.

⁶³ *AO*, 79.

⁶⁴ *AO*, 107. The phrase “third possibility” in the English translation is a rendering of only one German word: “*drittes*.” In Jenson’s text, instead of “possibility” he supplies the word “reality” to make sense of what “third” Barth is speaking of here, namely the “pre-existent Jesus.” This “third” possibility or reality is the basis for why Barth could say in his exegesis of John 1 in *CD II/2*, that the Word that was in the beginning with God was not an abstract Word but Jesus Christ. Barth notes: “we have no need to project anything into eternity [i.e. a human name or being], for at this point [the beginning] eternity is time, i.e., the eternal name has become a temporal name, and the divine name a human.” (*CD II/2*, 98)

⁶⁵ *AO*, 78-79. With the introduction of the language of “pretemporal,” confusion may arise based on Barth’s doctrine of God’s eternity as “pure duration.” Jenson clarifies (*AO*, 73fn7), again with reference to Barth’s account of God’s eternity in *CD II/1*: “As pretemporal it [God’s act of election] is also supertemporal and posttemporal...Nevertheless eternity is not time, nor are the three ‘times’ of eternity the same. It makes a difference with which aspect of His eternity an event is connected. (II/1, 720f.; 638ff.) Election is pretemporal, and only as such also supertemporal and posttemporal. (II/2, 201; 183)” Or, in *CD II/2*, 183: “It is true, of course, that in that eternity there can be an ‘earlier’ as there can be a ‘now’ and a ‘later,’ for eternity is certainly not the negation but the boundary of time as such. But for this very reason ‘then’ cannot mean only ‘earlier.’ When we speak of God’s eternity we must recognise and accept what is ‘earlier’ as something also present and future.”

There is much that could be and needs to be unpacked in such a statement. Does not all of this imply that temporal history is really just a repetition of something that already happened ‘elsewhere?’ As will become clear, this is indeed one of Jenson’s principle concerns with Barth’s doctrine of the eternal election of Christ. Jenson clarifies, however, that he does not think that Barth intends to posit the existence of a “second world, very like this one, in which everything that happens here has an eternal double.”⁶⁶ Why not? Jenson argues that, for Barth, since God’s eternal triune history is the model and source of our own precisely as directed towards a particular human history, it cannot itself be a “second world” apart from our own and neither can any notion of it, strictly speaking, be known as the history of decision that it is apart from creation. But then, what is the relationship between God’s eternal history and our own? This is where Jenson identifies ambiguity in Barth’s presentation. On the one hand, Barth wants God’s history to be wholly God’s own transcendent reality and, on the other hand, Barth wants God’s history to be God’s history with us in Jesus Christ. The problem is, how is Barth to relate them to each other without giving into a form of the abstract *decretum absolutum*? Jenson notes that Barth articulates the relation by simply stating that “God has acted on our behalf from eternity *and then* in the center of temporal history” and in both cases, *in* Jesus Christ.⁶⁷ Jenson perceives ambiguity in the nature of the ‘and’ in the above clause as Barth’s way of affirming God’s history with us while also, as he puts it in *GG*, “leaving a loophole for God’s transcendence.”⁶⁸ Why the pejorative word “loophole” here? Jenson sees the ‘and’ as a problem for Barth because the form of transcendence Barth potentially makes available through this ‘and’ could still be the ‘abstract’ transcendence or eternity that he wishes to avoid. Where Barth sought to avoid the

⁶⁶ *AO*, 83.

⁶⁷ *AO*, 84. Jenson here refers to *CD* II/2, 508; 458. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁸ *GG*, 154.

abstractness of Calvin's *decretum absolutum*, Jenson wonders whether Barth's decision to have Jesus Christ take the place of the absolute decree might amount to the same abstraction inasmuch as it posits "a 'third' level between time and eternity" in which God acts definitively on our behalf in advance of any created reality.⁶⁹ It is as if Jenson asks, "what is this 'third' reality and is it really identical with the history of Jesus Christ in Palestine?" If it is identical, then there is indeed an "eternal double" at play. If it is not identical, however, then can Barth really have avoided the abstraction of the eternal decree?

To answer the question of this "third" reality and its relation to created time, Jenson inquires about the status of the humanity of Jesus in Barth. Jenson notes quite rightly that, for Barth, the history of Jesus of Nazareth is "the *implementation and revelation* of" God's eternal decision and that both of these terms are important.⁷⁰ The human history of Jesus of Nazareth is the revelation of God's eternal decision inasmuch as it reflects or mirrors (*wiederspiegelt*) God's eternal decision.⁷¹ This language should be immediately striking given the analysis of chapter one, where it was established that the history of Israel and the church (as well as the reality of post-Biblical Judaism) was in its own way, according to Barth, a mirror and reflection of the eternal election of Jesus Christ. According to Jenson, however, Barth also thinks of the humanity of Jesus in the same way, though with a crucial difference: in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, his humanity is the "primary" creaturely sign of God's revelation and this because in Jesus' case, he "is both a sign and 'at the same time the thing signified.'"⁷² Jesus of Nazareth, the royal human,

⁶⁹ *AO*, 163.

⁷⁰ *AO*, 85. Emphasis in original. Barth uses this language of Jesus as "mirroring" God's eternal decision in various places. Jenson mentions one in particular at *CD* IV/2, 200; 179.

⁷¹ *AO*, 85. Jenson's references to Barth's use of this language are given variously from II/2, and IV/2.

⁷² *AO*, 90. In the particular context of *CD* II/2, 62; 58, Jenson's argument that Barth calls Jesus's humanity the "primary creaturely sign" of God's revelation seems to be an interpretation of Barth's claim that Jesus represents the "special case" or "goal" which all other biblical figures before him attested as signs. Barth's argument is that Jesus is the sign that bounds all other signs in that he is the sign that is also the thing signified. The English translation of

“exists analogously to the mode of existence of God (*existiert als... analog zur Existenzweise Gottes*).”⁷³ The mode of existence of God, however, is the Triune God’s “primal history.” Jesus of Nazareth is the analogous existence to the mode of existence of God as the one human who implements God’s eternal decision by revealing that decision in his own history.⁷⁴ Jenson states Barth’s dialectic in all of its complexity:

On the one hand the man Jesus Christ eternally pre-exists as the eternal decision in which God is who He is. On the other hand He is ‘merely’ the revealer and reproduction of this decision. But the ‘merely’ is out of place, for Jesus’ earthly role as mirror and revealer is an essential expression of the nature of the eternal decision—which is exactly that such a mirroring of itself exist!...Christ’s temporal history is indeed the mirror of His eternal history, but it is also its purpose!⁷⁵

Given the above, what is the relationship between God’s primal history and our history? Jenson argues that, for Barth, the relationship is one between reality and appearance; between inner reality and outer manifestation:

Despite its inner differentiation into human history as such and the special history of revelation, human historical reality is as a whole *the appearance* outside of God and the reflection back to Him of the glorious love which eternally happens in the life of the One who unites Himself with man in Jesus Christ.⁷⁶

In light of this answer, Jenson summarizes his presentation of Barth’s pioneering answer to the question of “modern man” thus:

To put it somewhat crudely, Barth has solved the problem of the disappearance of the timeless by retaining the general structure of classical theology by putting the historical event of Jesus’ existence in the place formerly occupied by changeless ‘Being.’ The eternal occurrence of Jesus Christ’s life is the basis of all life. It then reveals itself especially in Jesus’ own life. Thus it joins Him and us together. Or better, there is no need for us to be ‘bound together,’ no need for a middle link, for Barth proclaims the historical event itself as ‘Being’ as the eternal basis of all life. Thus where ‘is’ stood there now stands ‘becomes.’ Where ‘Being’ stood there now stands Jesus Christ. Where

“special case” in this context appears in the original as *einen Fall für sich*, which literally translates as “a case on its own” or, “a singular case.” Perhaps this is where Jenson gets the language of “primary” from.

⁷³ *CD IV/2*, 185; 166.

⁷⁴ *AO*, 85.

⁷⁵ *AO*, 91.

⁷⁶ *AO*, 111. Emphasis mine.

‘Beauty,’ ‘Goodness,’ ‘Truth’ in the abstract stood there now stands the life-history of Jesus. To be is to become, to become a brother of Jesus Christ, to share in His story.⁷⁷

It is important to note Jenson’s affirmations of Barth’s doctrine of election. He affirms Barth’s emphasis on the Gospel being fundamentally about the “grace” of God and so also, tentatively, affirms Barth’s supralapsarianism.⁷⁸ The Gospel of Jesus Christ, as Jenson says in *AO* and will repeat throughout his career, is not an emergency measure, not a “second choice in view of the failure of an original plan for a natural perfecting of creation.”⁷⁹ Reconciliation is not, for Jenson, “God’s reaction to sin.”⁸⁰ Jenson also affirms Barth’s insistence that the life of Jesus Christ is “an *eternal* event...the transcendent presupposition and basis of all other happenings.”⁸¹

As has been shown above, however, these claims require explication, and it is in the process of providing that explication that Jenson diverges from Barth. In order to make plain those divergences, it is instructive to return to a key statement made by Barth in *CD II/2* which was cited in chapter one:

In the whole of the divine work...it is really a question of only *a single act of divine rule*. This act is, of course, differentiated and flexible within itself. But it is not arrested or broken. It fulfils itself *step by step*, and at each step it is irresistible.⁸²

As Jenson begins his critical evaluation of Barth’s doctrine of election, his primary complaint centers on the way that Barth’s account of divine election seems “to have everything in its place” in advance with respect to the knowledge of God’s rule of history.⁸³ Jenson wonders whether one can, with Barth, “depict the long history of God with man as a history comprehended in one

⁷⁷ *AO*, 140.

⁷⁸ *AO*, 146, 158-159.

⁷⁹ *AO*, 148.

⁸⁰ *AO*, 150.

⁸¹ *AO*, 150. Emphasis in original.

⁸² *CD II/2*, 90. Emphasis mine.

⁸³ *AO*, 151.

great decision of God,” without admitting that “history is rather more complicated and paradoxical.”⁸⁴ Here one might rightly see Jenson showing his Lutheran concern about a “theology of glory” that is too confident in reason’s ability to discern the invisible things of God.⁸⁵ Jenson thus finds Barth’s answer to his first question, to what end God rules human history, unsatisfactory due to its sheer conceptual clarity. History may be determined for redemption from all eternity by God, but does the Gospel really proclaim that determination as somehow also accomplished in advance in a singular act or decision that can be explained? Jenson worries that Barth’s radical account of the victorious mercy of God—effective from all eternity—threatens inadequately to attest to the real “overcoming” of human rebellion in history and thus also inadequately attest to the wrath of God and the reality of the “old aeon.”⁸⁶ For Jenson, God’s “No” must not be subordinated to God’s “Yes” in such a way as to make the victory of the “Yes” something that can be read, like a “principle” or “explanation” of God’s victory, “back into God’s work of creation.”⁸⁷

Jenson’s basic critique of Barth touches an area of his doctrine that is fundamental: redemption. For Jenson, the danger with Barth’s doctrine of election finally is that it tends to

⁸⁴ *AO*, 151-152. Notably, however, later in his career Jenson would become increasingly suspicious of the language of paradox.

⁸⁵ In this and the following criticisms, Luther’s theses of the 1518 Heidelberg Disputation—especially theses 19 through 24—might help explain some of the inspiration which lies behind Jenson’s critique. Indeed, in his later contribution to the multi-authored volume called *Christian Dogmatics*, Jenson cites approvingly from Luther’s theses 19-20: “...Martin Luther was correct when in 1518 he presented the thesis ‘The true theologian is not the one who comes to see the invisible things of God by thinking about what is created; the true theologian is the one who thinks about the visible and hidden parts of God, having seen them in sufferings and the cross.’” Cf. “The Attributes of God,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, 182.

⁸⁶ *AO*, 154. In “CDH,” Jenson supports this argument through exegesis of the Gospels and the Pauline letters. While the summary of these exegetical arguments will be mentioned, for the specifics, see “CDH,” 223-237.

⁸⁷ *AO*, 156. Again, one can hear Jenson’s worries as they relate to thesis 21 of the Heidelberg Disputation: “A theology of glory calls evil good and good evil. A theology of the cross calls the thing what it actually is.” To be sure, Barth would affirm Luther’s statement, but Jenson worries that his account of the “No” and the “Yes” borders too close to an equation of good and evil: “...God’s will and his un-will, his creating and his not-creating are neither joined nor separated as the inevitable two sides of one coin.” (*AO*, 157) Interestingly, David Bentley Hart critiques Jenson for making evil an essential part of God’s being—an accusation that would be hard to square with the early Jenson’s comments here. See David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 156-166.

present the unity of creation and reconciliation—of God and humanity—as so tied to the eternal, primal history of divine election in which it is accomplished in the pre-existence of Jesus Christ that redemption becomes, in created history, primarily a cognitive event in which creatures become conscious of what is already eternally true.

Referring to Barth's exegesis of John 1, Jenson offers an alternative:

Barth is quite correct in seeing the prologue of John as telling the history of Jesus Christ; what is here presented is a short sketch of the history of the Person who is Jesus Christ. Precisely for this reason we must respect the *narrative* form of the prologue and the clear division of the works of the Logos amongst the 'periods' of his life. There was a 'time' when He was mediator of creation but *not yet* the overcomer of the darkness and the bringer of grace. Then ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο, as an event *succeeding upon* these events. Nor can the history of the Logos be understood as an immanent development. It is a genuine history, whose unity is not given in advance.⁸⁸

Where Jenson wants to avoid positing the unity of creation and redemption "in advance" of the history in which this unity occurs, "Barth," says Jenson, "defines the history in time as the revelation and analogy of eternal history" and so "puts himself in danger of removing reconciliation itself...from our history."⁸⁹ The human history of Jesus of Nazareth threatens to become primarily an "explanation"—we might even say a representation (*Darstellung*)—or "analogy" of reconciliation—a representation of the victory of God's Yes over God's No that happens in reality elsewhere. It is the presence of this "analogy concept" in Barth—what Jenson will later call "the main structural device of his [Barth's] theology"⁹⁰—that finally threatens to

⁸⁸ "CDH," 237. Emphasis in original. It is notable that in this context Jenson provides a positive reference to the concept of the *logos asarkos*, the "word without flesh." As will be shown in the next chapter, in his mature theology he is increasingly suspicious about the use of this concept in Christology. That being said, Jenson's desire to stick to the narrative aspect to the work of the Word of God will remain constant through his career and one could see his later suspicion of the *logos asarkos* as consistent with his desire to speak of the 'periods' of the life of the *logos* which, for the later Jenson, can never involve a period in which the *logos* is identifiable apart from Jesus of Nazareth.

⁸⁹ *AO*, 162-163.

⁹⁰ *GG*, 74. Whether Jenson is correct may be debatable, although there is good evidence that "analogy" and its supporting vocabulary—correspondence, image, model, mirror, representation—is indeed a crucial "structural device" in the *CD*. What is more of a point of debate is whether or not one can *do* Christian theology without some use of analogy.

make Christ's history into "something mightily resembling a metaphysical idea."⁹¹ Barth's theological representation of God thus asserts that the history of the human Jesus Christ is but a representation of "God's own eternal triune being."⁹² Following from that, then, humanity—and here we can say also the "community of God"—is to be understood as an "*image* of Jesus' life in God for his brothers."⁹³ Just as the human Jesus reflects the life of the Triune God, so the community of God reflects Jesus (the primary reflection or sign) to all people. The community's function is thus to help "polish the mirror" for the individuals whose election is also in Jesus Christ.⁹⁴ Here it is important to mention that any modification of Barth on this point necessarily will have a trickle-down effect on his doctrine of the one community and indeed, Jenson's alternative will be shown in the next chapter to entail just such an effect.

Jenson's critique of Barth thus centers on Barth's use of the concept of analogy; or, put in Barth's terms, Jenson rejects the claim that theology is fundamentally a form of the representation of a reality (the Word of God, Jesus Christ) whose history is actualized from all eternity and then revealed in time. In *AO*, Jenson does not elaborate on where he thinks Barth derives his use of analogy from. In *GG*, however, Jenson is much more explicit about the tradition of theological reflection which he believes is the source of Barth's use, as well as the problems he perceives with this tradition. Jenson suggests that the source can be found in the legacy of "dialectical theology."⁹⁵ By "dialectical theology," Jenson has in mind a wide scope:

⁹¹ *AO*, 168. In "CDH," Jenson notes (292n7) that the fact that analogy and knowledge "play a role, and a decisive one, is no problem at all!" The problem, as Jenson sees it, is the "particular role" ("CDH," 260) analogy plays in Barth, which as I have begun to show, is for Jenson the role of mediating the chasm between eternity and time through revealed knowledge. In *KOTHF*, Jenson notes (65fn37) the "necessity of analogy for metaphysics." With this in mind, one could say that Jenson's project is anti-metaphysical in the sense that he seeks a way of saying "God" without using "terms of 'analogy,' 'picture,' 'symbol,' or the like..." (*KOTHF*, 238).

⁹² *GG*, 75.

⁹³ *GG*, 75. Emphasis in original.

⁹⁴ *GG*, 75.

⁹⁵ *GG*, Foreword.

the Western tradition as far back as the pre-Socratics.⁹⁶ In Jenson's depiction of the dialectical tradition, he presents figures like Parmenides, Plato, and Aristotle as expressly religious figures who deal with the problems of death and time and the solution offered by eternal reality.⁹⁷ As was noted at the outset of this chapter, for Jenson these representative figures of the dialectical tradition thus offer a particular construal of the relationship between eternity and time which makes them mutually exclusionary. The "religious quest" of the dialectician is to journey from time to eternity as from illusion into reality. Plato's mantra for this quest is, according to Jenson, "[g]iven the image, we may think our way to the model by dialectic."⁹⁸ For Plato, there is thus a "common term" between image and model—there is a "*resemblance*."⁹⁹ Jenson notes that in the Christian tradition, the doctrine of analogy has been used to locate the common term between God and creatures as "being." God is "Being" and creatures are "beings" inasmuch as they participate in God who just is Being.¹⁰⁰

When applied to Barth's doctrine of eternal election, Plato's mantra is repeated and the classical tradition of analogy employed, says Jenson, but with the crucial difference that "being" is rejected for "relation" and relation is understood concretely with reference to the Christological content of the Gospel: given the revelation of God in the human history of Jesus Christ—the image or representation of God in created time—we may think our way to the

⁹⁶ Describing how Barth's *Romans* commentary draws together key elements of the dialectical tradition and ultimately employs those elements in order to articulate what 'God' means, is one of Jenson's initial tasks in *GG*.

⁹⁷ As noted above in fn22, Jenson was influenced by Jungel in making a connection between Barth's use of analogy and that of the dialectical tradition. With that in mind, it is also helpful to remember that the whole movement of "dialectical theology," which was a source of much debate and controversy in the German intellectual scene in the early and mid-twentieth century, was still "in the air" during Jenson's time in Heidelberg and Basel.

⁹⁸ *GG*, 76. Jenson notes in the same place that one can look at it the other way around too: "Given the model, the statue is its image."

⁹⁹ *GG*, 76. Emphasis in original. In *KOTHF*, Jenson's chapter "Image: Origen" offers a very similar analysis, this time of Origen's use of image language. Jenson credits Plato and the later "Hellenistic Platonism" with giving Origen the conceptual language of image in bridging the "ontological abyss between God and the world..." (33-37; 92-96)

¹⁰⁰ *GG*, 77.

eternal triune life—the model upon which history is founded. Or, to put it in the order Barth demanded: given the reality of the Word of God—Jesus Christ—that turns towards humanity and redeems it (the model), we may think our way to the reality of humanity (the image). The reality of God and the reality of humanity are mediated through the common term of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.¹⁰¹ Mediated how? Through revelation, which just is the whole history of the “Subject Jesus Christ,” the image, mirror, reflection, and representation of God.¹⁰² For Barth, however, it is important to remember that this history

was revealed for a first time in [Jesus’s] resurrection. To that extent it unquestionably belongs to a definite time. It has happened. But in so far as it has happened as this history, the act of God, it has not ceased to be history and therefore to happen. As this history it is not enclosed or confined in that given time... ‘Jesus Christ lives’ means that this history takes place to-day in the same way as did that yesterday—indeed, as the same history. Jesus Christ speaks and acts and rules—it all means that this history is present...Does it only take place to-day, in the present?...No, it has a backward reference. It took place then, at its own time, before we were, when our present was still future.”¹⁰³

In this particular context, Barth is concerned to avoid what he saw as a problem in the “older Christology” (Barth refers here to the Christology of “the Middle ages and the Early Church, but also...[the Christology] of both Lutherans and Reformed”) that asserted a change in Jesus Christ in the event of exaltation, such that “the present and coming Jesus Christ” was seen as “basically formless, or in a form which can only be briefly sketched, the details being left to pious phantasy.”¹⁰⁴ In full accordance with his understanding of Jesus as the expected Messiah and the fulfillment of the covenant, Barth’s basic question to the older Christology was: “How can that which God did in Jesus Christ yesterday not be His act to-day and to-morrow?”¹⁰⁵ Jenson thus

¹⁰¹ *GG*, 77.

¹⁰² *CD IV/2*, 107.

¹⁰³ *CD IV/2*, 107.

¹⁰⁴ *CD IV/2*, 106-107.

¹⁰⁵ *CD IV/2*, 110.

notes that, for Barth, “Jesus’ time... ‘cannot become the past and has no future at all before it...’”¹⁰⁶

Jenson’s basic concern, however, is the extent to which Barth’s doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ, makes the “history of Jesus Christ” fundamentally something that happens ‘elsewhere’ first and only later is revealed as the true reality. In this case, the divine “overcoming” of sin is in danger of becoming reducible to the defeat of “ignorance,” as what occurs in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the revelation of what has always been the case in God’s eternity and so as that which is always already ‘present.’¹⁰⁷ Jenson is clear that he does not think that Barth intends revelation to be only redemptive knowledge, but notes that it is nonetheless a conclusion that follows from Barth’s theology inasmuch as it makes use of the concept of analogy in the wake of Plato.

How does the above summary of Jenson’s concerns about Barth’s doctrine of election relate to Barth’s key categories in §33 (and as a result in §34)? A more detailed answer to this will follow below after considering Jenson’s alternative to Barth. For now, however, there is enough evidence to say that, for Jenson, the issue does not lie *per se* in Barth’s claim that God determines Godself to become one with humanity, a determination that means that God takes the form of the “crucified.” The issue is, primarily, that Jenson wants to abandon Barth’s articulation of the relationship between God’s eternal self-determination and the determination of created time through the terms of “analogy.” If Jesus Christ is the unity, determination, and form of God and humanity, then he is not so, for Jenson, in a “timeless” eternity (which Barth clearly intended to reject) and neither is he so in a “third” level of reality that is then repeated or revealed in time. Rather:

¹⁰⁶ *GG*, 153.

¹⁰⁷ *AO*, 158.

The unity of creation and reconciliation is the unity of one Person's history. Therefore it cannot be regarded as given in advance. His history cannot be regarded as the implementation of what is really already accomplished with the first event of that history [i.e. eternal election]. Rather the unity of His history is a truly historical unity, i.e. a unity which *occurs* in the succession of the deeds of which His history is composed... That the agent of creation *is* the Reconciler is a unity which only happens in the event in which He *becomes* the Reconciler. It is a unity given in the overcoming, in the 'nevertheless' which is the history of the Crucified and Risen.¹⁰⁸

And further:

God's will is one and eternal. But the oneness of God's eternal will is nevertheless not given from all eternity but is achieved by God *within temporal history*. It is constituted in the *succession* of God's decisions, in particular in the succession of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. It is an eternal unity achieved in time. *The unity of God's one eternal will is an event which occurred in time at the Cross*. It is this one drastic sentence which separates us from Barth.¹⁰⁹

These statements, coming right at the end of *AO*, reveal Jenson's concerns about the construal of time and eternity in Barth (and, of course, the Western tradition preceding him). These statements also, however, leave many unanswered questions.¹¹⁰ What type of relationship between God's eternity and created time is implied in Jenson's claim that the unity of God's eternal will is an event that occurred "in time at the Cross?" For Barth, the unity of God's will is an event that occurred as God's eternal decision, which is the immediate overcoming of the "No" by God's "Yes," which is then fulfilled "step by step" (successively) in time, but principally in the form of a witness to and repetition of Jesus Christ's pre-existent reality. Jenson's statement that this eternal unity is *constituted* in the succession of God's decisions in created history thus

¹⁰⁸ *AO*, 155-156. Emphasis in original. In this quotation, Jenson's claim that "there was a time when He was the Agent of Creation but not yet the Reconciler" is defended by him through appeal to concept of the *logos asarkos* (the word without flesh or the "not yet incarnate Word"). Jenson notes that Barth rejected this concept (167fn10) in favor of a notion of the eternal pre-existence of the God-man. Jenson too would, later in his career, engage in more intense criticisms of the concept of the *logos asarkos*, but would not return to Barth's account of the pre-existence of the God-man in quite the same way as Barth. Instead, as will become clear below, his alternate account of God's "temporal eternity" will be his proposed solution to the problem. See "Once More on the Logos *asarkos*" in *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics: Essays on God and Creation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 119-123.

¹⁰⁹ *AO*, 165. Emphasis mine.

¹¹⁰ This is, in part, due to the nature of the dissertation upon which *AO* was based. The dissertation was primarily an exegesis of Barth, with a minor exegetical alternative (most of which did not make it into *AO*) based on several New Testament texts.

charts a radically divergent path from Barth, even as it no doubt capitalizes on Barth's claim that one can rightly speak of past, present, and future in relation to God's eternity.

For Jenson, God's eternity is no longer, as with Barth, simultaneity of past, present, and future—what Barth called “pure duration”—but rather is truly characterized by “succession” and more than one decision. “We must be very careful,” notes Jenson, “in speaking of ‘God's decree’ in the singular...He chose the Crucifixion and He chose the Resurrection.”¹¹¹ Recall that, for Barth, God's eternal decision was twofold in that he chose judgment for Godself and mercy for humanity in the one person of Jesus Christ. This judgment and mercy were teleologically ordered, with judgment being the form of God's work in history that passes away and mercy being the form of God's work in history that comes. While agreeing with Barth that God's judgment and mercy are “two steps in one history,” Jenson nevertheless wants to maintain the genuine “succession” of these “two steps” in God's history with created reality. Where Barth's account of eternal election declared God's judgment overcome immediately by God's mercy, Jenson wants such an overcoming to be achieved through a truly successive movement between God and creation not given in any way in advance.

But what, then, of *predestination*? For Jenson, “[t]he ‘pre-’ in ‘predestination’” is not to be understood as the pre-existent reality of the history of redemption, but rather

God's declaration that what He does in Christ is His absolute will for us...It declares the final validity of the will of God in Christ by revealing that the God who there reveals Himself is the same God who has done all that went before, and that He has now brought it about that all that went before leads to this.¹¹²

Here, with the language of succession (before, now, after) in God's relationship to creation, is one of the principle areas where Jenson appropriates a significant aspect to Barth's doctrine of

¹¹¹ *AO*, 164.

¹¹² *AO*, 159.

God while also diverging radically from it. Jenson appropriates Barth's doctrine of God's triune eternity inasmuch as he affirms with Barth that God's eternity is not "timelessness."¹¹³ He affirms with Barth that God's eternity has "order and succession," "before and after," because the unity of the triune God is "in movement."¹¹⁴ Jenson sees Barth as pioneering in these claims but then sees Barth nonetheless upholding a traditional understanding of the eternity-time contradiction in the end through his use of the analogy-concept as the bridge between God's reality and our own. This, according to Jenson, potentially compromises Barth's doctrine of redemption, making it a "grandiose story of God and man [that] seems to float away into the heavens, leaving us gazing up as spectators of our own drama."¹¹⁵ At this point, whether or not Jenson's criticisms of Barth's use of analogy are warranted must be left undecided, for what is of first importance is to turn to Jenson's alternative: a doctrine of God in which he proposes to move past his "reliance on Barth."¹¹⁶ It is in this alternative to Barth's doctrine that Jenson sets the stage for what, later in his career, will be his alternative theology of Israel and Judaism.

Narrating the Story of the God Who Justifies the Ungodly: Dropping the Analogy-Concept

Near the end of his analysis of Barth's doctrine of God in *GG*, Jenson summarizes his understanding of where Barth's pioneering move hits a dead end:

Barth needs a way to say at once both that God is and is not in Jesus, both that the world is redeemed and lost, both that we already are what we are in Jesus' story and are not yet. The dialectic is indeed unavoidable to any Christian theology. Barth has found no way to sustain the dialectic to the end as a *temporal* dialectic.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ *CD* II/1, 612.

¹¹⁴ *CD* II/1, 615.

¹¹⁵ *GG*, 151. As will become clear in the latter part of this chapter and throughout the next, the use of language like "story" and "drama" become increasingly important for Jenson's theology.

¹¹⁶ *GG*, 156.

¹¹⁷ *GG*, 154. Emphasis in original.

Jenson's use of the phrase "temporal dialectic" is meant to express, in a nutshell, his understanding of the promise and problem with Barth's doctrine of God. Barth, on this view, begins with an account of the dialectical relationship between eternity and time in such a way that accords both realities a temporal structure. The dialectic is one between God's triune 'time' and created time. The 'time' of the eternal triune life is the model and basis of created time and so brackets it or sets its boundary. However, Barth's account of God's time as simultaneity or pure duration ultimately makes God's triune time an "eternal present" bounding all time and so itself describable only with reference to one or at most two terms of time. The eternal present ultimately brings what has always been the case (the past):

The temporality of the triune God is thoroughly worked out by Barth: 'He is the Beginning, without whom there is no Middle and no End; the Middle, that can only come from the Beginning and without whom there would be no End; the End that comes altogether from the Beginning.'[...] Yet in this very passage, the shadow of religious direction to the past, of the 'analogous' notion of eternity, is dark and well-defined. The 'Middle' and the 'End' are rightly said to come from the 'Beginning'—but nothing is said about the Beginning and Middle going toward the End. Without the Father there would be no Son or Spirit—but it is not said that without the Spirit the Father and the Son would not occur. In every nuance of his formulations, Barth displays the doctrine that the Father is 'the fount of the Trinity.' But that the Trinity also has a goal in the Spirit remains a mere occasional assertion. This gathering to the past, to the Beginning in which *all has already been decided*, pervades all Barth's thinking.¹¹⁸

At this point, it is as if Jenson asks: has not God's triune time become timeless eternity or has not the Trinity become a binity? Has not the triune goal (the Spirit) become so subsumed by the origin as to not play much of a role at all?¹¹⁹ As Jenson sees it, once the 'temporality' of God's triunity loses one or more of its terms, something needs to take its place and it is then that

¹¹⁸ *GG*, 173. Emphasis mine. It is perhaps a little unfortunate that Jenson did not attend more concretely to some of Barth's concerns with too strong an emphasis on appeals to the "End," along with his stated desire to hold together all three terms when speaking of God's eternity. See, for example, Barth's powerful reflections on the social and political factors that influenced his cautious perspective over-against a theology too focused on "eschatology" in *CD* II/1, 631-638.

¹¹⁹ Jenson explores the deficiencies of Barth's doctrine of the Spirit in his article, "You Wonder Where the Spirit Went," *Pro Ecclesia* 2, no.3 (Summer 1993): 296-304.

analogy (and its attendant terms: image, mirror, representation) stands in as the conceptual mechanism by which to bridge the eternal past with the past, present, and future of created time.¹²⁰ For Jenson, this is problematic for at least two reasons that should be clear by now: first, for Jenson, the use of analogy threatens to introduce the notion that redemption is a drama which occurs “in the abstract dwelling of the eternal God” and so, by implication, not in reality in our time but only in appearance.¹²¹ To make it beyond appearance, dialectic and analogy become the redemptive route from image to reality. Second, and more crucially for Jenson, this redemptive route is at base the route given in Greek religion, whereby humanity strives to return by an “inborn dynamic” (*Eros*) towards an original perfection.¹²² This, says Jenson, is precisely what Paul preached against in testifying to the God who justifies the ungodly, namely works-righteousness.¹²³ For Jenson, the justification of the ungodly does not occur on the basis of or in connection with something “inborn”—here we might say something “pre-determined”—but through a new and concrete action that draws the person towards what they are not-yet. Justification finally occurs as a promise for what is to come.¹²⁴

What, then, is the solution? What form of theological language can attest to redemption as really a drama that occurs in our history? Jenson offers a precis of his proposal for a doctrine of God after Barth:

If we drop the notion of analogy, we must try to understand God’s transcendence within the terms of time itself. We will have to understand the radicalness of God’s temporality as a certain pattern of that temporality itself. It is clear how this is to be done. We will

¹²⁰ Indeed, Jenson notes (*GG*, 86) that, for Barth, the doctrine of analogy is “*but a form of the doctrine of the Spirit.*” Emphasis in the original. The problem, as Jenson sees it, however, is that the doctrine of analogy is not a form of doctrine that can adequately express the role of the Spirit; indeed, Jenson sees analogy as, in certain respects, replacing the Spirit’s role.

¹²¹ *GG*, 151. Other opposing terms could be used here, such as “constitute” and “manifest.” Jenson is concerned that the theological use of analogy threatens to make redemption something that is fundamentally *constituted* in God’s eternity and then ‘merely’ *manifested* in time.

¹²² *KOTHF*, 93.

¹²³ *KOTHF*, 93.

¹²⁴ *KOTHF*, 233.

understand God's freedom over against what he is for and with us as his *futurity* to what he already is with and for us. And since Barth is indeed right in seeing God's freedom as one side of his deity, we will define God's deity as his futurity to himself and so to us. We will have to find a new way to understand the continuities of God's reality and work in time: the oneness of the three modes of God, the coherence of what God is apart from Christ with what he is in Christ, of what we have been with what we will be...Again, it is fairly clear what categories offer themselves: communication, utterance, language. We will learn to understand God as an *hermeneutic event*, as a Word.¹²⁵

Before this chapter ends, two questions remain that must be explored. First, what is the theological basis of Jenson's claim that God's deity is his "futurity to himself and so to us?" Secondly, and most important for our analysis, how does Jenson's appeal to "futurity" relate to and depart from Barth's key assumptions about theology and his specific terminology in *CD II/2*, §33 and §34?

Jenson justifies his claim that God's deity is his "futurity to himself and so to us" in relation to two theological foci: the resurrection and the role of the Spirit in the life of the Trinity.¹²⁶ Jesus's resurrection is not, for Jenson, the revelation of a completed transcendent history, as he contends it is for Barth. Recall that for Barth the biblical history could be divided into two times: the time of expectation and the time of recollection. This account of history was based upon a particular form of the promise-fulfilment construal of the unity of the scriptures. After Jesus's resurrection, the community no longer expected but rather recollected the revelation of Jesus Christ which was the revelation of the divine history which bracketed and determined human history—the humiliation of God and the exaltation of humanity in Jesus Christ. There is a certain sense in which the promise-fulfillment schema holds true for Jenson. Indeed, it is crucial, for Jenson, that Jesus' resurrection be recollected by the community as the fulfillment of the past. The key question for Jenson, however, is how Jesus' resurrection is to be

¹²⁵ *GG*, 155. Emphasis in original.

¹²⁶ The following exegesis is based on an engagement with *GG*, 157-179, supplementing occasionally with material from *SP*, 48-61.

remembered in this way. Jenson suggests that rather than the New Testament witnesses to Jesus' resurrection testifying to that event as "pure fulfillment" to be remembered, the witnesses testify to God's transcendent presence in the risen Jesus as the "*pure promise*" of "what is not yet."¹²⁷

The risen Christ, Jenson could thus be interpreted to say, is remembered as the fulfillment of the past in the present inasmuch as he appears as the concrete promise of the future. The resurrection is the appearance of fulfilled reality precisely as the appearance of the future. For this reason, Jenson says:

The risen Jesus is elusive because he is not present but future: his appearances are appearances of what is not yet.¹²⁸

Jesus appeared to the witnesses of the Resurrection as what he was not yet, but would be: the Lord of the End...Jesus' appearances as risen were the revelation of the God whose transcendence is his futurity to what already is.¹²⁹

The potential problem, for Jenson, with Barth's account of the resurrection is that it is in danger of explaining the overcoming of our alienation from God by means of the "religious defense" in which we seek security from the unpredictable future by projecting "a timeless Present which already is all that will be."¹³⁰ Barth's account of God's eternal self-determination, on this reading, is just such a timeless present, with all human existence—including Jesus of Nazareth's—being an image or representation of that self-determination in its twofold form. For Jenson, the transcendent God of the gospel heals the alienation of humanity from God, not in that God reveals and proclaims an already accomplished eternal determination of reality, but in that

¹²⁷ *GG*, 158. Emphasis in original. In *SP*, 50ff, Jenson replaces the language of "pure promise" with "unconditional promise." The language of "unconditional" in that context is meant to express the fact that the primary "condition" that makes promise problematic in our experience is *death*. That Jesus is the pure promise means that he is the promised one that has passed through death. With Jenson's claims about "promise" here, it becomes clear that his theology belongs, as he himself admits, to the diverse accounts of "theologies of hope" that were circulating at the time of his writing *GG*. See, again, Moltmann's *Theology of Hope*, 139-229 where he also uses the category of promise in relation to Jesus's resurrection.

¹²⁸ *GG*, 158. See also *SP*, 46.

¹²⁹ *GG*, 159.

¹³⁰ *GG*, 159-160.

God makes “the story of a past and therefore narratable event [Jesus’ death and resurrection]...the story of what is to come of us all.”¹³¹ In just this way, says Jenson, God’s transcendence “*is* the fact of time, the ‘beyondness’ of the future which gives us past and present and makes our lives temporal.”¹³² Time is not grounded in or given from an “eternal past” or “eternal present,” which ultimately amounts to “timeless reality” (despite intentions to the contrary) but rather is given precisely from the futurity of God. The resurrection appearances do not signify the end of Jesus’s incarnate story. Rather, they give specific content—the life of Jesus—to the future that is to come to us all. According to Jenson, Jesus’ resurrection thus contradicts the various forms of false religion that we use in order to “incorporate the future into the present.”¹³³ Jesus’s story cannot be so incorporated because it attests to that reality—resurrection—that is not among our present possibilities.

But has Jenson simply exchanged past for future? Has Jenson not simply made the Jesus who appears as the “future” for all intents and purposes the equivalent of the pre-existent Jesus? And so, does the problem about “timelessness” not remain despite his best efforts? No, says Jenson, because the anticipated future is the future of Jesus’ life, and his life was precisely that of “love,” that “pattern of existence” embodied by Jesus in his “being-unto-crucifixion.”¹³⁴ This, says Jenson, is the future or “End” which Jesus’s life is. Jesus’ love was revealed as the love that does not “close the future” but keeps it open.¹³⁵ Precisely this “openness” to what will be, then, is what characterizes God’s eternity.¹³⁶ This means, for Jenson, that rather than trying to protect God’s freedom through the claim that “the ‘dispensational Trinity’ [is] the ‘image’ of an

¹³¹ *GG*, 160.

¹³² *GG*, 162. Emphasis in the original.

¹³³ *GG*, 166.

¹³⁴ *GG*, 161. See the parallel account in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol.1, 100ff.

¹³⁵ *GG*, 162.

¹³⁶ *GG*, 171.

‘immanent Trinity,’” one can simply affirm the “descriptions of God’s triune life” made possible through Jesus’s past history without recourse to analogy.¹³⁷ Jesus’ “past history” ended in death. The resurrection is an act in which God makes Jesus’ ‘past history’ future and so identifies God as “the transcendence *of* the being Jesus.”¹³⁸ God is revealed, therefore, “not [as] a being” but rather as “the futurity *of* the past event Jesus.”¹³⁹ For this reason, Jenson argues in his famous turn of phrase, that the proper definition of the word “‘God’ equals, by definition, ‘Whoever raised Jesus.’”¹⁴⁰

It should be clear by now that Jenson is doing nothing less than attempting to redefine metaphysical-theological terms—eternity, nature, being, and attributes—on the basis of the gospel witness to the resurrection of Jesus.¹⁴¹ The resurrection is indeed, with Barth, the time in history where God is revealed or, what will become Jenson’s favored term, “identified.” For Jenson, however, what is revealed is that God’s eternity is not persistence over-against change but openness to another; God’s nature is not “a set of attributes” that remain stable but “the plot of his history.” The resurrection of Jesus is the particular event of God’s own “achieved temporal self-transcendence” and as such is revealed as “the event by which the world has a future, to *be* a world of time.”¹⁴² Since God’s transcendence is his futurity, “being” itself is revealed as

¹³⁷ *GG*, 174-175.

¹³⁸ *GG*, 162. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁹ *GG*, 162. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁰ *GG*, 162. As will be shown in chapter 5, he later adds an earlier reference: “Who having beforehand raised Israel out of Egypt.”

¹⁴¹ *GG*, 171.

¹⁴² *GG*, 192; *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. 1: 167. Emphasis in original. With the language of God’s “temporal self-transcendence,” Jenson might be interpreted as aligned with the theology of process. However, Jenson argues that his account of divine temporal self-transcendence differs from that of process theology in a couple of ways. First, Jenson notes that process theology is “covertly trinitarian, *with the world where the Son would be.*” (*GG*, 149). See the same basic critique in Jenson, *The Triune Identity*, 180-181. Second, Jenson affirms God’s being as an event with no persistent entity “ontologically prior to the event,” whereas process theology, according to him, begins by demoting “the notion of substance” with respect to God but then ends up “not really modify[ing] it at all,” articulating God as a “timelessly given structure of relations between all events” (*Christian Dogmatics*, 167).

“historical temporality...the call to change.”¹⁴³ Being human is being “a *story*, a *history*” and this because God is a story.¹⁴⁴ More than just a novel conceptual alternative to the metaphysics of analogy, Jenson thus sees something greater at stake in advocating for a conception of God in which transcendence is defined as “futurity.” The key polemic animating Jenson’s novel account of God’s transcendence can now be stated: the modern concern for the “historicity of man’s being” has exposed the God of timeless eternity as the foundation of false religion in that such a God forecloses the future by grounding human security in a narrative of the past that explains the mediating principle bridging the gap between time and eternity. As he explains:

The transcendence of the past is the transcendence of the God of religion only in that the past arbitrates the future so that true reality becomes a timeless and therefore supernatural, special reality. The Father of Jesus is a God at all only in that he overcomes and takes the place of this God of religion. The God of religion is the arbiter of the future, whose transcendence as lord and arbiter is that of the past. The God of faith is the arbiter of the past, whose transcendence as lord and arbiter is that of the future. Only in that time is thus, in the one way or the other, asymmetrical, is it *time*. Thus God and time belong together: atheism would be unconsciousness of time.¹⁴⁵

The reality of God and time belong together, for Jenson, and this was just what, in his own way, Barth had maintained. Recall that in Jenson’s analysis, Barth’s account of triune time was understood as the basis and model of our own time. Jenson follows Barth in this, but seeks to make the role of the spirit in the triune life more determinative. Here we approach Jenson’s alternative Trinitarian theology, which he must now provide given his novel account of the significance of the resurrection. Jenson argues that in Barth it is the Father as ‘the fount,’ as the

¹⁴³ *GG*, 171.

¹⁴⁴ *SP*, 138. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁵ *GG*, 169. Emphasis in original. In the “Introduction” to *The Futurist Option*, 5, Jenson and Braaten note that, for Jenson, “religion” is a “bad word” which describes the human attempt to “carry out our self-transcendence through a “retreat into the past.” Jenson, in a typically modern fashion, does see “self-transcendence” as a necessary part of the human story, but as should be clear, does not see that transcendence as a possibility given through the past or the present.

“eternal past,” who is determinative of the triune life. Jenson’s alternative is to give to the Spirit “the function which has belonged to the doctrine that the Father is the ‘fount of the trinity:’”¹⁴⁶

The Spirit is the hypostasis of God’s futurity and so of God’s relatedness. The Spirit is therefore *the determination* of the nature of the triune—that is, future and related—God. We therefore replace the formula that in the Trinity there is an Origin and two Originateds with the formula that in God there is a Goal [the Spirit] and two Anticipations, an anticipated Anticipation and a pure Anticipation. God goes before, God follows and God is preceded—and *these* are the relations subsisting as modes of being in God.¹⁴⁷

The triune God, for Jenson, is not eternal in the sense of persistent substantiality in the “origin,” rather God is eternal in that “he can never be surpassed, never caught up with.”¹⁴⁸ Classical accounts of God’s being as persistence give such a definition, says Jenson, because they attempt to solve the problem of the fleeting nature of human being; their ontology is precisely the desire for a form of being whose nature is “resistance to change, immunity to time.”¹⁴⁹ Being as persistence fulfills this religious desire inasmuch as it posits an eternity in which “everything that is to be already is...”¹⁵⁰ Classical religious ontology thus solved the problem of time and change by positing a form of participation in that which is eternally persistent. Jenson argues, however, that such an ontology is not a “truly theological ontology,” rather,

[i]n a truly theological ontology, ‘being’ is the possibility of becoming other than I am, and is therefore necessarily not a characteristic of myself. The guarantee that I am is beyond me; it occurs as the call to change.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ *GG*, 173.

¹⁴⁷ *GG*, 174. Emphasis mine.

¹⁴⁸ *GG*, 171. Here Jenson relies on the “the suggestion from Gregory of Nyssa” that the divine being is “sheer temporal infinity” (*Christian Dogmatics*, 168).

¹⁴⁹ *GG*, 172.

¹⁵⁰ *GG*, 172.

¹⁵¹ *GG*, 172. It is clear from the footnotes accompanying Jenson’s discussion of this alternative ontology in chapter 10 and 11 of *GG*, that Heidegger’s engagement with the question of the meaning of being stands as a critical resource for Jenson. Of course, Jenson’s key divergence from Heidegger occurs with respect to the question of death. For Jenson, the fact of Jesus’ resurrection means temporality is not “the chief category of a projected ontology of finite being” but can properly be predicated of the triune God (*GG*, 150).

In the above sentence we approach the final claim Jenson uses to support his novel account of the way that God and time belong together. Being is a “call to change” that gives time and that “call” is precisely the Word or Utterance that God is.

God is an utterance. He occurs as the utterance of one man to another—in English or Swahili or Greek—which in what it says and how it says it creates communication, creates the possibility of temporality: God is the utterance that creates being. He is therefore neither above nor within us; he occurs *between us*. We seek our being in the communication between us—and we have our being to seek from God.¹⁵²

What specific utterance is this God? Here we arrive back at Barth. Jesus Christ is the Word and decision of God uttered once and for all in pre-temporal eternity and then revealed in time. For Barth, this Word determines the actual relationship in which God has placed Godself; a relationship outside of which God no longer wills to be and no longer is God. This, in a nutshell, is predestination, for Barth: humanity is determined for salvation by virtue of the eternal reality of the Word of God, Jesus Christ, even if it must also witness to the damnation from which it has been saved. For Jenson, however, predestination

has nothing to do with any sort of cause-effect ‘determinism’...[and so a] proper doctrine of predestination is not a description of God’s relation to mankind in general...[a] proper doctrine of predestination is a first- and second-person doctrine: it reminds me, trying to speak gospel to you, not to take ‘No’ for an answer; it reminds me that God chooses you and me here, despite everything.¹⁵³

With the above quote on predestination, it becomes clear just how much Jenson’s alternative Trinitarian ontology contrasts with Barth’s understanding of doctrine of predestination and, as a result, how Jenson’s account necessitates a departure from much of the key terminology in *CD* II/2, §33 and §34. Jenson notes that the “material assertions” which

¹⁵² *GG*, 190. Emphasis in original.

¹⁵³ *SP*, 122. Of course, Barth’s doctrine seeks to avoid the idea of a general relation of God to humankind. Everywhere the movement in Barth is from the particular to the general, not the other way around. That being said, perhaps another way of framing Jenson’s critique of Barth is that once Jesus Christ’s pre-existence takes the shape of a “metaphysical idea,” it threatens to become just such a “general” relation.

govern his account of being can be described as “eschatological narration.”¹⁵⁴ In some respects, this would be a fine catchphrase for Jenson’s definition of theology and so perhaps an adequate contrast to that of Barth. For Barth, theology is the representation of the reality of the Word of God that turns towards humanity and redeems it. But as we have seen, Jenson is wary of the way Barth’s doctrine of eternal election locates this redemptive action of the Word of God in a persistent ‘past.’ Barth’s Word is thus too ‘deterministic’ because his representation of the Word is expressed too much in the form of a protology. If one were to attempt to capture Jenson’s modification of Barth, his definition might look thus: Theology in all of its aspects is the church’s eschatological narration of the story of the Triune God, who has anticipated for our stories “a conclusion narrated by the story of Jesus.”¹⁵⁵ It is eschatological narration because it points to a reality that is to come, not a reality that can be located securely in the past so as to be incorporated into the present. Encapsulated in the above ‘attempt’ is the fact that, for Jenson, theology is “the reflecting involved in making the move from hearing [the gospel] to speaking.”¹⁵⁶ This move, for Jenson, will necessitate finding “ever new language” through which to speak the gospel; theology’s narration cannot be “mere repetition.”¹⁵⁷ But how, then, to maintain the gospel’s historical continuity in new language? How to make clear, as Barth himself desired, that that which God did in Jesus Christ yesterday is still God’s act to-day and to-morrow? Jenson argues that the “living self-identity of the risen Jesus” is the basis for the

¹⁵⁴ *GG*, 172. In *KOTHF*, 157ff, Jenson uses the language of “eschatological utterance.”

¹⁵⁵ *GG*, 172.

¹⁵⁶ *SP*, 190.

¹⁵⁷ *SP*, 193, 190. Of course, although Barth in one sense argued exactly for the “mere” which Jenson rejects here, matters may not be so simple as, rhetorically, the claim of mere repetition need not itself be an endorsement of abandoning the task of finding new language through which to speak the gospel. Take, for example, this statement from Barth’s *The Church and the Political Problem of Our Day* (New York: Scribner’s, 1939), 12-13: “...the Church with her confession can *merely* repeat, simply join in the confession of the Prophets who bore witness to Jesus Christ beforehand, and of the Apostles who saw His Glory...But in the confession of the Church it is always a matter of a *definite* repetition. It is a repetition conditioned by the various times allowed to the Church in God’s patience, and by the various possibilities, which the Providence of God has assigned to her, with their various dangers and promises.” Emphasis mine.

gospel's historical continuity and that any theology can be deemed as authentic speaking of the gospel inasmuch as it is "faithful to the remembered history" and is a "true response to the freedom of the risen Lord."¹⁵⁸ In other words, to Barth's concern Jenson can simply say, the way to make clear that what God did in Jesus Christ yesterday is still God's act to-day and to-morrow is to make clear that whatever future action the risen Lord takes, it will take the form "*dramatically appropriate*" to, or displaying "dramatic coherence" with, what happened "yesterday" in the story of Jesus.¹⁵⁹ For Jenson, "[l]ove is the dramatic coherence of Jesus' plot of death and future action."¹⁶⁰

If Jenson's definition of theology differs from Barth's then what effect would Jenson's alternative have on the key terminology, that is, unity, determination, form, that Barth used in §33 and §34? Recall that for Barth God's self-determination provided the eternal basis for the unity, determination, and form in which God and humanity were reconciled in Jesus Christ. For Jenson, the form of God's self-determination described by the gospel is the event and decision that occurred in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in time. This self-determination is a determination characterized by its openness to the future. This means that the very language of "determination," especially in its mode as a 'pre-determination,' must at the very least be qualified with the language of "anticipation," for Jenson. In Jesus' death and resurrection, God anticipates our last future, but it is crucial, for Jenson, that this anticipation *gives* us time in which to hope for the unity of God's story and our own. That this unity is a unity between God and humanity, that it takes the twofold form of judgment and mercy, that this unity is spoken by

¹⁵⁸ *SP*, 193, 194.

¹⁵⁹ *GG*, 164. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶⁰ *GG*, 164. To Jenson's use of the language of "dramatic coherence," see chapter 7. In advance, what can be said here is that Jenson adopts the concept from Aristotle. He later makes this reliance on Aristotle explicit in his *SP*, 43, and continues employing the concept in his mature theology.

God in the form of a word that can be heard and believed, and that this word concerns the passing and coming form of God's work in history, all of these things can be affirmed by Jenson's alternative Trinitarian ontology when it is understood that this unity is only anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, thereby leaving the future open for this occurrence and so continuing to give us time.

Conclusion

Jenson's alternative doctrine of God is notoriously complex, and I have only begun to offer brief samples of the way he understands it to be a necessary "transformation" of Barth's theology. Would Barth have recognized it as such? While Barth approved of Jenson's interpretation of his theology in *AO*, Barth would not live long enough to engage with Jenson's alternative Trinitarian ontology in *GG*. Thus, one can only extrapolate from the material that Barth left related to projects similar to Jenson's. In this respect, two letters Barth wrote towards the end of 1964 are instructive.¹⁶¹ The first letter, to Jurgen Moltmann, was in response to his work *Theology of Hope*. Barth's primary complaint with the work was "the unilateral way in which you [Moltmann] subsume all theology in eschatology... What disturbs me is that for you theology becomes so much a matter of principle (an eschatological principle)."¹⁶² The second letter, to Pannenberg, was in response to his work *Jesus: God and Man*. Barth's primary complaint with this work was with Pannenberg's methodological decision to "pursue a path from below to above" in articulating his Christology.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ In addition to these two letters which I briefly mention, it might also be pointed out that in a letter to his friend Helmut Gollwitzer late in his life, Barth called the work of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs, both of whom Jenson uses constructively early on in his work, "irksome stuff." Cf. "Letter 49" in *Letters*, 62.

¹⁶² Barth, "Letter 172" in *Letters*, 174-176.

¹⁶³ Barth, "Letter 173" in *Letters*, 177-179.

Jenson's *GG* shows substantial engagement with and at times direct reliance on both of the aforementioned books of Moltmann and Pannenberg. It would require considerable textual work, of course, to demonstrate the ways that Jenson's work does or does not accord with these works. What is enough, at this point, is to suggest that the question of whether or not Barth would have seen Jenson's work as "what is really needed today to refine *C.D.*" can be answered by posing the kinds of critical questions to Jenson that Barth posed to Moltmann and Pannenberg.¹⁶⁴ Is Jenson's emphasis on God's transcendence as his "futurity" and on theology as "eschatological narration" an example of what Barth saw as Moltmann's error, namely, subsuming all theology into eschatology?¹⁶⁵ Jenson does purport to provide a Trinitarian ontology that is not all eschatology, for indeed while the Spirit is the trinitarian goal, the Father remains the beginning and the Son the present. Is Jenson's emphasis on the resurrection as God's achieved self-transcendence an example of what Barth saw as Pannenberg's error, namely, taking the path from below to above in his Christology? Here it seems that Jenson attempts to avoid the terms by which this criticism could affect him in that he takes "above" and "below" out of the equation.¹⁶⁶ Theology is not discourse that represents a reality above that moves to us below, rather, theology is discourse that represents a reality that is between us because reality—or 'being'—just is communication and God is the communication that we find ourselves in or

¹⁶⁴ The quotation in this sentence comes from Barth's letter to Moltmann, in which Barth said that he did not find in *Theology of Hope* what needed to refine the *CD*. Barth, "Letter 172" in *Letters*, 175.

¹⁶⁵ Barth had spoken of his worry in this regard long before in *CD II/1*, 31.3, 631ff, where he cautioned against "some kind of preference, selection, or favouritism" with regards to one of the three dimensions of time (a preference that Barth admits to having made earlier in his career) and their eternal "source" and "content" in God. In his *Knowledge of Things Hoped For*, vii., Jenson acknowledges a basic similarity between his project and the "theology of hope" found in a figure such as Moltmann. However, he argues that whatever similarity may exist, he "arrived at the position by a different way than taken by" figures like Moltmann.

¹⁶⁶ Indeed, in a review of Pannenberg's later *Systematic Theology*, Jenson notes that it might be that he and Pannenberg part ways precisely in that he retains the "usual understandings of time and eternity," which could be another way of saying that Pannenberg retains the distinction between "above" and "below" in a way that Jenson wishes to move beyond. See Jenson, "Parting Ways?" *First Things*, May 1995.

alongside. These last remarks are simply suggestive. What is necessary at this point is to see how Jenson's divergence from Barth maps on to his alternative doctrine of Israel and Judaism.

Chapter Seven

From Witness to Participant: Israel and Judaism as Participants in the Triune Story

As noted in the previous chapter, Jenson only began writing on the topic of a non-supersessionist Christian theology of Judaism late in his career, in the 1990s. In his autobiographical reflections from 2007, Jenson notes regarding that time: “I began to lecture and write on Christian theology of Judaism, in a way that would have been unthinkable—not just for me but for the church—even a few years earlier.”¹ Jenson notes the influence of such Jewish thinkers as David Novak and Peter Ochs as key conversation partners in this new development in his thought.² Indeed, Jenson went as far as to say that he saw his work with Novak and Ochs as “joint theological work.”³ While Jenson would write on a Christian theology of Judaism in a number of shorter essays which will be referred to throughout the course of this chapter, his most systematic presentation of the topic appears in his two volume *Systematic Theology*.

This chapter will be divided into two sections corresponding to the two volumes of Jenson’s *ST*. The last section will focus on parts VI and V of *ST 2*, entitled “The Church” and “The Fulfillment” respectively. It is there that Jenson takes up the topic of the community of God explicitly and systematically in a way that starkly demonstrates the difference between his doctrine of Israel and Judaism and Barth’s. My analysis cannot start there, however. The bulk of this chapter focuses on Jenson’s doctrine of God in *ST 1*. While Jenson’s systematic approach differs from Barth’s in presenting the doctrine of the church in his second volume, *The Works of*

¹ “A Theological Autobiography To Date,” 53.

² The influence went both ways. See, for example, Novak’s essay “Theology and Philosophy: An Exchange with Robert Jenson” in *Talking with Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), and Ochs’ chapter “Robert W. Jenson: The God of Israel and the Fruits of Trinitarian Theology” in *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011).

³ “A Theological Autobiography To Date,” 53.

God, even Jenson notes that “[i]t could be argued that in [his] system...also ecclesiology belongs in the first volume.”⁴ Indeed, as will become clear, Jenson’s ecclesiology is grounded in his trinitarian ontology and so, as with Barth, his doctrine of God determines his doctrines of Israel, the church, and Judaism.⁵ In fact, the key insight to be gained from an initial analysis of Jenson’s trinitarian ontology in *ST I* is that his ecclesiology, especially his doctrine of Israel, is actually more of a piece with his doctrine of God than was seen even in Barth. While Barth sought to uphold the eternal primacy of God’s transcendent action in eternal election, to which both Israel and the church could only witness, Jenson argues for the envelopment of created reality in God’s infinite life. As a consequence, Israel, the church, and the rabbinic synagogue not only represent the reality of the Word of God through the witness of their history, but also their history is a shared history with God in which God constitutes his own identity and only so determines the identity of his people. In turn, the “service” or “role” of the community, together with its determination, does not (as with Barth) consist in its correspondence to God taking the form of a reflection or mirroring of the primal history of God revealed in time in Jesus Christ. Rather, for Jenson the community participates in the divine action to which it testifies.

Following the textual unpacking of this claim, I move on to a direct articulation of Jenson’s doctrines of “the polity of God” in volume two, *The Works of God*. With Jenson’s key departure from Barth in his doctrine of God, his doctrine of the church and Judaism differs in form and content in significant measure. Principally, he refrains from articulating Barth’s understanding of the resurrection as the institution of the church alone as the sole witness to the

⁴ *ST 2*, 167.

⁵ With that being said, as I note below, there is a distinct difference between Barth and Jenson here. Jenson does *not* make the doctrine of election the “center” of his theology. He said as much in an interview with James Crocker, found in Crocker’s Doctoral Thesis (Oxford, 2016) “Robert Jenson’s Trinitarian Reconstitution of Metaphysics,” 367.

“coming” or “perfect” form of the community. With his emphasis on the Spirit as the triune goal or future that determines created reality’s future, and his description of the Spirit’s particular role in the drama of God’s relationship with created history, Jenson articulates a doctrine of rabbinic Judaism and the church as two “detours” or events “*within the event* of the new age’s advent.”⁶ The arrival of the kingdom, while a reality inaugurated with Jesus’s resurrection, has been delayed, for Jenson, by the personal action of the Spirit. While the church is indeed, as with Barth, the goal of Israel—Israel fulfilled—it is so in the present only in the form of an anticipation of the kingdom of God. Jenson subsequently argues that the Judaism of the synagogue anticipates the kingdom in its own way, a way different from, but not opposed to, the church. Moving beyond Barth, then, Jenson does not posit the ongoing existence of the synagogue in separation from the church as a form of rebellion and so a continued form of the representation of the form of the community that is to pass away. Since the church and the synagogue are both detours within the event of the new age’s advent, neither community is to be understood as the total fulfillment of Israel but as anticipations of the final fulfillment of Israel. To put it succinctly, for Jenson, while Barth’s account of the community is based upon a twofold form of representation in which Israel and the church correspond to an eternal form (in Jenson’s language, “identity”), namely the pre-existent Christ, Jenson’s account of the community presents Israel, the church and the synagogue as enveloped within the triune (threefold) relations and impelled towards an identification with God that amounts to their deification.

⁶ *ST* 2, 171. Emphasis in original.

The Context of Jenson’s Doctrine of Israel: The Dramatic Constitution of God’s Self-Identity

At the time of the writing of the first volume of *ST*, Barth’s *CD* remained, for Jenson, a “model and challenge” for the task of the theologian, especially with respect to those key areas of Barth’s thought that had so animated Jenson’s thinking in previous works: the doctrines of the trinity and Christology.⁷ Indeed, Jenson credits his central focus in *ST* on the question of the identity of the triune God to Barth’s claim that “[t]he question to be answered by the doctrine of the Trinity is ‘Who is God?’”⁸ According to Jenson, Barth enabled the “revival of trinitarian theology” by rejecting a key tenet of the trinitarian theology of the Western tradition:

Barth’s doctrine of the Trinity is in most respects straightforwardly Western. But he describes the inner-divine triune self-unfolding not as the dialectics of a self-*containing* subject but as the dialectics of a self-*revealing* subject. The root of trinitarianism, according to Barth, is that God’s self-revelation poses three questions—Who reveals himself? What happens to reveal him? And What is the outcome of this revelation?—and compels the same answer, ‘God,’ to all three, yet will not let us confuse the questions. God is not personal in that he is triunely self-sufficient; he is personal in that he triunely opens himself.⁹

Beyond his clear admiration for Barth, however, Jenson’s specific critiques of Barth also remain by the time of his *ST*. Recall in the last chapter that Jenson’s move beyond Barth in *GG* took the specific form of articulating God’s transcendence within the terms of time itself, with a special emphasis on the pole of the “future.” This move, which occupied Jenson throughout his career,

⁷ *ST I*, 21.

⁸ *KD*, 311-320; *CD* 1/1, 300-301. Cited in *ST* 1:60fn100. Emphasis in original. Jenson involved himself with this question beginning with *GG*. Cf. for example 97ff. He then went on to develop his answer further in a 1982 work concerned more explicitly with the task of “identifying” God, *The Triune Identity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), until finally reworking this previous material into *ST*. While Jenson is surely right that Barth was concerned with the identity of God, there can be no doubt—as this chapter will demonstrate—that Jenson’s particular use of the concept of “identity,” paired with his emphasis on “narrative,” moves distinctly beyond Barth.

⁹ *ST I*, 124. Emphasis in original. A passage such as this, found in Barth’s *CD* IV/1, §59.1, 202, surely proves Jenson right in this regard: “...we have to free ourselves from two unfortunate and arbitrary ways of thinking [about God’s existence]...[t]he first consists quite naturally in the idea that unity is necessarily equivalent with being in and for oneself, with being enclosed [*Verschlossenheit*] and imprisoned [*Gefangensein*] in one’s own being, with singleness and solitariness...But what distinguishes His [God’s] peculiar unity with Himself...is the fact that...[His unity] is a unity which is open and free and active in itself...”

consistently led him to attempt an analysis of the relationship between time and eternity that refused to construe them in any way as contradictory realities. In *ST*, this move is repeated at numerous points and in a variety of contexts. For the purposes of my study, the most significant context in which Jenson makes this move is in his claim that the triune God is identified not only by the “particular plotted sequence of events that make the narrative of Israel and its Christ,” but also radically “with” those events.¹⁰ The eternal God is identified by this narrative, which for Jenson means that God is a particular personal relation between God’s past, present, and future action in Israel’s narrative.¹¹ God’s self-identity does not “persist” in an eternal origin, for Jenson, but is “constituted” in the dramatic coherence of God’s past, present, and future action.¹² Said another way, the “actual life of the triune God with us is a true drama,” for Jenson. Indeed, it is God’s drama, and created reality is the “commanded stage” with “supporting players” for this drama.¹³

There is, of course, a sense in which aspects of this are true for Barth. In his account of “The Judge Judged in Our Place” in *CD IV/1*, Barth notes that

...in this event [of God’s giving of Himself to the world in the Son] God allows the world and humanity to take part [*tielnehmen*] in the history of the inner life of His Godhead, in

¹⁰ *ST I*, 60. To what extent this is a departure from Barth requires perhaps more textual analysis than is possible in this chapter. Nonetheless, I do believe it will become clear that a departure has occurred for, in Barth’s account of the divine simplicity, he argues that “even the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ” must not be understood or interpreted “as a commixture or identification [Identifikation] of God with the world...” (*KD II/1*, 502; *CD II/1*, 446). Neither, as Barth argues in *CD IV/2*, 87-88, can the incarnation be understood as a “direct or indirect identification” of the divine with the human and the human with the divine but rather “the effective confrontation” of one with the other. To be sure, Jenson is not advocating God’s identification with “the world” generally considered, but he is identifying God with the history of Israel and its Christ. For Barth, even this will not do. Barth would say that Israel belongs to Christ inasmuch as it is elect for his sake, but Christ is not thereby identified with Israel and thus does not “belong” to it.

¹¹ Discussing the question of whether or not to construe the Trinity as a “personal” or “impersonal” reality, Jenson gives a justification for his choice of the former: “...the preferred term in the present work, ‘identities,’ is obviously chosen with persons in mind. Among other nuances, it construes self-identity on the horizon of *time*, as *hypostasis* does not” (*ST I*, 118).

¹² *ST I*, 66. As was already mentioned in fn161 of the last chapter, Jenson adopts the concept of dramatic coherence from Aristotle’s account of what makes for a good story, namely, that it be one “in which events occur ‘unexpectedly but on account of each other, so that before each decisive event we cannot predict it, but afterwards see it was just what had to happen’” (*ST I*, 64).

¹³ *ST 2*, 21.

the movement in which from and to all eternity He is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and therefore the one true God. But this participation of the world in the being of God implies necessarily His participating in the being of the world, and therefore that His being, His history, is played out [*abspielt*] as world-history and therefore under the affliction and peril of all world-history.¹⁴

For Barth too, then, world-history is the theatre or setting (*Schauplatz*) of God's history.¹⁵ In the above quotation, however, Barth's understanding of what it means for God's history to "play out as world-history" sets him apart from Jenson. Barth's claim that God's history plays out as world-history is not the same as to say, as Jenson does, that God's identity is *constituted* in the history of Israel and its Christ.¹⁶ As Jenson rightly saw, Barth's construal of the pre-existence of Jesus Christ in his doctrine of election guarded against any formulation of a divine constitution in and through created history. The direction always ran the other way around, for Barth, with God determining Godself and then, by way of that determination, created reality.¹⁷ Thus, the life of Jesus of Nazareth in time manifested what was eternally God's sovereign act of self-determination (*Selbstbestimmung*). As was shown in chapter one, for Barth, this primal history of God's self-determination in Jesus Christ meant that God took "form" (*Gestalt*) in the eternal beginning of all his ways, which determined in advance the "form" and "content" that would become the history of elected Israel and the church.

For Jenson, however, in spite of the fact that Barth could speak of God's eternity in temporal terms, Barth's account of divine self-determination as a "primal history" compromises

¹⁴ *KD* IV/1, 236; *CD* IV/1, 215.

¹⁵ Barth used this same language in *KD* II/2, 101; *CD* II/2, 94 when speaking of the election of Jesus Christ: "And so man exists for His sake. It is by Him, Jesus Christ, and for Him and to Him, that the universe is created as a theatre [*Schauplatz*] for God's dealings with man and man's dealings with God." The German original does not speak of "dealings" but again of "the history of God" (*der Geschichte Gottes*).

¹⁶ Of course, neither Barth nor Jenson work with a general conception of "world-history," but rather the specific history of Israel and its Christ. So, Barth: "...the history of the world is not really 'world-history,' but the history of Israel and the Church." *CD* II/1, 625.

¹⁷ As will become clear, Jenson attempts to uphold a similar distinction, but in his case, God's self-determining does not take place "above" history but within and through history.

the Gospel's identification of God with us in Jesus of Nazareth. Self-determination, a term that shares a family resemblance with Jenson's favored term "identity,"¹⁸ is something that, for Jenson, is worked out "dramatically" in a temporal relation whose terms—past, present, and future—are asymmetrical, with the latter term (the future) being the direction towards which the past and present move.¹⁹ Barth, for Jenson, was too evasive in his description of God's eternity as "pure duration" since, as was shown in the last chapter, Jenson detected in this phrase what he considered Barth's consistent appeal to the "origin" (past) or the eternal present without adequate reference to the "future." For Jenson, however, if any "term" of time is to be favored, it is not the past but the future. Indeed, in favoring this term Jenson will go so far as to use the circumlocution "primally future" with respect to the way in which God is, as Spirit, "open to what he will be."²⁰ For Jenson, "what obtains in *life* always comes from a future" and God, as Spirit, "is his own future."²¹

In Jenson's terms, Barth's account of God's history failed to show sufficiently how the coherence (or unity) of God's self-identity (or, to use Barth's term, God's self-determination) is constituted dramatically as a story truly with Israel and the church. Jenson's counter-proposal, which he made first in his Heidelberg dissertation on Barth, was to make the drama that God is play out as a drama with us and at this late stage in his career, this move is repeated—now in systematic form—in the claim that God is identified by and with Israel's narrative. To speak of

¹⁸ In other words, what is "determined" is the self's identity. The "family" relation is that of German Idealism, broadly construed. See, for example, Dale M. Schlitt's *German Idealism's Trinitarian Legacy* (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), where he links Barth and Jenson as standing in this tradition.

¹⁹ Twice throughout both volumes of *ST* (*ST 1*, 218; *ST 2*, 33), Jenson employs the notion of time's arrow to illustrate what he is trying to do by referring to all temporal relation as "asymmetrical." Historically, the notion of time's arrow seems to have originated with Sir Arthur Eddington, as seen for example in his 1927 Gifford Lectures published as *The Nature of the Physical World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 68. Says Eddington there: "The great thing about time is that it goes on."

²⁰ Jenson calls Barth's use of the concept of "pure duration" a "circumlocution." One is compelled to ask, is "primally future" any better?

²¹ *ST 1*, 143. Emphasis in original.

the “Triune Identity,” for Jenson, is thus to tell “God’s story” which is “committed as a story with creatures.”²² While Jenson suggests that God could have been Godself on different terms,” he is adamant that “of this possibility, we can assert only the sheer counterfactual; about *how* God would then have been the same God we now know, we can say nothing whatever.”²³

With this assertion, a key question arises which Jenson addresses throughout the course of this first volume on the Triune God. Given the fact that God is God only with us, what is the distinction between creator and creature? For Jenson, the distinction clearly cannot rest upon a construal of divine transcendence that opposes eternity and time or, indeed, that opposes God and creation, as realities separated by a chasm that must be bridged.²⁴ Rather, since the triune God is truly identified with the narrative of Israel and its Christ, there is no God whose transcendence consists in being “outside” of our story. Saving history, for Jenson, is not “our journey away from and back to” God, instead, it is “God’s journey *with* us.”²⁵ In spite of the fact that Barth could speak of a creaturely participation in God’s history, there can be no question that Barth retained to the end a preference for language like “above” and “beyond,” and “confrontation” (*Konfrontation*) when expressing the difference and relationship between God’s primal history and our history with God.²⁶ Indeed, creaturely participation in God’s history took

²² *ST I*, 65. Emphasis in original. For a critique of this claim, see Francesca Aran Murphy, *God is Not a Story: Realism Revisited* (New York: Oxford, 2007), especially chapter 6 where Murphy takes up what she calls Jenson’s “story Thomism.”

²³ *ST I*, 65. Emphasis in original. In an attempt to avoid even this much “counter-factual” speculation, in a later essay Jenson “repents” even of making statements like these. See “Once More on the Logos *asarkos*,” 120.

²⁴ This “bridging,” for Jenson, is precisely what the writers of antiquity sought to do through a variety of religious forms of mediation. Jenson aims to reject such forms of mediation. *ST I*, 94-100.

²⁵ *ST I*, 60fn102. Emphasis in original. It is thus not surprising that Jenson accepts, however flippantly, the label “panentheist.” Cf. *Essays in a Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 199. Of course, Jenson would care little about the general label and would be more interested in describing the Gospel’s particular account of how creaturely life exists “in” the life of God.

²⁶ To be sure, Barth’s account of God’s absoluteness [Absolutheit] in *CD II/1*, §28.3, aimed to show that God’s transcendence, his being beyond the creature, was not to be understood as a contradiction of his immanence: “Now the absoluteness of God strictly understood...means that God has the freedom to be present with that which is not God, to communicate Himself and unite Himself with the other and the other with Himself, in a way which utterly surpasses all that can be effected in regard to reciprocal presence, communion and fellowship between other beings.

the specific shape, for Barth, of being a “witness” (*Zeuge*) and “reflection” (*Spiegelung*) of the glory of God that is his primal history—the primal history that nonetheless from eternity includes the decision to redeem the creature.

With the mention above of God’s “history,” and now with the mention of the significant term “witness,” two key theological differences between Jenson’s and Barth’s doctrines of God must be noted as they determine much of the analysis to come. First, Jenson does not make the doctrine of election central to his doctrine of God as Barth did. In turn, Jenson’s doctrine of Israel is not based upon an account of Israel’s election as one form (*Gestalt*) of the ecclesiological expression of the twofold eternal election of Jesus Christ in primal history. Alternatively, by drawing “Christology, and pneumatology, together with discussions of the historical Jesus, of the doctrine of the atonement, and of the resurrection” into his doctrine of the triune God, Jenson in effect makes Israel’s history “belong to the telling of God’s own story.”²⁷ What happens in Israel’s history is not a reflection of God’s primal history, rather what happens in Israel’s history is “the *executing* of the triune God’s unity with himself.”²⁸ God’s covenant with Israel, while initiated through a “unilateral act” of God, nonetheless “inaugurates a *future* shared by *both* parties.”²⁹ Secondly, and following from the above, Jenson does not make “witness” a key or crucial category in his doctrine of Israel like Barth does. The reason for this should be apparent: Barth’s understanding of “witness” implies a distance and strict

It is just the absoluteness of God properly understood which can signify not only His freedom to transcend all that is other than Himself, but also His freedom to be immanent within it...” (KD II/1, 352; CD II/1, 313). However, Barth’s account of God’s omnipresence also made it clear that God’s presence to creation is to be construed as “togetherness at a distance” [*Zusammensein in einer Distanz*], and not as identity. *KD II/1*, 527; *CD II/1*, 468.

²⁷ *ST 1*, x; *ST 2*, v.

²⁸ *Unbaptized God: The Basic Flaw in Ecumenical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 140. Emphasis in original. While this citation comes from an earlier work than *ST*, it is a powerful illustration of the claim Jenson continues to make in *ST*.

²⁹ “What Kind of God Can Make A Covenant,” in *Covenant and Hope: Christian and Jewish Reflections*, eds. Robert W. Jenson and Eugene B. Korn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 7. Emphasis mine.

differentiation in the relation between the reality of the event being witnessed and the person witnessing the event; between the two there is “sheer inequality” (*schlechthinige Ungleichheit*).³⁰ For Jenson, on the other hand, the Gospel declares events whose witness “belongs to the action to which it testifies...[it] participates in bringing to pass the content of the witness.”³¹ Israel’s history belongs to the action to which it testifies and in this way is participant in the determination of God’s identity.³² Many examples from Jenson could be used to substantiate this claim but one particularly powerful one can suffice for the moment, namely, Mary’s obedience:

Israel’s *fiat mihi* was the possibility of the Incarnation; whenever its refusal threatened, judgment had indeed to begin with Israel to bring her to repentance, lest the Son fail of actuality. When Gabriel challenges Mary, the issue is put to Israel once and for all, with no future for repentance. It is for her obedience at that moment, the climactic obedience of Israel, that we not only invoke Mary but revere her.³³

Mary’s obedience is crucial with respect to the actuality of the Son in God’s history with Israel, for Jenson. This account surely diverges from Barth’s own reflections on Mary, whose *fiat mihi* could not be construed in terms of her activity or participation in the reality of the incarnation.³⁴

The second theological implication that follows from Jenson’s construal of the creator-creature distinction can be described both negatively and positively. Negatively, no doctrine of God can tell of a divine drama—a triune relation of Father, Son, and Spirit—that happens

³⁰ *KD* II/1, 350; *CD* II/1, 312. Indeed, it is precisely this distance and difference that Jenson worries about in Barth.

³¹ *ST* 2, 125. While this passage arises in the context of Jenson’s discussion of the angelic witness, there is every indication, as evidenced by the examples that will be explored throughout this chapter, that this idea applies to the human witness as well.

³² Throughout *ST* this becomes apparent in Jenson’s treatment of the important roles played by Mary, Israel’s judges, and the prophets. Another area of Jenson’s thought that expresses this is his emphasis throughout his works on petitionary prayer as “our involvement in providence.” Cf. “What Kind of God Can Make A Covenant,” in *Covenant and Hope*, 13.

³³ *ST* 2, 204. For Jenson’s own extended reflections on Mary, see his “A Space for God,” in *Mary, Mother of God*, eds. Braaten and Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004): 49-57.

³⁴ *CD* IV/2, 45. “It was not...Israel or Mary who acted, but God—acting towards Israel, and finally...towards Mary.” Or, as he says in *KD* IV/2, 99, 100; *CD* IV/2, 90, 91: “This [the Virgin Birth] does not constitute [*ausmacht*], but only indicates, the grace of His particular origin. The grace of His particular origin consists in the fact that He exists as man as in the mode of existence of the Son of God Himself exists...He derives entirely from His divine origin.” For a comprehensive analysis of Barth’s understanding of the Virgin Birth, see Dustin Resch, *Barth’s Interpretation of the Virgin Birth: A Sign of Mystery* (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2012).

“before” the drama that God is with us.³⁵ Hence, Barth’s account of Jesus’ pre-existence, of the “primal history” or the “pre-time” (*die Vorzeit*) of God, is ruled out.³⁶ Positively, this means that the doctrine of the triune God necessitates a narration of the history—beginning to end—of commitment that God lives in Israel. In order to uphold the distinction between creator and creature, however, a doctrine of God will have to be able to specify the difference between divine and creaturely identities and so identify the “persons,” “roles,” and “plotlines” of the drama of God which is “at once” our drama too. How Jenson does this must now be examined for, as will become clear below, it is in his description of the “roles” played by the triune persons in history that Jenson determines his understanding of the roles played by Israel, the church, and the synagogue.

To say in advance what will be filled out below, the “role” or “mission” of Israel, the church, and the synagogue, for Jenson, is not to mediate God’s election to the world through a witness that mirrors and reflects the eternal “No” and “Yes” of God in Jesus Christ. For Jenson, the history that God is and the history “of Jesus’ life in Israel with his disciples” are “simultaneous,” which means that no reflection or mirroring is necessary.³⁷ Indeed, there is no metaphysical “distance” across which reflection or mirroring can or should occur. Much of Barth’s theology is determined by his desire to avoid falling into what he saw as Feuerbach’s legitimate critique of religion as the projection of the human person into eternity (deification, apotheosis). Barth’s alternative was to make theology “in all its aspects” a reflection and mirroring (a representation) of the reality of God rather than a reflection and mirroring of

³⁵ Thus, in *ST* and in a later essay, Jenson simply rejects any notion of the “*Logos asarkos*, used for something ‘before’ the incarnation on any sort of line...” Again, see “Once more on the Logos Asarkos,” 123.

³⁶ The impact of this decision shows itself in a number of contexts in Jenson’s *ST*. For example, Jenson rejects (as he did already in his Heidelberg Dissertation) any notion of “a logic of reconciliation behind or beyond the historical events in Jerusalem and on Golgotha.” *ST I*, 190.

³⁷ *ST I*, 46, 93.

humanity. God presents Godself in Jesus Christ and theology simply attempts to follow after, reflect, and mirror that presentation. Jenson, on the other hand, takes the distance across which projection, reflection, or mirroring can occur, in either direction, out of the equation:

Religious projection as described by Feuerbach and his epigones must be understood as *relapse* from a self-introduction of God that is the enabling truth of every grasp of eternity...³⁸

Revelation is simply God's initiative on his side of the dialogue he sustains with us.³⁹

There is yet another way of stating the contrast: whereas for Barth God's eternity was characterized by its simultaneity between source, movement, and goal, and our history by broken succession, for Jenson the concept of simultaneity is employed to a completely different end. Jenson rejects the notion with respect to God's eternity and uses it instead to express the envelopment of creation within the life of God: time is "room" in God's life; it is being "bracketed" by the infinite "enveloping consciousness" of the triune persons whose inner relations of "whence and whither," Jenson believes, can rightly be called "past" and "future."⁴⁰ God's "time" and our time are indeed distinct, for Jenson, but they need no bridging because God has included us in his life. Created reality is caught up, one might say, in the movement of the divine life that moves from past to future. Thus, Israel does not witness to a primal reality or movement transcendent of time, but rather participates in the dramatic (temporal) unfolding of God's self-identity by virtue of the fact that God includes Israel in God's life. The "way" of God's identity is thus a way with Israel. God binds Godself to Israel, makes promises to it, ties Godself "to the contingencies of history" and "allows himself to be claimed by *her*

³⁸ *ST 1*, 57. Emphasis in original.

³⁹ *ST 2*, 302.

⁴⁰ *ST 2*, 34.

addresses...all the lamentation and adoration of her history.”⁴¹ Jenson’s account of the being of God as “temporal infinity” that he gives in order to support this claim while attempting to uphold an account of divine transcendence is complex and will be examined only where necessary in this chapter.⁴² In the present context it is enough to say for now that Jenson’s account of Israel’s participation in God surely moves a step beyond Barth’s notion that between the self-determination of God and the determination of creatures (or the community) there is a relationship of “sheer inequality,” towards a “synergism” that Barth consistently sought to avoid.⁴³ I say “towards” a synergism because, again, Jenson does attempt to maintain the priority of the divine action throughout his *ST*. Nonetheless, it is clear that Jenson accords human actors and decisions—particularly in Israel’s history—a much more foundational role than Barth does.

The God of Exodus and Resurrection

Early on in *ST*, Jenson argues that in Israel’s narrative God is identified with two primary events: the events of Israel’s exodus and the resurrection of Jesus.⁴⁴ These two narrative moments are systematically crucial as they both tell of God’s self-introduction, where God identifies Godself with a personal name grounded in narrative action. While for Jenson it is a “determining theme of theology” that the Gospels identify God by the resurrection (something Barth also affirmed in his own way), he is also quick to point out that this event took place in a particular narrative context. The context in which the resurrection event occurs is within Israel and it is thus “the God of Israel whom Jesus called Father and to whom the disciples wanted to

⁴¹ *ST I*, 65, 82. Emphasis in original. In a footnote to this last quotation, Jenson notes: “...the present existence of Judaism is a vital *theological* topic for the theology being here developed” (*ST I*, 82fn57).

⁴² His central articulation of the concept of the being of God as “temporal infinity” can be found at *ST I*, 207-223.

⁴³ Cf. *CD II/2*, 193.

⁴⁴ *ST I*, 75.

pray” that is identified as the one who raised Jesus from the dead.⁴⁵ Jenson thus begins his entryway into the question of the identity of God in scripture “with the confession of the God of Israel” and does so, as he says, “in view of the predominantly gentile church’s perennial temptation to evade it.”⁴⁶ Israel, however, already had its own confession of God’s identity grounded in its foundational stories: the wandering Aramean Abraham, Israel’s slavery in Egypt, salvation from slavery, and the gift of land. These stories together, for Jenson, constitute the “Exodus-event” as Israel’s primary identification of God.⁴⁷ Now comes the key Christological question: how, if at all, does the resurrection of Jesus identify God as the same God identified in the Exodus-event? How does the God of Israel relate to this one Israelite? Jenson notes that

Identification by the Resurrection neither replaces nor is simply added to identification by the Exodus; the new identifying description *verifies* its paradigmatic predecessor. For at the outcome of the Old Testament it is seen that Israel’s hope in her God cannot be sustained if it is not verified by victory also over death...⁴⁸

Jenson now presents his statement that God is identified by the resurrection of Jesus as dramatic verification of Israel’s confession of God as the one “who brought you out of the Land of Egypt.”⁴⁹ How could Israel confess the identity of God as the one who rescued it from Egypt and bound Godself to it, if God let it fall to the greater enemy, death? More than just a question of Israel’s need to verify God’s identity, however, this passage is a powerful example of how Jenson understands God’s identification with Israel. God has so identified Godself with Israel

⁴⁵ *ST 1*, 42.

⁴⁶ *ST 1*, 42. Jenson notes on the same page that this temptation “remains the church’s most regular occasion of apostasy.”

⁴⁷ The parallel to van Buren is striking here, although as will become clear, Jenson employs the use of the term “Exodus-event” to very different theological ends.

⁴⁸ *ST 1*, 44. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁹ *ST 1*, 44. Jenson first made the link between exodus and resurrection in his earlier *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel*, 5-7. Notably, in *The Triune Identity*, when referring to the Exodus story, Jenson included consonants wherever he used YHWH in relation to the Exodus text from which he derives his “identifying description” of God, but in *ST* (and other later essays), he omits the consonants in order to honor Jewish custom. Cf. *ST 1*, 44fn12.

that God’s identity is wrapped up with its destiny. Given Israel’s history of struggle, this means that from the very start, God’s identity is “at risk:”

...his [God’s] identity with himself must truly be *at risk* as Moses and the Pharaoh struggle...⁵⁰

The above example comes early in the biblical story. However, Jenson sees the risk that God takes on in Israel’s history only increases as the narrative progresses.

At the chief dramatic peripety within the story told by Israel’s Bible, the Exile, the Lord explicitly puts his self-identity at narrative risk... The crisis of the total biblical narrative is the Crucifixion. As the cry of dereliction laments, the one called ‘Father’ here hands the one called ‘Son’ over to oppositional and deadly creatures. Therewith it becomes problematic that anything specified by listing ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ can be one God and not rather a mutually betraying pantheon. If the phrase can still be the name of one self-identical personal reality, his identity must be constituted precisely in the *integration* of this abandonment.⁵¹

The resurrection is the “integration” of the abandonment of the Son and so resolves a moment of narrative uncertainty—both for Israel and for God—resulting in Israel’s new narrative identification of God: “God is whoever raised Jesus from the dead, having before raised Israel from Egypt.”⁵² The gospel that Jesus is risen from the dead declares the work of God that determines “who and what God is.”⁵³ There is, for Jenson, no “work done *by* a God antecedently and otherwise determined” than by the resurrection.⁵⁴ In the event of the resurrection of Jesus, the drama of God—which is to say, the identity of God—becomes a coherent drama in which Israel has played a part at every step. Jenson goes on to note that the community that first came

⁵⁰ *Unbaptized God*, 140. Emphasis in original.

⁵¹ *ST I*, 65. Emphasis mine.

⁵² *ST I*, 63.

⁵³ *ST I*, 165.

⁵⁴ *ST I*, 165. Emphasis in original. This is why Jenson includes an account of the “historical Jesus,” his death, and his resurrection, within his doctrine of God. Interestingly, where Barth paved a new doctrinal path by including the doctrine of election within his doctrine of God, Jenson forges yet another new path: he includes the doctrines of the incarnation, atonement, and resurrection within his doctrine of God.

to identify God by the resurrection of Jesus began to use a “new kind of naming” than the previous name JHWH, a naming that would properly express the self-identity of God:

Instead [of using this name] they name the one whom God had raised and identify God by constructions that incorporate this naming...apostolic witness refers to God as ‘the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’...In the canonical account of the risen Christ’s appearance to commission the gospel’s mission, he institutes the church’s rite of initiation: this is to be a ritual washing ‘in the name ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.’⁵⁵

Jenson states that this naming is only understandable inasmuch as it occurs “within a narrative construction that displays relation internal to the logic of the construction.”⁵⁶ Father is not a general predicate of god but rather a “term of address” used by the Son, and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, understood as “the enabling future of the [triune] community so established.”⁵⁷ Father, Son, and Spirit thus name or identify, for Jenson, the personal God of the biblical narrative.

So much for the identification of God in Jenson’s thought. What has come to light in this process of identifying God in Israel’s story, for Jenson, is the fact that the God of Israel is not just revealed by Israel’s story but is identified with that story as it moves through time. Furthermore, the God of Israel is not identified simply as “one monadic agent of the history” of God with his people.⁵⁸ Rather, God is identified by “a plurality of what can only be called *dramatis dei personae*, ‘characters of the drama of God.’”⁵⁹ Furthermore, now that the biblical God has been identified by the plurality of these three characters in their unity, it becomes possible to look back and “pick out” these persons of God’s identity—Father, Son, and Spirit—and inquire into their specific “role” within the drama of God as they have always been active

⁵⁵ *ST 1*, 45.

⁵⁶ *ST 1*, 45.

⁵⁷ *ST 1*, 45.

⁵⁸ *ST 1*, 75.

⁵⁹ *ST 1*, 75.

throughout the scriptures. Jenson is aware that with the introduction of the language of “role” with respect to the persons of God’s identity, the potential exists for a modalist interpretation of God’s triunity.

A dramatic or social role can be played by more than one individual, and several roles can be played by one. The language of *personae* in its ordinary sense could therefore suggest a kind of modalism.⁶⁰

Jenson attempts to avoid this implication by stating that a *persona* (and their “role”) “is a social persona” and so is “a subsistent social relation.”⁶¹ Inasmuch as God is three identities that all play “roles,” the oneness of the three identities does not reside in a more foundational “fourth” identity but is the mutuality of the three.⁶² Thus, he states that a “divine identity is a *persona dramatis dei* who can be repeatedly picked out by a name or identifying description or by pronouns, always by relation to the other two.”⁶³ The triune God is, on this model, a “community.”⁶⁴ And as the community that has made “room” for created being in their midst, the triune God is the origin and model of what we call “community.”⁶⁵ Below, I will show how Jenson appeals to the roles and the “mutual work” of the Father, Son, and Spirit as “community” to describe the founding of the church and the synagogue.⁶⁶ To do so, however, a basic account of Jenson’s understanding of the particular roles of the triune persons as they are mutually enacted in Israel’s history must first be described.

⁶⁰ *ST 1*, 119.

⁶¹ *ST 1*, 119. He claims to have adopted this idea from Tertullian.

⁶² *CF. ST 1*, 117-124

⁶³ *ST 1*, 106.

⁶⁴ *ST 1*, 122.

⁶⁵ *ST 1*, 122; *ST 2*, 97-98.

⁶⁶ And so, early on in *ST 2*, 25, Jenson states it plainly: “...any work of God [including the people of God] is rightly interpreted only if it is construed by the mutual roles of the triune persons.”

The Persons of the Triune Community and their “Roles” in the Fulfillment of Israel’s History

To begin a description of Jenson’s account of the “roles” played by Father, Son, and Spirit, it is perhaps easiest to provide Jenson’s own description:

...the Father begets the Son and freely breathes his Spirit; the Spirit liberates the Father for the Son and the Son from and for the Father; the Son is begotten and liberated, and so reconciles the Father with the future his Spirit is.⁶⁷

Three important points must be noted before unpacking the relevant elements in this quotation. First, the role played by each person mutually determines the others. Second, given Jenson’s strong statements against any concept of God not determined by God’s history with us, this description is not to be understood as the description of an immanent triune life transcendent of created reality that ‘later’ takes economic form.⁶⁸ What this means is that actions like “begetting,” “breathing,” “liberating,” and “reconciling,” have as their concrete reference God’s life with creatures (in the present context, God’s life with Israel). In turn, these “roles” as they occur as a subsistent social relation must be unpacked with reference to the concrete history in which they occur in the history of Israel and the church. Third and finally, Jenson gives the persons of the Son and the Spirit roles here that are (as far as I know) novel in the Christian tradition prior to Hegel: he gives the Spirit the role of liberating the Son from the Father (rather than being only their “bond”) and the Son the role of reconciling the Father with his Spirit.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ *ST I*, 161.

⁶⁸ At *ST I*, 143, Jenson notes regarding the concept of the economic Trinity, which implies the concept of the immanent Trinity, that “there are in any case no such phenomena.”

⁶⁹ Here, especially with the invocation of the role of the Spirit, there can be no denying that Jenson’s Trinitarian ontology is indebted to Hegel. Jenson is of two minds with respect to Hegel: on the one hand, he states that Hegel was a “theological disaster” (Cf. “The Great Transformation,” in *The Last Things*, 40). On the other hand, he nonetheless presents his own understanding of the Holy Spirit as reclaiming “Hegel’s truth for the gospel” through a “small but drastic amendment: Absolute Consciousness [in present context, the reconciliation of the Father with his Spirit] finds its own meaning and self in the *one* historical object, Jesus, and *so* posits Jesus’ fellows as its fellows and Jesus’ world as its world.” “The Holy Spirit,” in *Christian Dogmatics*, vol. 2, eds. Braaten and Jenson (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 169. Hegel’s error, on Jenson’s terms, was that he put “the world where Christ ought to be.”

With the above in mind, how these relations occur concretely in Israel's history must now be examined with special relevance to the question of the preexistence of the Son.

An analysis of Jenson's understanding of the Father's begetting of the Son and breathing of the Spirit propels us into the relations and roles of each person of the triune community as they play out in the history of Israel. The Father begets the Son, for Jenson, not in that he does so in an eternity "before" or "above" all time. There is no Son of God to be known in that sense.⁷⁰ While Jenson does want to affirm "a birth of the *Logos* as God that enables and therefore must be somehow antecedent to his birth as man," he will not make that affirmation by describing that birth as the birth of a fleshless Word, a *logos asarkos*, who is involved in the triune decision to become flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Neither will he uphold the Son's antecedence to his birth in time by locating his birth in God's "timeless" eternity. The Father's 'eternal' begetting of the Son is a begetting "*in and into*" the freedom that is the Spirit as God's own "future."⁷¹ The Son's life, in other words, is not determined by the Father alone. Furthermore, it is important to note that the Spirit in and into which Christ is begotten is the future that includes his incarnate life in Israel. Ultimately, the future of his life includes incarnation in one human, Jesus of Nazareth. Since that future is what the *Logos* is eternally begotten in and into, it also follows (on this logic) that the *Logos* is not born into an unincarnate static essence or state but in and into "a pattern of movement within the event of the Incarnation."⁷² The incarnation is, for Jenson, thus posed as a single event that in itself contains movement and direction, indeed, a single event that moves from a beginning (the Father) to an end (the Spirit), from a past to a

⁷⁰ Here again Jenson entertains the question about an "unincarnate *Logos*" and says that, as a "contrary-to-fact" question, it can be conceded as indeed a "possibility," but one about which "we can know or guess nothing whatsoever." *ST I*, 141.

⁷¹ *ST I*, 143-144. Emphasis in original.

⁷² *ST I*, 141. The incarnation too, for Jenson, cannot be construed as an event that has no past or future.

future.⁷³ Crucial to emphasize in this context is the implication that there can be no “determination” of the Son only from his origin. Jenson thus notes that “the Son appears as a narrative pattern of Israel’s created human story before he can appear as an individual Israelite within that story” and, crucially, it is this pattern of movement that constitutes the form of the Son’s pre-existence.⁷⁴ The begetting of the Son is the begetting of the one whose identity cannot reside in the Father alone but also ultimately in relation to that which the Father breathes out, namely his own future (the Spirit). The Son is thus “liberated” not only “for” but “from” the Father. From this revisionary trinitarian grammar, it follows, for Jenson, that the pre-existence of the Son can be described as his “*being going to be born to Mary.*”⁷⁵

Concretely, in Israel’s story, this “pattern” of pre-existence occurs as the Son’s narrative presence as “another by and with whom God is identified, so that what he does to and for this other he does to and for himself.”⁷⁶ Just in this way, Jenson argues, Israel speaks variously of God as “identified with Israel as a ‘settled’ participant in her story with him, who yet is other than the perpetrator of the identification.”⁷⁷ God is settled in Israel as “the Shekinah,” “the angel of the Lord,” the “name” of the Lord, and the “glory” of the Lord.⁷⁸ Israel as a nation, often by way of a representative figure within the nation, is also, in its own way, “Son” of God, and indeed, a son “in flesh.”⁷⁹ In each of these instances, Jenson argues there is identity and

⁷³ Indeed, God is, for Jenson, an internally differentiated event. This leads to his definition, appropriated in certain respects from Barth: “God is what happens between Jesus and his Father in their Spirit.” Cf. *ST 1*, 221-222.

⁷⁴ *ST 1*, 141.

⁷⁵ *ST 1*, 141. Emphasis in original.

⁷⁶ *ST 1*, 75-76.

⁷⁷ *ST 1*, 76.

⁷⁸ *ST 1*, 76. With Jenson’s reference to the Shekinah as God settled with Israel, it is not hard to see the influence of Franz Rosenzweig: “The Shekhina, God’s descent upon man and his sojourn among men, is pictured as a dichotomy taking place in God himself. God himself separates himself from himself, he gives himself away to his people, he shares in their sufferings, sets forth with them into the agony of exile, joins their wanderings.” *The Star of Redemption*, trans. William W. Hallo (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 409. Indeed, Jenson later notes Rosenzweig’s influence on him in *ST 2*, 335fn80. In that context, he notes Rosenzweig’s influence on his understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

⁷⁹ *ST 1*, 78.

difference between the Lord and Israel. This dynamic of identity and difference between the Lord and Israel finds its climactic moment in Jesus of Nazareth, such that at that point it could rightly be said of Israel that it is “at once the Son and the community of the Son.”⁸⁰

In light of the above account of the Son’s pre-existence, it is helpful to stop and note that this is yet another instance in which it can be said that Jenson departs from Barth’s notion of Israel’s witness to Jesus Christ. Israel, for Jenson, clearly does not witness to a “form” of the pre-existent Christ through the mirror of the “content” that is its history. Rather, its history is the history in which the Son is pre-existent as a narrative pattern of divine movement in Israel. The pre-existence of the Son is thus not a “third” (*Drittes*) reality “in the beginning with God,” which serves as the way between the eternal godhead of Christ and his elected humanity.⁸¹ Putting it in these terms, it could be further said that the election of Israel is simultaneous with the election of the Son in a way that also departs from Barth. While Barth could indeed affirm that the election of Jesus Christ “is simultaneously [*zugleich*]” the “eternal election of the one community of God,” Barth still understood the relation between these two elections in terms of the difference between eternity and time, between the “beginning” in which the community is determined in Christ and the “way” [*der Weg*] upon which that determination plays out.⁸² This “way,” according to Barth, is “the way of witness [*Zeugnisses*] to Jesus, the way of faith in him.”⁸³ Israel is indeed, for Barth, the “natural and historical environment of the man Jesus,” but again not as the environment in which the form of his preexistence is constituted in movement between origin and goal or past and future.⁸⁴ Rather, for Barth, Israel is the environment of Jesus in that it

⁸⁰ *ST I*, 82.

⁸¹ *CD II/2*, 107.

⁸² *KD II/2*, 215; *CD II/2*, 195.

⁸³ *KD II/2*, 215; *CD II/2*, 195.

⁸⁴ *CD II/2*, 196.

reflects or mirrors, “in face of the whole world,” one side of the twofold form of the primal determination of God.⁸⁵

For Jenson, the “role” of the Son as elect—the son as subject of election—is a role played out historically with the community of Israel. This role indeed, as with Barth, has a form, but that form is not determined from the “beginning.” One could say that, for Jenson, the Son has dramatic form, and so he must take shape as he lives his history in Israel’s history. Jenson describes what could be called the Son’s “form” variously. The Son is “servant.” While the nation of Israel is the elect as servant of the Lord, Israel is also “the community to be served by the Servant.” Thus, the servant of the Lord that Israel expected “is one within Israel who, for Israel, is what Israel is.” Since God is, according to Jenson, identified with Israel “as participant within her story,” and since Israel’s story involves the problem of death and the hope of its overcoming, he is this servant as the suffering figure described in Isaiah 40-55 who will “face Israel’s death with Israel.” He will do so, however, in such a way as to “just thereby assert that he is *God*.”⁸⁶ How so? As God is both within and beyond Israel, so he can both die and be the “one before whom the death is enacted.”⁸⁷ This “Servant-duality” is precisely what, according to Jenson, appears in the next form of the Son, namely, “king” and “messiah.” The king or messiah is savior precisely in that he “stands over against Israel” as nevertheless one who “is not himself” without Israel.⁸⁸ Since the salvation that Israel’s hopes expressed, however, was salvation from the reality of sin and death, the promise of the king’s coming must be interpreted as a promise for nothing short of his inaugurating a new reality: participation in the divine life through

⁸⁵ *CD II/2*, 196.

⁸⁶ *ST I*, 82. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁷ *ST I*, 82.

⁸⁸ *ST I*, 82-83. Again, this kind of language runs the other way around in Barth for whom Jesus’s “standing over against” Israel would be the determining of Israel, such that Israel would not be Israel without *him*.

atonement and resurrection.⁸⁹ But if this participation is not totally to dissolve the difference between Creator and creature, the Messiah “must be the one who in his own person can be an agent in the divine life and the community that in his identity with it is taken into that life.”⁹⁰ This is just what, according to Jenson, the gospel says happened in Jesus and his resurrection.

All along in the above description of Jenson’s account of God’s role in Israel as Son, what Jenson claims is being “traced” is the expectation of “one great eschatological event,” namely the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.⁹¹ According to Jenson, “Israel’s Scripture materially concludes with the question posed to Ezekiel: Son of a human—what do you think? Can these bones live?”⁹² This question, as it were, leaves a plotline unresolved in God’s story with Israel. Death is precisely the threat of having no future. Being identified with Israel, God makes this threat his own in the Son who dies on the cross. The death of the Son is the identification of God with Israel’s death. Jenson thus claims, not entirely unlike Barth himself, that “the Gospels identify the death of Jesus with the death of Israel.”⁹³ The difference at this point is that while Barth claims that Israel’s history of sin and suffering “reflects” and “mirrors” the judgment, death, and abandonment that, properly speaking, God elected for Godself from all eternity, Jenson makes God’s identification with Israel’s history of sin and suffering actual only through Israel’s history leading up to and through to the end of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.⁹⁴

God is participant in the history “deeply marked by rebellion against... identification” with God

⁸⁹ *ST 1*, 82-83. Invoking the concept of deification here, Jenson is quick to argue that deification need not be understood as undoing the creator-creature distinction. Rather, such a distinction is upheld in that “there must be... a difference between an Israelite who stands over against Israel and the people without whom this one is not himself.”

⁹⁰ *ST 1*, 83.

⁹¹ *ST 1*, 84-85.

⁹² *ST 1*, 12.

⁹³ *A Theology in Outline: Can These Bones Live?*, 30.

⁹⁴ Another way of stating the contrast: whereas for Barth God primally determined Himself for “rejection,” for Jenson, this determination was decided dramatically, *in time*. Jenson thus agrees with Barth that “it [rejection] can no longer be our rejection, only Christ’s” (*ST 2*, 176-177) but notice the “no longer” here, which implies the idea that this determination was a historical achievement.

and so can rightly be called “the chief of sinners” even as he is also at the same time “the righteous judge of sin.”⁹⁵

The resurrection of the Son, however, overcomes sin and the threat of death and so the threat of the premature, incoherent ending of God’s story with Israel. The risen Son is the reconciliation between the past promise of the God of Israel and the future of that promise and so of Israel’s future. Together, Jesus’s life, death, and finally his resurrection, is the reconciliation of the Father with the future that his Spirit is. Simultaneously, the resurrection answers Ezekiel’s question. Indeed, Israel’s bones can live because Jesus, the Son, lives. The role of the Son is to mediate the resolution of this unresolved plotline in Israel’s story, but precisely as the mediation of the Father’s originating work and the Spirit’s perfecting work which, as has already been shown above, is bound to Israel.⁹⁶ The resurrection of the Son narrates “the future that God has for his creatures” precisely because the resurrection is the coherence of God’s self-identity in the Son.⁹⁷

The Spirit who raises the Son is the Spirit of the Father, and had already rested on this Son. The unity of the crucified Son with the risen Son is posited in the essential unity between this Father and this Spirit. The unity of the crucified Son with the risen Jesus is nothing other than the oneness of God.⁹⁸

The question of Israel’s determination is resolved in time at the resurrection. Israel’s determination is not resolved, therefore, by way of the revelation of a divine pre-determination, but by way of the dramatic coherence of the work of the Father and the Spirit brought together in the person of the Son in Israel’s history. It is for this reason that Jenson believes he can make the claim that the Son pre-exists his human birth only in that “Christ’s birth from God is the divine

⁹⁵ *ST I*, 85-86. This is one among only a few contexts in which Jenson says something about Israel’s sin. In marked contrast to Barth, Jenson tends to focus more concretely on the threat of death faced by Israel rather than on Israel’s disobedience.

⁹⁶ *ST I*, 114.

⁹⁷ *ST I*, 198.

⁹⁸ *ST I*, 200.

future of his birth from the seed of David.”⁹⁹ The determination of Christ as “Son of God” cannot be a primal determination, rather, it must be a determination that results from the reconciliation of origin and goal, of past and future, of the Father and his Spirit in the Son’s resurrection.¹⁰⁰

Another key difference between Jenson and Barth has appeared. In Barth’s theology, that God’s self-determination was to be for humanity in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, meant that Jesus Christ’s Sonship took twofold form: judgment and mercy, death and resurrection. This was an eternal pre-determination. As has just been shown, however, in Jenson the determination of the Sonship of Jesus Christ comes “from” his resurrection, not from his pre-existence.¹⁰¹ It is only in the resurrection that Christ’s identity is determined in relation to the Father and his Spirit.¹⁰² Again, however, not just the Son’s identity is determined in this way, but given the fact that the role played by each person mutually determines the others, the identity of the Father and the Spirit in their relation to one another is also determined in the resurrection. It is as though it is an open question in Israel’s history how the God of Israel (the Father) will relate to Israel’s end,

⁹⁹ *ST I*, 143. Emphasis in original.

¹⁰⁰ Jenson finds an exegetical basis for this claim in Romans 1:3-4, where he notes that Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as “determined God’s Son..., according to Holy Spirit, from resurrection of the dead.” *ST I*, 142. Here a critical question arises: Does all of this mean that Christ’s human story determines his divine story? Is this not an instance in which theology is the representation of the reality of “man” as he is turned, in Israel’s history, decisively towards the reality of the Word of God? Jenson rejects the consequence. He is adamant that Christ’s history as a human being is not “ontologically symmetrical” with his divine history. Jenson attempts at all times to defend the statement that “Christ’s human history happens because his divine history happens...not vice versa” (*ST I*, 138). Many of Jenson’s interlocutors do not think this distinction really can hold given all that Jenson says elsewhere. See, for example, David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003): 156-166; Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Doctrine of the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017): 108-111. Jenson’s distinction depends entirely on Jenson’s account of God’s being as temporal infinity, grounded as it is in his doctrine of the Spirit as God’s future. The ontological asymmetry between Jesus’ divine story and his human story, one could say, is grounded, for Jenson, in the fact that Jesus’ life in divine history is constituted in his role as reconciler between the Father and his Spirit, not first and foremost in his role as Israel’s Messiah. Although both histories happen simultaneously, divine history determines created history by enveloping it in these more fundamental triune relations. Finally, since divine history is determined by the pole of the future—indeed, God is “primally future to himself”—it is the fact of the Spirit’s raising Jesus that establishes the ontological priority of Jesus’ divine story (*ST I*, 217). The human story of Jesus, we might say, cannot be ontologically symmetrical with his divine story since it was the divine Spirit’s action of raising him from the dead which made his human story the future of all human stories.

¹⁰¹ *ST I*, 142. This assertion is based on Jenson’s exegesis of Romans 1:3-4.

¹⁰² “Once more on the *Logos asarkos*,” 122.

that is, to its future. It is precisely the Spirit, according to Jenson, that is the Father’s “life as he transcends himself to enliven other reality than himself” (here Israel) and so the question of Israel’s end is simultaneously a question of the Father’s relation to himself as future.¹⁰³

The question, then, is: what is the character or personality of the Spirit of the Father as he lives in Israel, and will this Spirit finally be withdrawn from Israel—which would mean Israel’s death—or will it be poured out on Israel—which would mean its new life? Jenson notes that while the Spirit “appears as a single reality from the start” of the biblical narrative, the personality of the Spirit does not and so the Spirit’s personality is also undetermined in Israel’s history before the resurrection.¹⁰⁴ Jenson notes that the *persona* of the Spirit “appears in two chief contexts” in the Old Testament, namely, in “his historical agency through Israel’s leadership” which came to “move history” and as “the agent of prophecy” in Israel that spoke God’s word.¹⁰⁵ However, Jenson points out that there is yet another conception of the agency of the Spirit in Israel’s narrative, and that is as the “promised eschatologically outpoured Spirit.”¹⁰⁶ The coming of this Spirit in identity with the two other forms of agency is a “messianic” synthesis.¹⁰⁷ The Spirit will rest upon one person in Israel who will nonetheless be the giver of the Spirit in such a way that “the Spirit will cease to be a special endowment.”¹⁰⁸ Indeed, as will become evident below, it is crucial that this eschatological outpouring be promised for “all flesh.”¹⁰⁹ For this to be possible, however, this messianic Spirit bearer “must somehow be beyond the community even while belonging to it, so as to be related to the entire community as

¹⁰³ *ST I*, 86.

¹⁰⁴ *ST I*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ *ST I*, 86ff.

¹⁰⁶ *ST I*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ *ST I*, 87.

¹⁰⁸ *ST I*, 87.

¹⁰⁹ *ST I*, 88.

such.”¹¹⁰ This messianic Spirit bearer is, of course, Jesus the Son who in his identity with Israel (belonging to the community) and in being raised from the dead (and so beyond the community), is able to pour out the Spirit on the community in the event of Pentecost. Jenson summarizes the consequences of this new event:

As the Spirit shows his face, the church appears. The Messiah’s community is a single communal prophet; just so, the relations we have traced in Israel’s Bible are fulfilled. This is also the place to say for the first time what will be said again: the church does not ‘supersede’ Israel. The church is the community of ‘Jews and gentiles’; she is Israel fulfilled by identification with and distinction from her Messiah, that is therefore open also to the eschatological ingathering of the nations.¹¹¹

There is much in this passage that needs unpacking and the full meaning of this passage will only become clear in the last section of this chapter. At this point, there is one question the answer to which will provide the transition to Jenson’s account of the church and the ongoing existence of Judaism in separation from the church: which “relations” are fulfilled at Pentecost? Quite simply, the relations that are fulfilled at Pentecost are those between the Father, Son, and Spirit in their identification with Israel. The reconciliation of God the Father as source and the Spirit as goal in the resurrection of Jesus is the self-identity of God.¹¹² The resurrection of Jesus “establishes his deity.”¹¹³ Importantly, that it does so means not only that there ‘was’ not a pre-determined identity ‘beforehand,’ it also means that Jesus does not continue to develop or incorporate new experiences. As risen, Jesus now belongs to the transcendent future, indeed, he is that future, for Jenson, but he does so precisely as “an accomplished reality within the history of this age.”¹¹⁴ As an “accomplished reality,” Jesus is the fulfillment of God’s promises to Israel. In the Son, Israel’s conflicted story is given a narrated conclusion and it is a conclusion that

¹¹⁰ *ST I*, 88.

¹¹¹ *ST I*, 89.

¹¹² *ST I*, 159.

¹¹³ *ST I*, 200.

¹¹⁴ *ST I*, 201.

moves from death to life; from narrative tension, to narrative coherence; from God’s identification with Israel, to Israel’s identification with God. Inasmuch as the risen Jesus has poured the Spirit upon his community, the community itself has become identified with one who is an “agent in the divine life” that gives coherence to Israel’s narrative.¹¹⁵ What, however, of the historical fact that Israel’s human story, including the reality of death within that story, did not cease with Jesus’ resurrection?

Here Jenson notes that the expected narrative plot would have included, as it did with Jesus first, the resurrection of the Messiah’s community in his wake. Jenson invokes his criteria for a good narrative (adapted from Aristotle), stating that it should be expected that events in God’s life with Israel will be “unexpected,” even if they are seen retrospectively as “just what had to happen.”¹¹⁶ The determination of the Son is given from his resurrection, and so the expectation would be that the fulfillment of Israel’s identification with God would also include resurrection as their determination. But, unexpectedly, only Jesus was raised. Why? According to Jenson,

Jesus’ Resurrection ‘first,’ making a time in which he is enthroned as Messiah while his people are still on the way and in which the resurrection has begun while people continue to die, is, to be sure, unexpected by previous versions of Israel’s hope. Yet by it, what is otherwise an antinomy at the heart of the Old Testament is resolved. Israel is to be a blessing to all nations, who are gathered to her God. But when it is seen that Israel’s destiny can be fulfilled only by the conclusion of this world’s history and the beginning of a new reality, no historical space is left in which the ingathering can occur. By Jesus’ Resurrection occurring ‘first,’ a sort of *hole* opens *in* the event of the End, a space for something like what used to be history, for the church and its mission.¹¹⁷

The event of the “End” has indeed come, for Israel. Israel’s history has, as with Barth, been given an inevitable narrative “passing,” even as such passing ushers in its fulfillment, its

¹¹⁵ *ST I*, 85.

¹¹⁶ *ST I*, 64.

¹¹⁷ *ST I*, 85. Emphasis in original.

“coming” new life. If Israel’s end meant that no new events would be possible, however, then God’s history with Israel would contain a form of narrative incoherence, for there is one crucial promise in Israel’s history that would be left unfulfilled if Israel were to be raised with Jesus: God’s promise to Abraham that Israel would be a blessing to all nations, and directly related to this promise, the promise that the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh. The church and its mission are, as will now become clear, founded for the purpose of fulfilling this goal and the Judaism of the Rabbis appears precisely as a paired, complementary phenomenon with the church in this space within the end.

The Founding of the Church and the Synagogue on the Way to the Fulfillment

I began the previous section with a passage from Jenson in which he described the “roles” of the Trinitarian persons in their narrative relations in Israel’s history. It is now possible to show how Jenson appeals to these roles to describe the founding of the church and the synagogue. Indeed, importantly, the church has a “triune institution,” for Jenson, and this means that the ecclesial community finds its “model...origin...and its end” in the triune community:¹¹⁸

...the Father’s role as unoriginated Originator of deity is concretely not other than his role as the One who sends the Son and the Spirit on their ecclesial missions; the Son’s role as the one in whom the Father finds himself is concretely not other than his role as head of the church that in him finds the Father; the Spirit’s role as the one who frees the Father and the Son is concretely his role as the one who frees the Christian community.¹¹⁹

As with the last section’s introductory passage, this passage will serve as an entryway into an analysis of Jenson’s account of the relationship between Israel, the church and the synagogue and how it differs from Barth’s. An initial summative contrast can be stated before beginning the

¹¹⁸ Jenson’s appeal to the Trinity as “model,” “origin,” and “end” for the Church, comes from a statement of the Joint Roman Catholic-Orthodox Commission, *The Mystery of the Church and the Eucharist in the Light of the Mystery of the Holy Trinity* (Munich report, 1982), ii.2. Cf. *ST 2*, 173fn26.

¹¹⁹ *ST 2*, 173.

analysis: whereas Barth's analysis of the community of God is an explicit outworking of his doctrine of election, Jenson's doctrine of the community is fundamentally an outworking of his Trinitarian ontology. Thus, for Barth, the community is determined by a twofold form that corresponds to the twofold will of God in the eternal election of Jesus Christ. This also meant, for Barth, that the oneness of the community in its history as Israel and church was established in the fact that Jesus Christ's history took the form of a twofold history. In Jenson, the community of God, while certainly unified "in Christ," is nonetheless given a threefold "reality" that "echoes" the relations of the triune identity: Israel is determined to be "the people of God," and in the risen Christ's identification with it, it is freed to be, as church and synagogue, "the temple of the Spirit" and just so the present availability of the "body of Christ" in the world. Working out the nuances of the above summative contrast must now be done in detail.

Jenson begins his analysis of the triune institution of the church with the Father. He notes that the Father's sending of the Son must "mean that the Father chooses Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel and Israel to be his people."¹²⁰ The Father, in other words, establishes Israel as "the people of God" by electing Jesus to be the Messiah and Israel to be his community.¹²¹ This is the predestination of the community, for Jenson, and in many ways Jenson's account echoes Barth. That it does so is evident, for example, in the fact that Jenson adopts Barth's account of "the dialectic of election and rejection" as being "historical and so" having "*direction*."¹²² Of course, the key difference here is that for Jenson the "historical" aspect of God's eternal election is such that it actually makes the "pre-" in predestination something that "occurs also within time, as the Resurrection and as the contingency and divine agency of Israel's and the church's proclamation

¹²⁰ *ST 2*, 176.

¹²¹ *ST 2*, 190-195.

¹²² *ST 2*, 176. Emphasis in original.

and prayer, visible and audible.”¹²³ Israel and the church, in other words, participate in the decision of predestination.¹²⁴ The direction Israel’s election ultimately leads is to acceptance in Christ and this “in Christ” means ultimately life in the church as the total Christ (the *totus Christus*).¹²⁵ Israel’s goal, as with Barth, is the church. The church is thus “an event within Israel” in which Israel is being fulfilled in identification with the Son. As was noted above in the last section, however, this identification is only possible, for Jenson, if the Spirit so acts to make it possible. The Father also sends the Spirit on an ecclesial mission, and that mission is precisely to “impel” Israel to become the church and to “liberate” the church “for the fulfilling of Israel.”¹²⁶ Israel fulfilled must finally mean Israel as it is a blessing to the nations. The Spirit’s mission would thus have been incomplete, and Israel would have been “unfulfilled,” as was noted above, had “the Father determined that the saints of canonical Israel should rise together with Jesus.”¹²⁷ Thus, the concrete mission the Father sends the Spirit on is the mission to “delay the Parousia,” making a time in the event of the End for the church’s mission.¹²⁸ The church’s mission is “to be the gateway of creation’s translation into God” and in order to do this, the church must be freed by the Spirit “to be appropriate for union with a person risen into the eschatological future,” to be, that is, his body.¹²⁹ The church is thus the present availability of “the body of Christ” in the world and is so in that it is the “temple of the Spirit” of Christ.¹³⁰ The church, however, is not yet the “realized” people of God. The church, as the body of Christ who

¹²³ *ST 2*, 176.

¹²⁴ Again, one sees Jenson’s emphasis on creaturely participation in God on display. *ST 2*, 176: “Thus—to put it in the most strenuous possible context—to the penitent’s question, ‘But how do I know I am among the elect?’ the confessor’s right answer must be, ‘You know because I am about to absolve you, and my doing that *is* God’s eternal act of decision about you.’” Emphasis in original.

¹²⁵ *ST 2*, 173.

¹²⁶ *ST 2*, 183.

¹²⁷ *ST 2*, 178.

¹²⁸ *ST 2*, 178.

¹²⁹ *ST 2*, 179, 182.

¹³⁰ *ST 2*, 195-197.

is risen into the future and as the temple of the Spirit “whose very reality among us is ‘foretaste’ or ‘down payment,’” can only be understood to “anticipate” the one people of God.¹³¹

With the introduction of the crucial concept of “anticipation” (already explored in the last chapter), Jenson’s departure from Barth becomes all the more apparent. The church is not presently the fulfilled people of God but is, rather, a “detour” that will one day lead to that one gathered people. The direction of Israel’s history, in other words, while leading to the church, does not therefore lead directly to the fulfillment of the one community. Instead, the church ends up taking an unexpected path. The true goal, for Jenson, is the Kingdom and it is only there that the one community of God will truly gather.¹³² Here it is helpful to stop and ask how this compares with Barth’s account. On the one hand, there is a certain parallel. Recall that, for Barth, the church is given the “coming form” of the community. Here one might suppose a kind of agreement between Barth and Jenson inasmuch as “coming” shares a conceptual likeness with the notion of “anticipation.” One could also posit agreement between Barth and Jenson regarding the source of the one community’s unity: that it is a unity in Christ. Once one digs deeper than these surface agreements, however, the differences become patent. Barth’s account of the church form of the community says nothing about the church being a detour on the path to Israel’s fulfillment.¹³³ The church is the “perfect” (*vollkommene*) or consummate form of the community, precisely in its provisional reality as a mediating witness to the mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ.¹³⁴ For Jenson, whose account of the community stresses much more its participation in the triune life, the one community does not merely “witness” provisionally to God’s act once

¹³¹ *ST 2*, 172.

¹³² *ST 2*, 323, 333.

¹³³ Of course, that is not to say that Barth could not speak of the Church’s failure to witness, which he could indeed do quite well!

¹³⁴ *KD II/2*, 233; *CD II/2*, 211.

accomplished but participates in the relations whereby the triune God draws all of reality towards deification. Indeed, if the church has a “mediating” role, for Jenson, it is a mediation not only of witness but of intercession and sacrifice:

If the church’s Christological and pneumatological realities can be comprehended as her mission, so the church’s specific direction to the Father is her *intercession*. Agitated by the Spirit and implicated, as the Son’s created body, with all creation as it is made through and for the Son, the church’s petition and praise represent before the Father the petition and praise of all creation. That is to say, the church’s vocation before the Father is *priestly*, and her service before him *sacrificial*.¹³⁵

Yet another difference becomes apparent when considering the question of the oneness of the community. In Barth, this oneness is based upon his account of the community’s witness to the twofold form of Christ’s eternal election. In Jenson, however, the oneness of the community will ultimately be the community led “into exact concert with the triune community and its righteousness, as this is defined by Christ’s death and Resurrection.”¹³⁶ In other words, just as the oneness of God, for Jenson, was only achieved in the resurrection, so too the oneness of the people of God (who are not raised!) will only be achieved in the eschaton:

it is within the bracket of predestination and eschatology that the New Testament refers to the church as the *populus dei*...the inner relations and exterior boundaries of the people of God are determinate only within Jonathan Edwards’s ‘most general proportion’ of God’s acts, in which they are ‘not tied to any particular proportion, to this or that created being, but the proportion is with the whole series of [God’s] acts and designs from eternity to eternity. Within any more limited set of historical connections, within any part or aspect of God’s history with us, Israel ‘after the flesh,’ the believing remnant of Israel, the church of Jews and gentiles, and the continuing synagogue cannot be neatly sorted out with respect to their character as the people of God.’¹³⁷

It is only at this point that doctrine concerning the synagogue separated from the church can adequately be addressed for Jenson. “The synagogue,” like the church, is a “detour...within the

¹³⁵ ST 2, 227. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁶ ST 2, 326.

¹³⁷ ST 2, 192-193.

Fulfillment of Israel’s hope.”¹³⁸ While Jenson argues that the church should still “call Jews to be baptized into the church of Jews and gentiles and think that when this happens it obeys God’s will,” he argues that the church “dare not conclude that the continuing separate synagogue is *against* God’s will.”¹³⁹ Why not?

Here arises the question of the continuity between Israel and the church on the one hand and Israel and the synagogue in the other. For Barth, the synagogue could only be construed as a form of rebellion (even if this rebellion precisely confirmed Israel’s enduring election) since the form of its continuity with Israel was a repetition of its “passing” form and so an expression of its rejection of the promise given in its midst. The church had a form of continuity with Israel that was appropriate in light of Christ’s resurrection, for Barth, precisely because it was a continuity that incorporated the witness to the passing form of the community within the community that witnessed to its coming form. For Jenson, however, the confession of the synagogue’s continuity with Israel is not to be given based on its belief or unbelief in Christ. The synagogue, for Jenson, is *patently* continuous with Israel in that it maintains descent from Abraham and Sarah and gathers around Torah.

Why should the church affirm that such an ‘unexpected’ form of continuity with Israel (unexpected on the church’s part) is God’s will? Precisely for the same reason that the church confesses its own mission as God’s will: God, through the Spirit’s personal initiative, has within the event of the end, instituted the gathering of a community in direct continuity with Israel that is and is not yet the one gathered people of God. The founding of the church was unexpected but is nonetheless an act that the church declares coherent within the story of God with Israel. The ongoing existence of the synagogue, argues Jenson, should be conceived no differently. In fact,

¹³⁸ *ST* 2, 194.

¹³⁹ *ST* 2, 193. Emphasis in original.

Jenson sees the claims of church and synagogue to “rightly read Israel’s Bible...[as] precisely equivalent” given the historical fact that after the destruction of the second temple, “Pharisaism and the church were the survivors.”¹⁴⁰ Prior to the eschaton the church “waits by faith in Jesus’ Resurrection” and “the synagogue waits by study of *torah*.”¹⁴¹ For Jenson, Torah, understood in the “most comprehensive sense,” along with the “entire ensemble of institutions” that are found in Israel, the church, and the synagogue, must be confessed as the ways that God has, through his Spirit, “maintained...this people’s [the people of God] historical continuity.”¹⁴² With this claim, Jenson makes a bold statement regarding the synagogue:

...the church must think that the [synagogue’s] study of *torah* is indeed worship of the one, that is Triune, God.¹⁴³

The implication, in other words, is that in its own way the synagogue is to be understood as “the people of God,” the “temple of the Spirit,” and the “Body of Christ.”

In an essay published in 2003 called on “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” Jenson makes three proposals to his Christian interlocutors that are meant to give theological warrant for the above claims.¹⁴⁴ First, he notes what the church is unable to provide in the time of the detour, namely, “a people identified by descent from Abraham and Sarah.”¹⁴⁵ He then proposes that given this fact, Christians should believe that “God wills the Judaism of Torah-obedience as that which alone can and does hold the lineage of Abraham and Sarah together during the time of detour.”¹⁴⁶ Second, Jenson argues that the church has been unable to “enforce”

¹⁴⁰ *ST 2*, 194.

¹⁴¹ *ST 2*, 194. Emphasis in original. While Jenson has opted not to capitalize Torah, I have chosen to throughout the thesis.

¹⁴² *ST 2*, 194.

¹⁴³ *ST 2*, 194. Emphasis in original.

¹⁴⁴ “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” in *Jews and Christians: People of God*, eds. Braaten and Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003). The original version of the essay was published in 2000 in *Pro Ecclesia* 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 43-56.

¹⁴⁵ “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” 9.

¹⁴⁶ “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” 9.

the Law in “its role as charter of a people that is just different.” He then proposes that given this fact, Christians “should acknowledge that God, in the time between the times and when there is no temple, wants a community that studies and obeys Torah as Judaism does, so that he may have an unavoidably special people also in that time.”¹⁴⁷

Finally, Jenson addresses the crucial fact that these proposals cannot really be Christian “unless they can be christologically founded.” In turn, his third proposal states:

The Word who has come in the flesh belongs to the lineage of Abraham and Sarah, and this fact belongs to his identity, to what traditional Christology calls the ‘one hypostasis’ of the Word who is Jesus. Paul teaches, and the church follows his teaching, that the church is the body of the risen Christ, and Paul does not initially mean that as a trope. As my body is myself as I am present and available to you, so the church is Christ’s presence to the world, in the time of detour. But what sort of flesh is this body? Can there be a present body of the risen Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, in which the lineage of Abraham and Sarah so vanishes into a congregation of gentiles as it does in the church? My final—and perhaps most radical—suggestion to Christian theology...is that, so long as the time of detour lasts, the embodiment of the risen Christ is whole only in the form of the church and an identifiable community of Abraham and Sarah’s descendants. The church and the synagogue are together and only together the present availability to the world of the risen Jesus Christ.¹⁴⁸

It is perhaps with a closing word about this radical suggestion that my analysis of Jenson’s theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth can be concluded. Jenson understands the fulfillment of created reality as “translation” into God (deification). That has happened in Jesus Christ inasmuch as in him the goal of time, the end of time, and “what time is about,” has reached “through time” in Israel’s history.¹⁴⁹ If the fulfillment of time is to happen, what happened in Jesus Christ must continue to be available within our time.¹⁵⁰ According to Jenson, this availability occurs, unexpectedly, in the separate life of the church and the synagogue. But, according to Jenson, it will not always be so. At the final End, that is, when the Lord returns in

¹⁴⁷ “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” 11.

¹⁴⁸ “Toward A Christian Theology of Judaism,” 13.

¹⁴⁹ *ST I*, 222

¹⁵⁰ *ST I*, 67.

judgment, he will “restore his people to the main road, ending the detour.”¹⁵¹ At this point, he will “terminate the separation between the church and Israel according to the flesh.”¹⁵² Judaism and Christianity exist presently as “mirror images,” says Jenson, not, as with Barth, of the passing and coming humanity, but of each other, of the community whose Torah obedience holds together the lineage of Abraham and Sarah and the community, whose obedience to Christ moves Abraham’s promise outward to Gentiles in mission. When the Lord returns, says Jenson, the mirror images will be “fit...to one another.”¹⁵³

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown some of the most fundamental ways that Jenson adopted and re-worked Barth’s theology, and the effect such re-working had on Jenson’s doctrines of Israel, the church, and the rabbinic synagogue. Unlike some of Barth’s other students,¹⁵⁴ Jenson never came to Barth’s theology with the intent of revising his *Israellehre* but instead sought to revise Barth’s doctrine of God. But, as Jenson began to write on a Christian theology of Judaism late in life, he began to work out the implications his own doctrine of God would have for a doctrine of Israel and Judaism, looking back to Barth’s doctrine of election as a resource when helpful. The most decisive difference to be seen between Barth and Jenson on the topic of Israel and Judaism is visible in Jenson’s appeal to the Spirit as the determination, the “future,” of the community called “people of God.” Perhaps it could be said that for Barth the community has a Christological determination, while for Jenson the community has a Pneumatological

¹⁵¹ *ST* 2, 334-335.

¹⁵² *ST* 2, 335.

¹⁵³ *ST* 2, 335. Jenson notes (335fn80) that he adopts, from the Christian side, the concept of the church and Judaism as mirror-images from Franz Rosenzweig.

¹⁵⁴ Principal among them being Marquardt and van Buren.

determination. Of course, this is a bit too reductive a statement, but it captures something of the key difference. Israel's goal, the church's mission, and the parallel existence of Judaism alongside the church are determined by the triune relations, and within the triune relations, it is the Spirit's role that is determinative for the community's coming future.

The question posed at the end of the last two chapters can be asked yet again: would Barth have recognized Jenson's work in *ST* as what was needed to improve on his *Israellehre*? At the end of chapter one I suggested that Barth's admonition to Marquardt that he be aware of the dangers involved in improving Barth's *Israellhere* ultimately represented Barth's worry about natural theology. On what theological basis is a doctrine of Israel and Judaism to be built? Jenson's late-career doctrine of Israel and Judaism was built upon his novel doctrine of God, especially his emphasis on the positive relationship between eternity and time. Would Barth have recognized Jenson's doctrine of God's eternity as adequate to safeguard his doctrine of Israel and Judaism from becoming a form of natural theology? As a student of the 18th and 19th centuries, Barth feared what could happen when theology over-emphasized the positive relation between time and eternity, namely God's "supra-temporality:" "[t]oo much attention...[would be]...paid to man in time, his needs and problems, but above all his positive possibilities."¹⁵⁵ Barth also knew well what could happen when theology made too much of God as "future," and so reduced theology to "eschatology:" God's "post-temporality" would "be played off" against his pre-temporality and supra-temporality.¹⁵⁶ To be sure, Jenson aims to avoid the pitfalls of 18th and 19th century theology in this regard by holding together all three poles of time. Perhaps this much can be said, however: avoiding Barth's over-emphasis on God's pre-temporality, Jenson over-emphasized both the supra-temporality and post-temporality of God. Clearly, the result accorded

¹⁵⁵ *CD* II/1, 632.

¹⁵⁶ *CD* II/1, 631.

the history of Israel, the church, and the Judaism of the synagogue a level of importance and “possibility” not found in Barth. Israel, the church, and Judaism do not just “mirror” or “represent” a more fundamental reality, rather, each is caught up as participant in the enveloping relations of the triune God leading towards created reality’s deification.

Conclusion: Theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth?

The above analysis of van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson has sought to demonstrate the conceptual relationship between each theologian's early engagement with Barth and their later contributions to post-Holocaust theology, arguing that by examining the former, one can better understand the theological bases for the latter. Throughout my analysis, it has become clear that each of the three appropriates and departs from different aspects of Barth's thought, with these appropriations and departures later coming to bear directly on their theologies of Israel and Judaism.

Van Buren is unique among the three in that he began very much in step with Barth, adopting most of his dogmatic approach, and only departing from him several years after his return to America. With his turn to linguistic analysis and the secular meaning of the Gospel, however, he set out on a path that departed radically from Barth's Christology and he continued on that path as he developed an alternative to Barth's doctrine of revelation in *DW* and then Barth's *Israellehre* in *CTPI*. Israel and Judaism, for van Buren, are not determined to be witnesses of Jesus Christ. Rather, Israel and Judaism witness to the God who has determined to be the creator and redeemer.

Yoder's early engagement with Barth was both appreciative and critical. He appreciated Barth's Christological focus, however, in his engagement with Barth's ethics—specifically Barth's argument for the legitimacy of Christian involvement in war—Yoder critiqued what he saw as an inconsistency between Barth's Christology and his doctrinal exposition of divine freedom, election, and revelation. If Christology and revelation are the true bases for ethics, they must determine the ethical shape of the community of God in correspondence with the “messianic element” revealed in Christ, not only by way of an analogy with the freedom of the

electing God whose mercy rules in his judgment. This critique, as I argued above, relates conceptually to Yoder's account of the witness of Israel and Judaism in his later *JCSR*. The witness of Israel and Judaism, for Yoder, is determined for the new obedience made possible through Christ's victory, an obedience that Yoder named "Jewish pacifism." The community of God, as he saw it, thus mediates not only God's judgment and mercy in the world, but also God's justice.

Finally, like Yoder, Jenson's early engagement with Barth was both appreciative and critical. While Jenson thought Barth pioneering in his claim that God's eternity is the prototype of our time, he nonetheless thought Barth ended up with a "timeless" God after all. In his attempt to carry forward Barth's reflections on God's eternity, Jenson developed a Trinitarian ontology in which God's transcendence was understood in terms of his futurity to both Godself and to creaturely history. In his theology, it is the Spirit that is the determination of the Triune life, not the person of Christ as in Barth. As a result, Israel's and Judaism's history does not serve, for Jenson, as a witness to God's self-determination understood in terms of Christ's pre-existence outside of the movement of creaturely history. Rather, Israel and Judaism are caught up as participants in the constitution of the Triune life as it envelops created reality.

Despite the diverse paths of appropriation and departure each of the three take from Barth, at a basic level one direction they all have in common with the great Swiss theologian is that they recognize the importance, and indeed, necessity of providing a theological account of biblical Israel and the ongoing existence of the Jewish people in Christian theology. This begs the question, however, of whether there are, in their diverse alternatives to Barth, areas of overlap? Put differently, are there common theological convictions operative in theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth?

Simply stated, at the foundation of each theology of Israel and Judaism after Barth is a critique of his doctrine of God, specifically his doctrine of God's self-determination as the pre-determination of all of reality in Jesus Christ. Van Buren, Yoder, and Jenson all questioned Barth's framing of God's self-determination as the pre-determination of all reality in Jesus Christ and the implications such a framing had for understandings of the relationship between the reality of God and the reality of human history. Implicit in their diverse analyses are the questions: Is who God is, and who human beings are, really determined apart from human history or is it determined in the course of human history? Is history and its goal pre-determined by and in God or is the future open? Do epoch-changing historical events such as the Holocaust not have an impact on our conception of the being and nature of God, the mission of Israel and the church, and the course of history?

It is not hard to see how the above questions relate to the task of providing theologies of Israel and Judaism, not only after Barth, but especially after the Holocaust. If anti-Judaism and the historic teaching of supersessionism are to be repudiated in Christian theology, then Christian theology is faced with the difficult task of accounting positively for the historical development of Judaism independent of Christianity. What became evident from the analysis of the first chapter on each theologian is that their basic departure from Barth's doctrine of God's eternal self-determination and so the determination of all other reality in him—a doctrine that funded Barth's understanding of the determination of Israel and Judaism exclusively to be the witness to God's judgment—laid the foundation for each of the three theologians to then frame Israel and Judaism's witness in broader, and indeed more positive, terms.

Interestingly, in one way or another, each theologian often justified their departure from Barth's doctrine of God's eternal self-determination with the claim that they were only following

through Barth's best insights in rejecting idealistic or philosophical interpretations of scripture, or interpretations of scripture tainted by conceptions of divinity derived from Greek metaphysics. These were to be rejected in favor of theological reflections based on scripture as telling of a particular "history" and of particular "events." Barth's account of God's eternal self-determination as the pre-determination of all reality in Jesus Christ, in their estimation, retained too many of the metaphysical or philosophical trappings that he otherwise sought to reject.

To be sure, Barth did indeed encourage the rejection of philosophy and metaphysics throughout the *CD*. However, in practice, he nonetheless remained indebted to much of the Greek philosophical tradition, the Greek and Latin patristic heritage, and in addition, he remained conversant with the nineteenth and twentieth century philosophical landscape.¹ Thus, Barth's polemic against philosophy in its many guises should be read, as Oakes puts it, "more like a dare [to practice theology apart from philosophy] than a well-defined programme."² This "dare" was taken up with various degrees of intensity in the theology of each of the authors I have studied, with particular effects on their later theologies of Israel and Judaism. Despite the occasional admissions by each that all thought-schemes are subject to critique, van Buren and Yoder tended to accept the rejection of Greek metaphysics as self-evidently necessary for theology. Van Buren framed this rejection variously as a turn to "empirical" reality or to a "historical" perspective more befitting of "biblical theology" or "covenantal theology," while Yoder framed his rejection of philosophy and metaphysics in terms of "biblical realism" or a more "Hebraic way" of thinking. Early on in his theological career, Jenson also called for a rejection of metaphysics,³ but later attempted somewhat of a middle path, calling his theology a

¹ For the in-depth account of Barth's career-long battle to define the relationship between theology and philosophy, see Kenneth Oakes's *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy* (New York: Oxford, 2012).

² Oakes, *Karl Barth on Theology and Philosophy*, 253.

³ See "Proclamation without Metaphysics," in *Theology as Revisionary Metaphysics*, 4-17.

“revisionary metaphysics.” What is clear, however, is that each believed theology needed to be liberated from some or all of the Greek philosophical heritage, and each believed that Barth’s doctrine of God’s self-determination was an instance of a regression into that heritage.

From this basic point of departure, all three found resources for moving beyond Barth in articulating a theology of Israel and Judaism that offers a much more positive account of the witness of biblical Israel as well as of the providential importance of Israel’s continuing history in the development of Judaism. Van Buren and Yoder do so by rejecting any notion of pre-determined “forms” of the community and by way of a conception of history as an undetermined arena of action within which God and human creatures act. History is open-ended for both in the sense that God has so determined Godself so as to not determine the creature’s or history’s redemptive end without the participation and cooperation of those creatures. For both van Buren and Yoder, this leaves matters of ultimate redemption somewhat more uncertain and thus affords the human cooperation with God a degree of importance not seen in the same degree in Barth. To be sure, Yoder does claim that Jesus’s Lordship is determinative in the sense that his victory is ultimately assured. That said, the emphasis falls, for Yoder, on how the church should witness proleptically to that ultimate redemption in its ethical life while it waits for final redemption. Jenson’s answers to the question of history’s determined end, however, are different. For him, history is determined by the life of the Triune God—indeed, creation is being “enveloped” by the Triune life—but since that life is itself a story with a past, present, and future, the future of the creature included in that story is in its own way genuinely unfinished.

Given van Buren’s and to an extent Yoder’s conception of history’s indeterminateness, and Jenson’s different construal of the relationship between eternity and time, all three authors find it possible to frame the witness of rabbinic Judaism in continuity with biblical Israel, but no

longer in the sole form, as with Barth, of a repetition of Israel's rebellion. Again, all three come to this affirmation by different routes. Van Buren affirms Judaism as a witness to God in *direct* continuity with biblical Israel in its call to observe Torah. He then skirts the problem of Christ's superiority or divinity largely by framing his representative significance as being the Gentile way into Israel's covenant. *Israel's* theological precedence to the Church is thus everywhere affirmed and maintained by van Buren and Christ is understood to belong to Israel (not the other way around, as with Barth).

Things are different for Yoder and Jenson for whom Judaism's and Christianity's claims of continuity with biblical Israel are basically equivalent and not by any means direct. Yoder affirms the historical development of Judaism as being in continuity with biblical Israel but does so by way of challenging the prevailing definitions of what counts as Judaism and Christianity in the first place. Belief in Jesus as redemptive Messiah is not the sole prerequisite for proper continuity with Israel (as it is with Barth). Living in continuity with Jesus's life of obedience, understood as the fulfillment of biblical Israel's embodied existence as the elect people, is of greater importance than confessing his divine status as redeemer or adhering to the creeds of the establishment church. Thus, rabbinic Judaism, like the Free Church for Yoder, can be understood as continuous with the faithful in Israel and with the supremely faithful one, Jesus, because both communities have, in his estimation, witnessed to the proper "synthesis of apartness and representation" befitting the people of God in every new age in the world, especially in the realm of ethics.⁴

Finally, for Jenson, Judaism and the church are not continuous with biblical Israel in any direct sense. The story of biblical Israel is tied up with the story of the Father, the Son, and the

⁴ This quotation comes from the Introduction to Yoder's *The Priestly Kingdom*, 12.

Spirit and that story has a narrated conclusion in the death and resurrection of Jesus. That there still is a human story that continues today is possible, for Jenson, only because of the action of the Spirit, who delayed the Parousia of Jesus and the final coming of the kingdom. In this time of delay, the church and Judaism exist as “detours” along the road to the future kingdom, with Judaism maintaining what the church cannot, namely the lineage of Abraham and Sarah sustained through Torah observance, and the church fulfilling Israel’s mission to the Gentiles.

Having accounted in detail for the ways each of these three theologians can be said to have written theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth, I conclude this study by asking whether their attempts ultimately provide an advance on Barth’s. Of course, any argument for the extent to which each of the three theologies of Israel and Judaism provide an advance on his doctrine begs yet another question: by what criteria should success be evaluated in this regard? In the introduction and at the end of each chapter, I have returned to Barth’s letter to Marquardt within which he acknowledged that his doctrine of Israel needed improvement, especially given his acknowledgment that his own “irrational aversion” to Jews may have had “a retrogressive effect” on his doctrine of Israel.⁵ On the most basic level, then, one could determine the relative success of each of their attempts by pointing to the way they move past Barth’s primarily negative depiction of Israel and Judaism as witnesses of God’s judgment, especially inasmuch as that negative depiction remained indebted to Christianity’s anti-Judaic heritage. Indeed, in my summary of each author’s critique of Barth’s doctrine of God’s self-determination above, I noted that if anti-Judaism and the historic teaching of supersessionism are to be repudiated in Christian theology, then Christian theology is faced with the difficult task of accounting theologically for the historical development of Judaism separate from Christianity in positive terms. This task has

⁵ Barth, *Letters*, 262.

perhaps never been as pressing given the growing movement in ecclesial circles to repudiate the teaching of supersessionism and affirm God’s enduring covenant with the Jewish people.⁶ The possible theological bases for such affirmations continue to be sought in the disciplines of Theology and in the study of the New Testament.⁷ Indeed, the three theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth studied in this thesis should be seen as the leading American attempts at providing such theological bases.⁸

It is perhaps here, however, that one might also ask the question of whether each of the three theologians examined in this thesis succeeds in articulating a more positive account of Israel’s history, including the historical development of Judaism separate from Christianity, without, as Barth put it in his letter to Marquardt, falling prey to the inevitable dangers inherent in such attempts. As noted in the concluding section of my chapter on Barth, surely for him the danger in an improved doctrine of Israel would lie in the theologian’s temptation to seek a foundation for a doctrine of Israel and Judaism severed from an understanding of Jesus Christ as the self-determination of God and the determination of humanity in him. Of course, in the case of each of the authors examined in this thesis, what counts as a “danger” for theology generally, and a theology of Israel and Judaism in particular, is precisely what is up for debate, and clearly each of their departures from Barth indicates that, in their estimation, the danger lies more in staying with him on certain key points of doctrine than in departing from him. One could, of course,

⁶ For an account of this movement, see Jeremy Bergen’s *Ecclesial Repentance: The Churches Confront Their Sinful Pasts* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), 226-233.

⁷ With respect to work in Theology, there are too many authors and too many works to mention in a brief footnote. However, a brief glance at the current list of the founding members for *The Society for Post-Supersessionist Theology* (<https://www.spostst.org/>) is a place to start when looking for theologians who have a history with or have recently begun to engage this type of work. With respect to New Testament studies, one can look, for example, to Cascade Publishing’s *New Testament After Supersessionism* series, which so far includes volumes on Romans, Philippians, Ephesians, and Colossians.

⁸ A notable attempt by a European is Friedrich Wilhelm Marquardt’s two-volume work *Das christliche Bekenntnis zu Jesus, dem Juden: eine Christologie* (Munich: Kaiser, 1990-1991).

argue that Barth's doctrine of Israel and Judaism is simply the right position and that departure from him thus invites theological error. Given Barth's own theological convictions regarding the perpetual need for reform in theology, however, it would be better to avoid such a move.⁹ We are left, then, with the question, how is one to name the "danger" that accompanies theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth?

While up to this point my thesis has been largely descriptive, there can be no proposal for answering the above question that is not itself, however preliminary, a constructive theological answer. Recognizing this, in conclusion, I suggest one basic criterion that seems to me the most relevant and important for naming the dangers involved in articulating theologies of Israel and Judaism after Barth, especially given the developments in ecclesial and scholarly circles to repudiate supersessionism. The criterion I refer to here is the criterion of Jewish-Christian difference.¹⁰ In short, the danger of an improved *Israellehre* is the real possibility of superseding Jewish-Christian difference in the process.¹¹ The "supersession" could happen in one of two directions: either the supersession of Christian difference in an attempt at compensating for the guilt of Christian anti-Judaism or the supersession of Jewish difference through the claim that

⁹ As Barth put it in *CD IV/1*, 372: "'Back to...'" is never a good slogan."

¹⁰ Here I must mention my debt to three scholars for animating my thinking regarding this criterion: David Novak, Dana Hollander, and Ellen Charry. Below I discuss Novak's claim that Christian theology must maintain its distinctive difference from Judaism by remaining supersessionist. I think Novak's reflections in this regard important, as will become clear. In a conversation with Hollander in the Winter of 2016, I discussed my interest in Christianity's relatively recent turn towards a rejection of supersessionism and the subsequent developments in Jewish-Christian dialogue that have occurred as a result. She helped me to think critically about the ways that the language of Jewish-Christian difference sustained the possibility of authentic engagement between these two traditions and, conversely, the ways that the language of "dialogue" could at times suggest an effort to overcome that difference. Finally, Charry's recent essay "Toward Ending Enmity," in *Karl Barth, the Jews, and Judaism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018): 147-171, has made profound suggestions for the "spiritual friendship" that might be possible between Judaism and Christianity. While Charry's reflections certainly challenge the notion of a "presumed theological autonomy of both traditions," she does not presume the opposite, namely, that their differences could be overcome (Charry, "Ending Enmity," 166-167).

¹¹ In adopting this criterion, I am fully aware that the movement of Messianic Judaism does indeed challenge the notion of a strict and irreconcilable difference between "Judaism" and "Christianity." While I think this challenge is worth attending to it does not fall within the scope of this thesis.

authentic Christianity really is the same as authentic Judaism. What is so remarkable about Barth's *Israellehre* is that he manages at once to accomplish a systematically sophisticated statement regarding Jewish-Christian unity in difference—which results in an equally strong statement of Christian solidarity with the Jews—while remaining indebted to the claims of historic Christianity that set it apart from historic Judaism. Barth's doctrine thus upholds Jewish-Christian difference in his claims about Jewish-Christian unity. If van Buren's, Yoder's, and Jenson's theologies of Israel and Judaism are judged based on this criterion, what is the result? Do their proposals fall prey to the danger of eliding Jewish-Christian difference in their attempts to name that which unifies these two traditions?

In answering these questions, it is worth noting that over the years several Jewish theologians and philosophers have engaged in discussion with all three theologians examined in this thesis and have expressed, in some cases appreciation for, and in other cases criticisms of, their attempts. Wyschogrod's and Novak's reviews of van Buren's *TJCR* show that they appreciated the extent to which van Buren allowed the Holocaust as well as living Jewish voices to impact his thinking.¹² The worry expressed by Wyschogrod and Novak was that, for all of the positive gains made in his *TJCR*, he might not be fully acknowledging the fact of irreconcilable differences between the church's Christology and Jewish understandings of God. Based on my analysis of his departures from Barth in *TJCR*, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that van Buren indeed did downplay this distinctively Christian difference in order to compensate for Christianity's anti-Judaic heritage.

In the case of Yoder, Ochs and Boyarin both admired his alternative account of the reason for the Jewish-Christian schism, his refusal to accept crude typologies of first century

¹² See Novak, "A Jewish Response to a New Christian Theology," *Judaism* 31, no.1 (Winter 1982): 112-120; Wyschogrod, "Christology: The Immovable Object," *Religion and Intellectual Life* 3, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 77-80.

Judaism as “legalistic,” and his affirmation of the Jewishness of Jesus and Paul.¹³ Both also worried, however, about the extent to which Yoder’s reading of Christ’s ethical normativity for the people of God in terms of “Jewish pacifism” led him to an account of Jewish-Christian unity that resulted in his reading “so many Jews somehow right out of Judaism.”¹⁴ Here, then, Yoder could be said to fall into the danger of superseding Jewish and Christian difference through the claim that authentic Christianity and authentic Judaism are finally the same thing.

Jenson’s attempt perhaps comes the closest to upholding Jewish-Christian difference by grounding his theology of Israel and Judaism in Christology and Trinitarian theology, while simultaneously making an affirmative statement concerning the legitimacy of rabbinic Judaism. This has not been lost on Jenson’s friend David Novak. In his appreciative essay “Theology and Philosophy: An Exchange with Robert Jenson,” Novak describes his theological conversations with Jenson:

Theology...provides enough of a difference to make our conversation a genuine dialogue and not an antiphonal monologue. The theological difference is that as a Christian and a Jew, Jenson and I are existentially dedicated to faith assertions (i.e., willing to die for them if need be) about the truest relationship with God available in this world, which are undeniably not just distinctive but mutually exclusive head-on. Which is the best way to and from the Lord God of Israel: the Torah or Christ?¹⁵

To be sure, as I demonstrated in my chapters on Jenson, some of the theological moves that he made in *ST* might have been negatively evaluated by Barth and indeed, many Christian theologians today, some influenced by Barth, remain unconvinced by the novel Trinitarian ontology that grounds Jenson’s alternative doctrine of Israel and Judaism. That said, of the three

¹³ Cf. Ochs’s commentary at the end of each chapter of *JCSR* as well as his chapter “The Limits of Postliberalism: John Howard Yoder’s American Mennonite Church,” in *Another Reformation: Postliberal Christianity and the Jews*, 127-163. For Boyarin’s appreciation and critique, “Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*,” *Cross Currents* 56, no.4 (Winter 2007): 6-21.

¹⁴ Daniel Boyarin, “Judaism as a Free Church: Footnotes to John Howard Yoder’s *The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited*,” 19.

¹⁵ Novak, “Theology and Philosophy: An Exchange with Robert Jenson,” in *Trinity, Time, and the Church: A Response to the Theology of Robert W. Jenson*, ed. Colin Gunton (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 43.

his attempt remains the least prone to the dangers of superseding either Christian difference or Jewish difference, for while Jenson does indeed believe that in the fulfillment it will be Jesus Christ who will overcome the division between Jew and Christian, he does not allow that belief to translate into a mandate for an embodied unity in Christ's name in the present.

One could say that Jenson avoids the dangers of supersessionism principally by, as Novak puts it in his essay "Supersessionism Hard and Soft," upholding a high "eschatological horizon" for his Christian claims regarding Jewish-Christian unity.¹⁶ In Novak's view, "Christianity must be generically supersessionist" in its claims regarding the superiority of Christ, but it matters greatly whether or not this generic supersessionism translates into Christian embodiment of that supersessionism in the present through, for example, a special mission to the Jews aimed at converting them.¹⁷ For Novak, this embodied form of supersessionism is called "hard supersessionism" whereas "soft supersessionism" waits for the Jewish recognition of Jesus as Messiah at the second coming.¹⁸ A view like Jenson's, which points towards Jewish-Christian unity only in the fulfillment, thus accords with Novak's understanding of a Christian theologian's necessary claim of Christ's ultimacy while also upholding and honoring Jewish-Christian difference in the meantime. Novak further describes soft supersessionism this way:

On this view, ultimately though not immediately, Judaism will be overcome by Christianity, because all Jews will finally become Christians...Christians who advocate it [soft supersessionism]...speak with Jews in good faith in the present, yet-to-be-redeemed interim or waiting-time. Yet that dialogue is still not an encounter of equals. Judaism is still taken [by Christians] to be proto-Christianity.¹⁹

¹⁶ Novak, "Supersessionism Hard and Soft: David Novak outlines the framework for Jewish-Christian dialogue," *First Things*, 290 (February 2019), 29.

¹⁷ Novak, "The Covenant In Rabbinic Thought," in *Two Faiths, One Covenant?: Jewish and Christian Identity in the Presence of the Other*, edited by Eugene B. Korn, John T. Pawlikowski (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 67.

¹⁸ "Supersessionism Hard and Soft," 29.

¹⁹ "Supersessionism Hard and Soft," 29.

Notably, in the article cited above, Novak does not mention Jenson, but rather Barth as his example of a theologian whose theology upholds this high eschatological horizon and so is a “soft supersessionist”:

Soft supersession is...supported by a theocentric view of the end time. Only God has the right to bring a person into the covenant. In the case of the Jews, that probably will have to wait for the final redemption, which for Christians will be Christ’s Second Coming. (One could say that Karl Barth was this kind of soft supersessionist.)²⁰

Novak’s positive appraisal of Barth makes it clear that, for Jews and Christians alike, Barth’s *Israellehre* remains a high standard for Christian theology, a standard that continues to exert an enduring influence on those who come after him.

²⁰ Novak, “Supersessionism Hard and Soft,” 29.

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