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CHRIST AND THEOLOGY

A Study in Karl Barth

by

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Submitted for the qualification of Doctor of Philosophy to
the University of Durham

Research for this thesis was conducted in the Faculty
of Theology

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Table of Contents

	<u>Page</u>
Abstract	(iii)
Introduction	1
Chapter 1 - The Early Barth and Kantian Moral Theology	5
Chapter 2 - Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Eschatology	24
Chapter 3 - A Question of Hermeneutics	52
1. Barth's Early Thought	52
2. A Review of Barth's Later Thought	70
Chapter 4 - <i>Fides Quaerens Intellectum</i>	82
1. Background to Barth's Work on Anselm	82
2. The Argument of <i>Fides Quaerens Intellectum</i>	87
3. Conclusion	114
Chapter 5 - The Religious and the Secular	127
Chapter 6 - The Problem of 'Integrating Man into God'	137
1. The Methodology of Grace	137
2. The Problem of Analogy in Karl Barth's thought	141
3. The Nature of Man's Dependence upon God	152
4. Grace and Nature	163
Chapter 7 - Barthian 'Realism'	182
Chapter 8 - The Resurrection	209
Chapter 9 - Barth and Christology	232
1. Christ the Source of the Knowledge of God	232
2. The 'Extra Calvinisticum'	242
3. The 'Inner Being' of God	244
4. The Form of Barth's Christocentrism	250
5. Conclusion	257
Conclusion	272
Bibliography	285

Abstract

This thesis is presented as a critical analysis of Karl Barth's work which attempts to be philosophically and theologically literate. It tries to bring out the pervasive influence of Kant upon Karl Barth, in particular upon *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, a work which concludes with a stinging attack upon Kant's version of the ontological argument, and yet which owes so much to a Kantian dualism for its own conclusions.

The work is also intended as criticism of Professor T.F. Torrance's interpretation of Karl Barth, which we regard as philosophically untenable because resting upon a false epistemology. We believe that Professor Torrance is one of many interpreters of Karl Barth who have yet to come to terms with the issues raised for theological realism by the epistemological revolution brought about largely through Kant's influence.

We also offer a theological critique of Barth. His theology is, we believe, based upon a form of Christocentrism which has been criticised as 'Christomonist'. We attempt to develop this criticism with our own interpretation of it in this thesis.

Finally, we conclude with the argument that a properly Christocentric theology must always understand the nature of God in terms of the form of His self-disclosure in Christ. There must be no sense in which the cry 'Let God be God!' seems rather to override than to call attention to the fact that God was in Christ. We believe that Barth does not consistently hold to this principle in his work, and that consequently there is a dimension to God's being in Christ which is lacking in his theology. We believe that this dimension is a Kenotic one.

INTRODUCTION

Widely regarded as the most important theologian of the twentieth century, Karl Barth's theology has attracted a virtual industry of secondary literature. To provide a critical study of the sum of theological reflection upon Barth is a lifetime's study, and cannot be contained within the scope of a doctoral dissertation. This work does not attempt such a study. It has been written because I have been stimulated, both by reading Barth himself and by reading certain accounts of his work, to attempt a critical review of his theology. I should like in particular to mention the account of Barth's early theology offered by Professor T.F. Torrance,¹ which ignores, I believe, profound difficulties entailed by Barth's theological method, (indeed this thesis was consciously written in the light of the conviction that Torrance's treatment of Barth would not do) and the treatment of Barth by Hans Urs von Balthasar,² which reaches in my view to the heart of the problem raised by Barth's work.

Whilst I believe that the effect of encountering these works and others, together with a thorough acquaintance with the thought of Barth himself, has been to lead me into a profound consideration of crucial issues in the attempt of a Christian theology to do justice to its subject-matter, it has not enabled me to digest and reflect upon all that has been written on Barth.

This is not to say that I intend any apology for the form of this thesis. It is offered as a work of scholarship which must, therefore, reach certain standards not required, for instance, of the essayist. But it is a work of scholarship aimed, not at an aspect of Barth's thought or at a deficiency in the secondary literature, but at Barth's thought taken as a whole, criticised from the perspective of a theologian's attempt to articulate and make sense of the central problems in theology. It is not a work that seeks to show how problems of a general nature are raised by the study of a particular aspect of Barth's thought, but one



which seeks to show how problems of a particular nature are raised by a general study of Karl Barth. The scholarship which, in the former case, is evident from a detailed acquaintance with a particular subject-matter, should here be evident from the way in which any general discussion must be informed by knowledge of particular issues.

A summary of the arguments contained in this thesis is provided in the accompanying abstract. Our intention is a general approach to Barth's theology which seeks to uncover an enduring dualism which affects, not only his early 'theocentrism', but also his later 'Christocentrism'. Our thesis amounts, indeed, to the claim that Barth's Christocentric theology cannot in fact cope with the nature of God revealed in Christ.

There are other general approaches to Barth's thought which follow a different pattern to our own. One in particular, which I have not sought to follow up, is that which sees in Barth an example of 'theological alienation' which might be treated in illuminating fashion through a Marxist critique. Dr R. H. Roberts has been particularly suggestive to me in this respect.³ This thesis, however, attempts to follow the dualism of Barth's theology through to a flawed Christological vision. The two approaches are not, of course, incompatible, since the 'alienation' of the theologian from reality is nowhere more evident than in his failure to come to terms with the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth, truly God only in so far as He was truly a man.

I wish to acknowledge the support and encouragement of my supervisor, Professor S. W. Sykes, in the preparation of this thesis, and in particular his acute suggestions on how I might improve my first draft. I would also like to acknowledge the help I have received from Dr R.H. Roberts' vast expertise on Barth, and the rich legacy of Professor D.M. Mackinnon's attempt to make me to some small extent capable of

understanding problems in the relation of theology to philosophy whilst I was a student at Cambridge. Because of an acute consciousness of how far in what I have written I fall short of the worth of those who have helped me, I am very glad to be able to say that this thesis is entirely my own work, and that it was very much my own decision that I could not see any way of improving it of which I was capable.

Thanks must also be recorded to the University of Newcastle upon Tyne Research Fund for supporting me during a period of sabbatical leave in Cambridge, to my colleagues and to students in the Department of Religious Studies for their understanding of the need to research, and to Deborah Middleton for her helpful criticism of my work and much assistance in the painful process of organisation.

Notes on Introduction

1. Torrance, T.F., *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology 1910-1931*.
2. von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Karl Barth, Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*.
3. See, for example, the suggestion in 'Barth's Doctrine of Time : Its nature and Implications', from S.W. Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, p.125, n.30. Roberts describes Barth's work as capable of being seen as 'the most profound and systematically consistent theological alienation of the natural order ever achieved' (pp.124-5), and in his footnote comments:

A certain affinity exists here between the logic of Barth's position and that of Hegel as criticised by Marx in the 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole' in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.

CHAPTER ONE

The early Barth and Kantian moral theology

Barth's attitude towards Kant had not always been critical. The lectures on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which contain his most complete critical examination of Kant^{1a} were written during the 1930s, at a time when Barth was also in the process of developing a methodology which came to determine the nature of his *Church Dogmatics* - a methodology outlined in *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, a study of Anselm's *Proslogion* which concludes with a rejection of Kant's interpretation of Anselm's ontological 'proof' of God's existence.^{1b} During an earlier period of his thought, whilst it would be over-simplifying to say that Barth was a 'Kantian', his relationship to Kant was a much closer one. However, the manner of his use of Kant underwent significant changes. In this chapter, we shall study the thought of Karl Barth up to the writing of the second edition of his commentary on *Romans*,² a work which demonstrated a very different use of Kant from that of his earlier writings.

Barth certainly claimed to have read Kant thoroughly at a very early stage in his academic life. In a conversation with Wuppertal students in July 1968, he declared that during three semesters at Marburg, from April 1908 to August 1909, he read both the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Pure Reason* thoroughly. The latter, indeed, he 'went twice through almost with a toothcomb'.³ Moreover, Barth claimed already to have worked through the whole of Kant 'before I made my pilgrimage to Marburg'.⁴

It is, perhaps, difficult for modern students of theology in an English department of theology or religious studies, to understand the importance of Kant for modern Christian thought, for their study of Systematics may well not include a comprehensive reading of something often seen to be more appropriately studied within the context of 'philosophy of religion'. In Barth's case, however, and whatever his

views in later life, 'at that time we thought it was the way one had to begin theology'.⁵ And so Barth's own theological life began with a thorough study of Kant and Schleiermacher.

This is not to say that Barth was interested in Kant from a purely philosophical interest in questions of epistemology or ethics. There is some evidence that he was not. He went to lectures by the Neo-Kantian philosophers Hermann Cohen and Paul Natarp, while at Marburg, but seems to have found them unprofitable.⁶ His real interest lay in the theological significance of Kant, particularly in the thought of William Herrmann, 'the theological teacher of my student years'.⁷

We can understand the influence of Kant's religious thought upon the ideas of Karl Barth in two ways: firstly, a metaphysical agnosticism concerning the nature, not only of God, but of reality as such, and secondly, a belief in the existence of God which is grounded upon man's sense of obligation to the moral law, his duty. During the period up to and including the writing of the first commentary on *Romans*, the influence of Kant upon Barth followed Herrmann's in being centred upon the second aspect of Kant's thought. In the years that intervened between then and the publication of the second edition of his commentary, however, a profound concern for the first aspect of Kant's thought supervened, and helped to change the whole nature of Barth's theology into what could be termed 'dialectical' or the 'theology of crisis'.

The Kantian moral idealism which remained with Barth for a decade after his departure from Marburg, is well exemplified in an address given in January 1916 in the Town Church of Aarau and reproduced in *Das Wort Gottes und die Theologie*, published in 1924.

The address is entitled 'The Righteousness of God'. It begins with a quotation from Isaiah:

'The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
Prepare thee the way of the Lord, make straight
in the desert a highway for our God ...'

and Barth comments:

'This is the voice of our conscience, telling us
of the righteousness of God'. (9)

Conscience remains, for Barth, in principle beyond the criticism of human religion and morality which he makes: 'it may be led astray', but 'it remains for ever the place, the only place between heaven and earth, in which God's righteousness is manifest'. It interrupts our ideas of duty and our religious feelings, which themselves are open to doubt and may be unrighteous, 'as with a blaze of trumpets from another world'.¹⁰ Nor is it merely the instrument of self-criticism: the voice of conscience, which tells of an unrighteous will that has produced distress in the world (Barth speaks in the middle of the First World War), tells us also that there is another, righteous will, out of which 'a new world will arise'.¹¹ It was this voice of conscience, moreover, which the prophets made articulate to human beings, and which constitutes their preparation of the way of the Lord.

However, Barth goes on, the righteous will to which our conscience introduces us, as something separate from the unrighteous one to which we naturally assent, is a capacity which we like to pretend ourselves capable of achieving from our own resources, or from some established human institution such as the state or the law. The 'righteous will' to which we incline in the midst of unrighteousness, we identify with the laws of the state, or the interests of families, or the legal code, or even our morality. We present the alternative, righteous, will to ourselves as something human rather than divine. In doing so, however, we obtain no guarantee actually of identifying the truly righteous will: for values of state, family, law or morality may be used to justify unrighteous realities - 'I think of the capitalistic order and of the war'. In short, 'the devil may also make use of our morality'.¹² Such values only 'rescue us from the alarm-cry of conscience', rather than express its concern: even 'religion' and 'Christianity' may have this effect, in their offer of a 'wonderful sense of safety and security' for 'the unrighteousness whose might we everywhere feel'.¹³

Nowhere in this analysis, however, does Barth relativise conscience

itself, in the way that state, law, family, morality and religion are relativised. Conscience remains a divinely given voice recalling us to righteousness, if we would only be still and recognise it, understanding that faith is a process of 'letting God speak within'.¹⁴ In this address Barth remains a 'Kantian' insofar as he remains committed to the absoluteness of conscience, which registers to the listening heart the righteous will of God, and is recognised in that 'inner way of simple faith' which Christ revealed.¹⁵ Conscience itself escapes the criticism which other, external and internal, sources of authority do not: not everything on earth falls under the 'relativist axe' as a merely human phenomenon which may be as much the work of 'the devil' as of God. Conscience remains, binding the divine and human orders, that were later to draw apart in Barth's thinking, together: the two are bound together by this one, crucial, Kantian chord.

In this same year (1916) Barth and his fellow-pastor Eduard Thurneysen decided to make a study of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. At the same time, Barth renewed the study of Kant himself.¹⁶ At first the work was intended for an inner circle of friends only; but in 1919 Barth published a commentary. In the course of these three years Barth had remained faithful to his view of the absoluteness of conscience, but was increasingly under the sway of another principle, that of eschatology. His imagination was caught by the fame of Johann Christoph Blumhardt, stories of whose miraculous healings were well known, and associated by Blumhardt himself with the imminent coming of God's reign. Barth's interest in Blumhardt was stimulated by his son, Christoph Blumhardt, whom he came to know through Thurneysen in 1915.

The influence of Blumhardt sat in increasingly strong tension with the Safenwil pastor's enthusiasm for the regeneration of this world, evinced in his involvement with the Religious Socialists. In July 1916, it was a review of Blumhardt's *Hausandachten* (House Prayers) that introduced a virtual breach between Barth and Leonhard Ragaz, one of the

leaders of the Religious Socialist movement.¹⁷ The tragedy of the First World War, frequently cited as destroying faith in the liberal theology of his manifestly warlike peers, had something of a double effect, since he saw the war as eliciting equally strong evidence of a nationalist ideology in the Socialists.¹⁸

The Barth of 1919 hardly thought in terms of the 'providential role of Socialism' which had appealed to him five years earlier. At the same time, however, the reign of God, with its purely transcendent origin remained, even in Barth's increasingly eschatological thinking, a journey of the 'beyond' to the here and now, realisable in community through obedience to an ethical ideal, an ideal couched in Kantian terms by which the will of God and the nature of man were fused into one.

In the first edition of Barth's commentary on Romans, (1919), it is clear that the strong eschatological thrust of the work does not prevent an emphasis upon the moral law as the ideal realisation of God's will - even if man cannot realise it.

The strong opposition to a pietistic, romantic individualism in this work, for instance, certainly leads Barth to play upon the incapacity of the individual, separated from the corporate Kingdom of God, to receive God's truth:

Das Licht der Wahrheit fällt in ein Auge, das es nicht zu ertragen vermag, der göttliche Inhalt ergiesst sich in ein irdisches Gefäß, das er sofort sprengen muss. Gott kann mit mir nichts anfangen. (19)

Yet while the solitary individual, set apart from the Kingdom, is here presented as the being incapable of receiving 'the light of truth' - for his eye cannot bear it, or the 'divine content' - for the earthly vessel that receives it will not be able to hold it, and it will burst out again, nevertheless these metaphors about the individual's incapacity to receive 'divine truth' do not make that truth unrealisable in this world, but unrealisable in an individual set apart from the Kingdom of God. Barth continues:

Das Individuum ist nicht das Subjekt, das den Imperativen der Sittlichkeit gehorchen kann. (20)

The ethical imperative cannot be obeyed by man acting in 'romantic isolation' as an individual. But that imperative remains the ideal realisation of God's will, in principle realisable on earth:

An diesen Menschen tritt nun das ewige 'Du sollst' heran, er muss dazu Stellung nehmen: der 'Ich' soll Gott gerecht werden. (21)

Faced by the 'eternal thou shouldst', man remains subject to God's demand that he realise in himself a moral ideal which he constantly fails to realise. He remains bound to strive for a union of the eternal and the temporal in a pure moral action of which he is, as a sinner, incapable.

In this, first edition of his commentary, Barth never relativises the moral law as such as an imperfect human attempt to understand God's will. Paul has rejected the idea (Romans 7:7) that the law is evil, and Barth's interpretation of Paul takes the opportunity of denying that the moral law can be treated as other than an absolute demand upon man's obedience:

Nein Gott, und die Gerechtigkeit, die das Gesetz fordert, sind eins. Nicht der irrende, abgefallene, Mensch ist es, der den kategorischen Imperativ der Pflicht, der in ihm ist, ersonnen hat, sowenig er der Erbauer des gestirnten Himmels über ihm ist. (22)

Man no more devised the moral law, then, than built the starry heavens! Is it not possible that Barth has in mind here the concluding remarks of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, that two things filled his mind with ever new amazement, 'the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me'?²³ The idea that the categorical imperative is a construction of human ethical theory is ruled out completely: it is a divinely given ideal. Barth goes on to write:

Hinter den Erscheinungen der Religion und Moral verbirgt sich die ewige Objektivität des Wahren und Guten, und die Fülle der Ideen weist zurück auf ihren Ursprung und Inbegriff in Gott. (24)

Behind the 'appearances' of man's actual moral behaviour and

religious practice, is concealed the 'eternal objectivity' of the true and the good, whose origin and principle lie in God. In the Platonic language of the quotation, the 'fullness of the ideas' may be only imperfectly expressed - indeed more accurately concealed - in the experiences of morality and religion in this world: yet these 'ideas' may nevertheless be identified with the categorical imperative, which remains itself beyond reproach, and is not itself an 'appearance' of morality in which ideal goodness is 'concealed'.

Hence the first edition of this commentary is prepared to argue, that by grace man may become attached to the moral law and God's will become a law of nature in him:

Ihr seid unter der Gnade. Euch ist gegeben, was von euch gefordert wird. Ihr seid im Besitz der Macht, die das Gute tut, weil sie selber das Gute ist. (25)

The unrealisable good, in so far as man remains an individual sinner, becomes by grace the good that is in him and is him. He does not merely point away from himself, in all forms of moral and religious behaviour, to a reality which can only appear in him by way of a paradoxical concealment. For the moral law is not itself an example of such behaviour, open to relativisation as a 'merely human' ideal: it is a divine reality, given to man not devised by him. By God's grace it may be realised in him as his true being, and God and man united thereby as the will of one becomes the nature of the other.

Despite the stress on faith failing to justify man in terms of any historical or psychological reality in this world, the moral law itself remains immune to categorisation as such a reality: thereby it remains also as an ideal in whose realisation, by God's grace, the temporal and the eternal, human and divine, finite and infinite are not separated absolutely but rather are held together in 'den Kategorischen Imperativ der Pflicht, der in ihm ist'. In this, first commentary on Romans, in a way perhaps reminiscent of Hegel's thought in *The Positivity of the Christian Religion before The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate*,

the hold of Kant's moral theology restrains Barth from a more daring approach,²⁶ which yet must needs eventually break the fraying ropes that bind it.

Between the first and second editions of Barth's commentary, a number of important influences worked upon Barth's thought. Two of the most important were Overbeck (and through him, Nietzsche) and Dostoevsky. Both men attacked the very thread that kept the human and divine worlds in a less than total estrangement, that of conscience. The 'sinners' in Dostoevsky's novels do not realise an ideal life - they hope for it. Their hope is paradoxically in the consciousness of their own worthlessness, rather than in the striving to overcome it in obedience to the moral law. They are, in the world of the novel, a realisation to Barth of the Lutheran principle, 'simul justus et peccator'. Talking to Raskolnikov in a pub of his failings, Marmeladov's hope lies in God's acceptance of the sinful, not in the power of his own conscience to make him better.²⁷ He has no hope of that. He will continue to squander his money on drink, lose his civil service post, beggar his family and leave his daughter Sonia condemned to prostitution, as the only means of earning a living for her family. Influenced by his collaborator and fellow-pastor Thurneysen, who published a significant work on Dostoevsky in 1921,²⁸ Barth experienced a world in which human beings did not progress towards maturity in obedience to the dictates of conscience: rather, conscience exposed to them the hopeless nature of their own sin, and, paradoxically, awoke in them at the same time a humble confidence in their future deliverance. Conscience did not realise the unity of the will of God with the nature of man, but reinforced their separateness: it established the nature of man's confidence and valuation of himself in terms of hope for a future in which his salvation would be in spite of himself, and his justification imputed because only eschatologically imparted. Rather than leading man to a unity with God centred upon his moral idealism, conscience led man to an awareness of his otherness from God, his nature

as an irredeemable sinner, and his hope for salvation in spite of his sinful nature.

The influence of Overbeck upon Barth, mediated through the publication in 1919 of a collection of his work, *Christentum und Kultur*, was to reinforce the eschatological strain in Barth's thought, and the conviction that as such Christianity must be at variance with the norms of religion, culture and morality. For Overbeck, the eschatological context of true Christian belief was a 'call to the desert', away from the 'decadence' of compromise with civilisation. This influence, however, itself an accentuation already noticeable in Barth's first commentary, may be less significant than that of Nietzsche; Overbeck's colleague and close associate at the University of Basle. It was Nietzsche who perhaps mediated to Barth something of the fervent, Olympian style he displays in the second edition of his commentary. More significantly, Bouillard suggests,²⁹ there may be a connection between Nietzsche's 'transvaluation of values' and Barth's attack on the values of morality, culture and religion in the name of Christianity: he connects Nietzsche's rejection of 'Christian values' in favour of the will to power, with Barth's rejection of faith in this-worldly values of man's moral and religious experience in favour of an eschatological hope. Paul's remark (Romans 15:1) that 'we who are strong' should 'bear the infirmities of the weak', is connected to Nietzsche's view of those few who are prepared to reject 'Christian' values. Certainly the nature of the 'strength' is different in Barth and Nietzsche: but the values which come under wholesale rejection in the presentation of both men could not easily fail to include the very moral idealism which lay in Barth's inheritance from Kant and Herrmann.

Through Dostoevsky and Nietzsche in particular, the idea of conscience as an absolute principle by which God's will was united to man's nature, and the Kingdom advanced, was undermined in Barth's thought. Conscience was not the instrument of unity between man and God

but a means by which man learnt to address himself to his otherness from God; it turned his expectation of salvation into a hope for acceptance in spite of his sinful nature. Salvation was a paradoxical reality, in which the separation between man and God was accepted, rather than melting away in a morally achieved fusion. Conscience lay on the side of man's weakness rather than his strength, as a value which, like those of religion and culture, reminded him essentially of his disunity with God. It did not heal the divide between them, but awakened man to a consciousness of it, and encouraged him to look for a strength found only in acceptance that this divide could not be, in his human understanding, overcome.

Barth's thought was driven by these reflections towards a radical eschatology in which the separation between man and God was absolute. In Kierkegaard he had an example of passionate acceptance of the paradox which this created for Christian belief. In Kant, however, he had the semblance of its philosophical justification.

Throughout his academic life, Barth's study of Kant (as well as that of Plato) was influenced by that of his brother, Heinrich:

Mein Philosophische Bruder sorgte dafür, dass mir auch die Weisheit Platos wieder ernstlich vor Augen geführt wurde. Und Vater Kant, der mir einst die Initialzündung vermittelt hat, hat auch in jenen Jahren (Barth is referring to the 1910s) merkwürdigerweise aufs Neue direkt zu mir geredet. (30)

In 1921 Heinrich Barth published two studies of Platonic thought.³¹ Arguably, he produced something of a 'Kantian' interpretation of Plato. In his book on the soul in Plato's philosophy, he argued that the soul could not be found in the region of being, but must be treated as an *a priori* idea, an argument which illustrated Heinrich Barth's tendency, as a neo-Kantian, to interpret Plato's Ideas as if they were 'formal a priori'.³² At the same time, Heinrich Barth sought to redress an imbalance which he felt belonged to the 'Marburg School'. Their critical idealism radicalised Kant's transcendental analytic and eliminated the 'thing in itself'. Heinrich Barth sought to restore

the relation of a transcendental problematic to the problem of reality, and thus to maintain the essential dualism of Kant's thought, not allowing the idealism of Kant's interpreters to bypass the question of reality as it existed apart from the human understanding.³³

What is profoundly important, in the thought of both Plato and Kant, is the outline of a dualism. In the former, the dualism lies between the sensible world of becoming and the intelligible world of being: in the latter, it lies between things as they are perceived and understood, and things as they are 'in themselves', apart from such perceiving and understanding.

In this section of the work we concentrate upon the influence of Kant, whose philosophy does not rest upon an unreal distinction between the scope of the senses and that of the understanding, unlike Plato's, and which therefore approaches the problem of the relation between knowledge and reality with an epistemological maturity lacking in Plato (as it was also lacking in the pre-Kantian empiricists' distinction between 'impressions' and 'ideas').

In many treatments of the influence of Kant's philosophy upon Christian thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, that influence is confined to the disproof of traditional proofs of the existence of God, found in the second half of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.³⁴ But Kant's influence upon modern theology was much broader than that. In his treatment of 'The Impossibility of a Cosmological Proof of the Existence of God',³⁵ Kant remarks that the proof involves the application of the principle 'applicable only in the sensible world' to a reality beyond it. The proof attempts to infer, from the contingent nature of the world, the existence of a necessary being as its cause. Kant's objection to this is that 'the principle of causality has no meaning and no criterion for its application save only in the sensible world. But in the cosmological proof it is precisely in order to enable us to advance beyond the sensible world that it is

employed'.³⁶ The point seems to be that an idea whose *raison d'être* lies in its being a concept which the understanding brings to experience cannot be applied beyond experience; the place of a concept of causality is to allow the understanding to have experience, not to enable it to speculate upon what lies outside experience altogether.

The point here is much broader in scope than a mere rejection of speculation concerning God. Kant's philosophy must surely exclude all speculation concerning the nature of reality as such, as it exists independently of the observer, and not merely concerning the nature of God. The cosmological argument must surely be wrong, on Kant's principles, not only in the way in which it attempts to reason from the world to God, but in the way in which it attempts to reason about reality as such. For if the concept of causation is not derived from nature, but rather brought to it by the understanding, which demands that in order that reality should be made intelligible to it it should have such a concept imposed upon it, then to argue that reality as such exhibits a character of causality is itself to take philosophy 'where it cannot go'. There is a tendency to suppose that Kant is making the 'sensible' remark that whilst we may confidently discern the true nature of the empirical world, we cannot know what may lie 'beyond' it. Kant is far more radical and interesting in his remarks than that. He is not so much, in these remarks on the Cosmological Argument, attacking a view which reasons from the known to the unknown, as one which reasons from one unknown to another. The distinction between phenomena and noumena which arises from his insistence that 'the world' or 'nature' must be understood as reality only insofar as it is determined according to *a priori* concepts of the understanding, and which is therefore distinct from reality as it exists apart from such determination, effectively removes from the understanding not merely God but things-in-themselves, all that is insofar as it lies outside the inevitably distorting mind of man, which transforms what exists into

what may be ordered by the understanding, and therefore can only presume ignorance of the real nature of what exists. The trouble with the 'cosmological proof' is not simply its ambition to discern in the finite nature of reality the ground for believing in an infinite God; but its ambition simply to discern the finite nature of reality. For what reality is it discerning? Only the 'phenomenal world', the world as it appears to man. Is its fault to believe that from the nature of reality external to the observer it can determine the existence of God? But its fault lies firstly in believing that it can determine the nature of reality external to the observer. The real effect of Kant's philosophy is not simply to exclude the employment of the speculative reason in attempting to prove God's existence, but to produce a fundamental shift in theological thinking as such.

This shift may lead the theologian to see God's revelation located not in the nature of a reality external to the observer, but in the observer's own experience, which is the only reality known to him. It may encourage a development of theology in which evidence for the existence of God is made to lie in the nature of man's moral or religious experience rather than in the nature of the world external to him, which becomes an unknown reality into which his understanding cannot go. It was in this shift in theological thinking, influenced by Kant's philosophy, that Barth came to discern an unwelcome anthropocentric trend in nineteenth century theology (not to be confused with subjectivism), a trend which he was finally to believe could only be broken by a theocentric ontology based on the primacy of revelation.

In the second edition of Barth's commentary on *Romans*, we find no evidence yet of such an ontology. But there is, already, a clear rejection of the move from an external to an internal reality as the locus of God's revelation. Barth denies himself the possibilities for theology in the light of critical idealism which Kant himself, and Schleiermacher, develop, in which the exclusion of man's knowledge from

reality as such is accepted, and his knowledge of God located in human moral and religious experience. For such a move is precisely what, in Barth's view, leads to an unacceptable 'relativising' of faith, which is identified with a particular set of moral, religious or cultural values, including that of conscience. The result is a 'moralising' and 'psychologising' of Christianity, and the possibility of assessing Christian belief in terms of extra-theological principles drawn from ethics and psychology. Barth has, therefore, no locus of revelation in the world as we experience it at all: reality as we know it is itself relativised into an existence under 'judgment', in which faith is an eschatological hope which can in no way bind the Word to come to this world. As Bouillard points out, under the perspective received from Kant's critical idealism, Barth's thought expressed in the second commentary shows that:

eschatologie devient synonyme de transcendance.³⁷

Man's eschatological hope is no longer for a future in which the possibilities of this world are realised, but for a 'Wholly Other' transcendent reality in which this world is negated.

'If I have a system',³⁸ Barth remarks in the preface to his second edition of his commentary (which I also deliberately refer to as a 'second commentary', given its radical differences from the first, acknowledged by Barth himself in terms of an original which 'has been so completely rewritten that it may be claimed that no stone remains in its old place',³⁹) 'it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called the "infinite qualitative distinction" between time and eternity, and to my regarding this as possessing negative as well as positive significance: "God is in heaven, and thou art on earth".

Barth goes on:

The relation between such a God and such a man, and the relation between such a man and such a God, is for me the theme of the Bible and the essence of philosophy.

Note the words, 'and the essence of philosophy'. Barth's system is not

so much Kierkegaardian in its philosophical base, as Kantian, applying the firm dichotomy between appearance and reality in transcendental idealism to the theological scheme of an absolute separation between God and man. It builds upon a Kantian perception concerning the inevitable self-imposed limits placed by the mind upon its knowledge of reality, and with a Nietzschean grandeur proclaims the acceptance of this isolation of man in the pathos of an eschatological hope. Man's capacity is undoubted - indeed established - by Kant, but the limits of that capacity are also established, in a firm objective separation between the reality with which man deals and the reality he must presume, but cannot know, beyond such dealing. He is liberated from a Humean scepticism concerning the use of concepts such as that of causation, only in the acceptance that they are forms of understanding rather than constituents of reality in itself: such a liberation exists only in the context of an imprisonment within which he cannot even ask the question which Hume asked, concerning the capacity of reality itself to bear such epistemological tools. He is locked into his own perception and understanding of reality within which, in a memorable phrase of Professor Donald Mackinnon's⁴⁰, he can operate freely only in the consciousness that he can never 'jump out of his cognitive skin'.

Under Kant's critical idealism, man is bound, even in his very scientific self-confidence, to a metaphysical agnosticism which he cannot deny. His optimism about himself and his progress in discerning and manipulating reality is justified, only at the moment when reality is itself taken from under his feet and he is condemned to isolation from it. It is within this framework of transcendental idealism that Barth's theology in his second commentary on *Romans* fits: a transcendental eschatology, which carries with it all the vital doctrines of the Christian faith, those of Creation, fall, resurrection and salvation, ensures that none may cross the impenetrable divide between time and eternity, and establishes a separation between man and God which

provides the paradoxical formulation of a Kantian dualism.

The possibility of freedom which such dualism made possible, and the consequent justification of the reality of moral obligation, in the thought of Kant himself, is excluded from account in this commentary. It is regarded as an unnecessary appendage to the transcendental idealism itself. As we shall see in detail in the next chapter, the second edition of Barth's commentary finds the ultimate statement of man's relation to God in a 'denial of knowledge',⁴¹ which makes room, not for a moral, but for an eschatological, faith.

Notes on Chapter One

- 1a. *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19 Jahrhundert.*
- 1b. Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p.171.
2. In 1921.
3. E. Busch, *Karl Barth*, p. 45.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. H. Bouillard, *Karl Barth: Genèse et Évolution de la Theologie Dialectique*, p.81.
7. From a lecture given in 1925, found in *Theology and Church* (a collection of Barth's shorter writings), p.238. In this lecture Barth makes it clear that Herrmann did more, in his view, than merely reproduce Kant:

As a dogmatic theologian, Herrmann was an ethicist who interpreted and corrected Kant in a very specific way. Even if it be granted that in practice he raised the problem of religion from the standpoint of ethics and found its solution in the framework of the ethical question, so that Troeltsch thought he could feel in agreement with him - nevertheless for Herrmann the answer stood on its own feet even against ethics. (*Theology and Church*, pp.240-1)

Barth claims that Christianity, in Herrmann's view, whilst expressed in terms of ethics, could neither be reduced to, nor made dependent upon, ethics. This obviously raises great difficulties, although it does show Barth believing that Herrmann in an important sense distanced himself from Kant.
8. E.T. *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp.9-27.
9. *Ibid.*, p.9.
10. *Ibid.*, p.10.
11. *Ibid.*, p.13.
12. *Ibid.*, p.18.
13. *Ibid.*, p.19.
14. *Ibid.*, p.25.
15. *Ibid.*, p.26.
16. In a letter to Thurneysen of the 26th June of that year, Barth wrote:

Our reflections of two weeks ago about renewed philosophical and theological studies stays with me and becomes even more important when considered from all aspects ... So, on with the battle! I am already busy making extracts from Kant (until now prolegomena and laying of foundations, next it is to be the *Critique of Pure Reason*, oh!) as though I were once more getting ready for an examination. This work of tidying up and the improved new edition of old studies is very refreshing for me ...

The letter can be found in a translation by James D. Smart, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making*, pp.37-8. The book contains letters between Barth and Thurneysen (the pastor of nearby Leutwil) from 1914 to 1925.

17. E. Busch, *op.cit.*, p.92.
18. Arnold B. Come, *An Introduction to Barth's Dogmatics for Preachers*, p.32. See also H. Bouillard, *op.cit.*, pp.86-7.
19. Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, p.201.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, p.197.
23. '.... der bestirnte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir'.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, p.169.
26. See C.C.J. Webb, *Kant's Philosophy of Religion*, p.196-7, for the suggestion that Kant in his *Opus Postumum* identifies the divine presence with the moral law and talks of God as to be sought only 'within us', in a way that reminds Webb of 'Pauline teaching about "the righteousness of faith".'
27. The reference is to Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.
28. E. Thurneysen, *Dostojevski*.
29. H. Bouillard, *op.cit.*, p.103.
30. Barth, 'Nachwort' to *Schleiermacher - Auswahl*, p.295.
31. H. Barth, *Die Seele in der Philosophie Platons*, and *Das Problem des Ursprungs in der platonischen Philosophie*.
32. See P. Gürtler, *Der philosophische Weg Heinrich Barths*, pp.19-20.
33. This danger of a 'radicalising' of Kant's analytic was one that Heinrich Barth constantly guarded against. Thought is always thought about something, and the critical idealism of Kant maintains the distinction between thought and reality, (see Gürtler, *op. cit.*, pp.10-12). This is not to say that Heinrich Barth did not seek a modification of Kant's thought.
34. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp.495-531.
35. *Ibid.*, pp.507-514.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 511.
37. H. Bouillard, *op.cit.*, p.105.
38. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.10. The main text of the commentary is a translation of the sixth edition, which remains

substantially the same as that of the second. The quotation, of course, is from the preface to the second edition translation.

39. Barth, *op. cit.*, p.2.
40. He might say, however, that I forget here the use Kant makes in the Transcendental Dialectic of 'ideas of reason', as opposed to 'forms of understanding'. I cannot see, nevertheless, how even these ideas manage to overcome the dualism of Kant's thought: rather, they give unity and order to the work of the understanding without claiming to describe the nature of the reality with which the understanding presumes itself coming to terms. However, for a view of the analogy between Kant's ideas of reason and the 'negative natural theology' of Barth's second commentary on 'Romans', see chapter two.
41. cf. Kant, *op. cit.*, preface to the second edition, p.29.

I have therefore found it necessary to deny knowledge, in order to make room for faith.

More explicitly, with respect to his own view, Kant remarks:

So far, therefore, as our own Critique limits speculative reason, it is indeed negative; but since it thereby removes an obstacle which stands in the way of employment of practical reason, nay threatens to destroy it, it has in reality a positive and very important use. At least this is so, immediately we are convinced that there is an absolutely necessary practical employment of pure reason - the moral - in which it inevitably goes beyond the limits of sensibility.

(*Ibid.*, pp.26-7)

CHAPTER TWO

Transcendental Idealism and Transcendental Eschatology

Among the various influences upon the second edition of Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, one that is easily missed is that of Paul himself, in a work that is, after all, presented in the form of a commentary on a text. In examining Barth's book, we shall take care to show the use he makes of Pauline concepts, without presuming to be able to judge the work as a piece of New Testament scholarship (upon success in which endeavour the value of the work does not, in our view lie).

Barth's commentary is an exploration of Pauline thought in the light of the conviction that the 'infinite qualitative distinction' ('unendlichen qualitativen Unterschied') between time and eternity, and its significance for the relation between God and man, was something which the Apostle himself affirmed. He understands 'faith' (πίστις) in Paul's thought to be an attitude towards God which sees Him in complete antithesis to the world. A key point in Barth's analysis is that any denial of this antithesis would indicate a belief that man might 'possess' the divine, might control it and direct it to a human purpose. Through some human institution, or circumstance, or privilege, man would believe himself able to 'take hold of' God: but for Barth, Paul's conviction that faith is equally possible for all derives from his perception that the barrier between man and God excludes any such human appropriation of the divine. There is an equality of all men before God in the universality of the divine absence: God is 'no respecter of persons' (Romans 2:11), and 'there is no distinction' (Romans 3:22b). In this context 'faith' is not to be understood as a 'possession' of man, as some divine power which certain individuals lay hold of, and which overcomes in themselves the distinction between man and God. Barth frequently translates 'πίστις' 'the faithfulness of God', rather than 'faith' as a quality of man, in order to emphasise that

faith does not overcome this distinction. In translating Romans 3:22a, Barth refers to the righteousness of God not 'through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe', but 'through his faithfulness in Christ unto all them that believe'.¹ Barth's intention is to claim that Paul is not arguing that God's righteousness is manifested to those who have the quality of faith in Christ, and who thereby unite themselves with the divine, but that God's righteousness is manifested through His own, divine, faithfulness, which allows no one to push forward their own capacities, privileges - or faith! - in order to make a claim upon Him and unite themselves to Him.

It is in this sense that Barth understands Paul's rejection of any ground for 'boasting' (Καυχημα) in man. The power of great figures such as Abraham is God's, not theirs. 'Abraham never "possessed" God: God possessed him'.² The 'righteousness' of Abraham - 'to Abraham his faith was reckoned for righteousness' (Romans 4:9b) - is not a 'peculiarity of Abraham's directly visible status'.³ Barth insists that 'his righteousness is clearly distinct from his circumcision',⁴ for it is not an aspect of some earthly privilege or of his belonging to a particular race. Indeed, Barth insists that the emphasis upon Abraham, in Paul's account, is an emphasis upon Abraham as a 'pagan' rather than a 'Jew', as one therefore who had precisely no earthly privilege or status to claim for himself before God. Abraham has nothing to boast about before God, save his faith, which his circumcision signifies but in no way establishes. Moreover the faith of Abraham, as we have already observed, is not an active quality of man which unites him with God, but the faithfulness of God which remains separate from the being of man. It is thus that Paul, Barth argues, speaks of Abraham's faith as 'reckoned', that is to say, it is not a quality of Abraham which God perceives, but a quality of God in which Abraham is accepted in spite of his 'ungodliness' and separation from his Creator - a divine 'nevertheless' rather than a divine 'therefore',

forgiveness rather than a divine imprimatur upon what men are.⁵

Every ground of boasting is lost, except hope, for any confidence man has cannot lie in what he is or possesses now before God, but in what he believes of God in spite of the separation between them. In other words, his ground of boasting is a hope of salvation in which man is established beyond dissolution of this world-order, of which he can in principle have no understanding in this life, nor in any way grasp.⁶ The only ground of boasting, then, is repentance, (Romans 2:4)⁷ in which man accepts the impossibility of uniting himself with God in the context of his worthless nature on earth. The only true object of boasting is the righteousness 'manifested by the blood of Jesus',⁸ for the cross, in Barth's presentation, stands between man and God as the very cornerstone of his dialectical argument that man's 'establishment' comes through 'dissolution', that his salvation is by way of 'cross and resurrection', though the denial of this world in its separation from God and its re-establishment beyond that dissolution in a form which cannot now be perceived. Boasting in the righteousness 'manifested by the blood of Jesus', focusses upon the cross as 'the bridge which creates a chasm and the promise which sounds a warning'.⁹

The cross creates a distance between ourselves and God even as it unites us to Him. It joins man to God in affirming their separation, as Christ himself only lives in the resurrection through his death on the cross. Man and God remain apart, and the 'boast' of the former in the righteousness of God does not deny that separation: it affirms that there is an establishment of man beyond it in an eschatological transformation of which he can have, in this life, no knowledge, and in this life possess proleptically no part and enjoy no foretaste.¹⁰

In the context of this Barthian scheme, 'grace' cannot imply any 'spiritual power residing in the man of this world', any acceptance of a 'cosmic power in this earth'.¹¹ Grace is a promise of the Kingdom of God unrealised, an assurance that the separation between man and God

is not the ultimate reality. It is always hidden and invisible - for it can never become a 'part' of this world: the mark of its operation is a declaration of the passing of this world. In giving us grace, God treats us as that which we are presently not. He treats us as those to be established through the dissolution of the present order in which we still exist in absolute otherness to Himself. Grace transforms the 'prisoner' into a 'watchman',¹² who learns to see the confines of the present order, not as any less separated from its divine origin, but as a place from which he may expect and hope for the eschatological coming of God. Grace does not infuse a divine presence into the world: it relativises the world, and makes it aware of its limitations, whilst denying it the power to overcome those limitations. It gives it a note of expectancy, of hope - the hard walls of its confinement remain, be they of a cell or a watchtower.

This situation of man before God is represented, Barth argues, in the classic Pauline concepts of the law, of sin, of death and of the Fall. These provide the confirmation of a dialectical statement of the human condition, which is wholly set apart from God - robbed of life, fallen from Paradise - and able to be restored only by the dissolution of the present order, rather than its gradual penetration by the presence of God. The idea that the present order may be united to God is rigorously excluded by Barth's presentation of Paul's treatment of the law, which stands for human being, having and doing insofar as they present man striving to realise a divine-human harmony which in principle cannot be achieved. The law awakens in man a dissatisfaction, a sense of deprivation, a void and a longing, a Platonic 'anamnesis' of a reality incongruent with the present world order. Indeed there is a sense in which the story of the Fall is used by Barth to give grounds for such an 'anamnesis', as if the Garden of Eden were a transcendent order of existence of which man in his fallen and sinful condition retained somehow a distant memory, expressed however only in the negative

form of the sense of fundamental mismatch with his present order. As the slave in Plato's *Meno* is encouraged by questioning to find in his geometrical prowess evidence of a former knowledge, so the reality of the law encourages man to recognise, in his fallen condition, a suggestion of his estrangement from a reality which he cannot, however, directly conceive.¹³

It would therefore be a great mistake to suppose that the dialectical nature of Barth's argument excludes any recognition of the significance of those passages in Romans which have suggested to later theologians a belief that the existence of God could be discerned from the nature of the physical universe, or that there was some analogy between the being of the world, or the being of man, and the being of God himself. Barth has a perfectly clear role for passages such as Romans 1:19-20 in Pauline thought:

Because that which may be known of God is manifest to them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and dignity;...

The argument of Karl Barth is that the later doctrine of the 'analogia entis' can only be expressed in terms of the self-criticism of the finite order, in which self-criticism the infinite and wholly other may be indirectly affirmed. In other words, there is no positive comparison to be made between the being of the world and the being of God, even the claim that they both, at different levels, possess 'being' itself. But there is a negative indication in the inherent limitations in its own nature which the present order reveals of itself, of an infinite order of being. For there is 'no relativity that does not reflect "a vanished absolute" which can never be wholly obliterated because it is the absolute which makes relativity relative'.¹⁶ If we were to understand Barth philosophically, we should think not of the 'analogia entis' but of the ideas of reason in Kant's first critique.¹⁷ In the perception of 'invisible things ... through the things that are

made' (Romans 1:20), we should recognise not the presence of a divine reality within the world order, nor some suggestion of divine immanence or qualified participation of the being of the world in the being of God, but the inherent suggestion, in the self-contradiction of the reality we know, of an absolute order in which such contradictions are resolved. Kant's suggestions, in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, that insofar as we remain committed to an intellectual ideal of reason, and feel convinced that the unity and totality of our understanding which it suggests must be realised, then we must be committed to belief in the existence of God,¹⁸ is at least comparable to Barth's suggestion of a 'vanished absolute' in a humanity condemned by the Fall to inhabit a world of 'relativity' cut off from its origin. The Barthian dialectic, like the Kantian, is committed in principle to a Platonic separation between reality as we experience it and a reality which, although wholly other than that with which we are at present involved, is nevertheless suggested by the form of that involvement.

Barth's presentation of Paul's *Romans* assimilates religion to the law. Religion, like the law, is a conscious and creative human activity. The Church, similarly, represents a form of human self-assertion, which is presented by Barth both as necessary and ultimately false. The Church is essential 'for the benefit of those who cannot live with the living God and yet cannot live without God'.¹⁹ It attempts to humanise the divine²⁰ and bring it within the sphere of the world of time and things, for there are those who cannot live with the absolute dichotomy between time and eternity. Yet 'the Church confronts the Gospel as the last human possibility confronts the impossible possibility of God'.²¹ The Church represents the culmination of man's attempts to humanise the divine, and is therefore, as the fruition of a vain effort, the occasion of his recognition that God and man cannot, in fact, meet. In that sense the Church is essential to Christianity (in similar vein Barth justifies Paul's upholding of the law). It is even possible to

say that the Church is essential to salvation - that there is no salvation outside it. For the Church, as the apotheosis of man's attempt to overcome the distinction between himself and God, also provides the occasion of his acceptance of that distinction, and therefore the possibility of faith.

The 'tribulation' of the Church, its failure to 'humanise the divine', is the occasion of its coming to hope,²² because where the impossibility of such 'humanisation' is perceived faith in God which accepts the relativity of the present order and its separation from God becomes possible. Barth joins his understanding of the Church to Paul's treatment of the rejection of Israel in Romans 9-11. Israel's rejection provides the possibility of salvation for the Gentiles, precisely in the sense that her failure to unite man and God provides the opportunity of accepting their absolute separation: but such an example given to the Gentiles also provides the opportunity for Israel herself to be accepted, for she too can see her rejection as an opportunity for faith. She too can see in her rejection the possibility of election, in the loss of God the possibility of faith in God who is unknown.

Within the Church, Barth argues, it is entirely appropriate that believers are baptised 'into the death and resurrection of Christ' (Romans 6:3-5). In baptism, the illusion of the likeness of man to God is stripped away. Baptised into the death and resurrection of Christ, the believer accepts his otherness from God and his 'establishment' only beyond the dissolution of the present order: it is in this sense that 'united to him in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection'.²³ Baptised we 'walk after the Spirit', not in the sense of possessing any divine quality now (cf. Barth's treatment of grace, above p.26) but in the sense of recognising the 'impossible possibility' of our 'establishment through dissolution', of an existence in another order of which our knowledge now is limited

to the consciousness of limitation in the order in which we at present live.

Barth's second commentary on *The Epistle to the Romans* is a dialectical critique, in that it has as its fundamental principle an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man which can only be overcome eschatologically: there is no present overcoming of the distinction,^{23a} and Pauline terms such as 'grace', 'faith', 'spirit' and 'justification' are interpreted within that overriding principle. The ultimate 'establishment' of man must be beyond the dissolution of this world-order: it is thus an 'establishment through dissolution', a 'life through death' (to be seen in the context of Christ's own life through death in his crucifixion and resurrection). Indeed the man who is 'established' through God's creative word is the negation of man as he is now, the 'not I', the 'non-existence of our non-existence'.²⁴ Such establishment only through the negation of what we are in this world, rather than through the addition of 'grace' in the sense of spiritual power to our lives as we live them now in a unity of man and God on earth, is the essential conviction of 'dialectical theology' - that God's Yes is uttered only in His No, His mercy in His judgment, because the salvation which He proclaims for man involves the dissolution of his present being in ultimate separation from his Creator.

To say that this dialectical theology can make no sense of the idea of the world as God's creation, reflecting His glory even in its fallen condition, would be unfair on Barth. He certainly does try to make sense, although in a negative rather than positive manner as we have suggested, of the world as a reality through which the divine being is disclosed to man. But the glory of God is disclosed, not through the world or man's positive likeness to Himself, but in its exposing in its own limitations a self-critical attitude towards itself as final. Barth's argument is comparable in this respect to both Plato and Kant: his sense of God in the world is a Platonic *anamnesis*

expressed in terms of the longing for unity and completeness that justifies the Kantian 'idea of reason'. Commenting on Romans 5:13 ('for until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law'), Barth does indeed use language which, once translated from its poetic colour to a prose meaning, concedes a form of revelation of God in the world:

The law is the light of the revelation and of the presence of God, broken into beams of different colours in the prism of the sequence and variety of human events. (25)

Moreover, any reading of Barth's commentary reveals that he believes there to be, in this world, an 'indication' or 'likeness' (Hinweis, Gleichnis) of the divine reality which is, however, wholly separate from this finite order of being. We shall consider three examples to illustrate this:

The first comes in his comment on Romans 3:1-4; in particular the passage:

What advantage then hath the Jew? Or what is the profit of circumcision? Much in every way: first of all, that they were entrusted with the oracles of God.

This passage may seem to contradict Barth's claim that no person or human institution has a privilege of 'possessing' God, since all are condemned by him, and exist within the context of their own ultimate dissolution. Barth comments:

For when we have clearly perceived that, if divinity be so concreted and humanised in a particular department of history - the history of religion or the history of salvation - God has ceased to be God, and there can be no relation with him, then we are able to see that the whole occurrence of the known world receives its content and significance from the unknown God; then too, we are able to see in every impress of revelation a sign-post to Revelation (dass aller Offenbarungseindruck ein Hinweis ist auf Offenbarung selbst); then, too, we are able to recognise that all experience bears within it an understanding by which it is itself condemned, and that all time bears within it that eternity by which it is dissolved. (26)

How does the known world provide insight into an 'unknown God' in infinite, qualitative distinction from itself? How can it bear within itself an 'impress of revelation' (Offenbarungseindruck) that is an indication (Hinweis) of revelation itself? Barth's answer is that the

insight is a negative one: where, in the world, the absence of God from particular 'concretions' and human beings has been recognised, where it has been understood that were God to overcome the divide between Himself and man and be 'contained' within the world then God would 'cease to be God', there a particular understanding has been achieved in the world concerning the nature of its Creator. It has been understood that, since God is God, He cannot be found in particular human beings or places on earth. The advantage of the Jew, in this sense, is not a positive possession of the divine, but a negative understanding of why, in this world, God cannot be present to be possessed. That is the 'indication' or 'sign-post' of the 'unknown God' to be found within the known world.

The second example comments on Romans 2:14, where Paul speaks of the Gentiles, 'which have not the law', but nevertheless 'do the things of the law'. How is it that the Gentiles 'by nature and in the natural order do the law'?²⁷ Their lives, Barth tells us, are a 'parable' (ein Gleichnis)²⁸, but a parable in the negative sense that the 'Gentile world lies in wickedness', that it is a world 'disintegrated, disorganised and undermined', but that precisely because of that the mercy of God 'seems closer and more credible' among them.²⁹

It is clear from this example that the Gentiles 'do the law' and are closer to the mercy of God precisely by their failures rather than their successes. As the natural world suggests, in the trace of what it has lost, the reality of a God who cannot make himself known to it, so the moral, cultural and religious activities of man are 'parables' or 'likenesses' (Gleichnisse) insofar as they manifest, in human behaviour and society, the absence of the Kingdom of God. Once again the indication of God is a negative one:

Disturbance of soul, restless murmuring, cavil and protest:
such may be sign-posts (Hinweis) to the peace of God which
passeth all understanding. (30)

Human failure indicates God's peace and presence, as the world

indicates by its recognition of His absence the reality of the unknown God. Both, in the reality of their separation from God, bear witness to him: in the unreality of the world, and the failure of man, lies the parable of the reality of God.

The third example presents Barth's treatment of the Incarnation in his commentary. Commenting on Romans 1:3-4, Barth remarks concerning Jesus 'born of the seed of David according to the flesh':

The years AD 1-30 are the era of revelation and disclosure. (Offenbarungszeit und Entdeckungszeit). (31)

Given the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between time and eternity, and between God and man, presupposed in Barth's 'system', it would be highly significant to know in what sense these years of Jesus' historical existence formed a 'time of revelation' and 'a time of discovery'. Barth tells us that the era is one which 'sets forth the new and strange and divine definition of all time' (die neue, andersartige, göttliche Bestimmung aller Zeit). This divine definition dissolves the particularity of these years, by making every epoch 'a potential field of revelation and disclosure'. And then Barth introduces another colourful metaphor:

The effulgence, or rather, the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell; the void by which the point on the line of intersection makes itself known in the concrete world of history is not - even though it be named the life of Jesus - that other world which touches our world in Him.

The German reads:

Jener Punkt der Schnittlinie selbst aber hat wie die ganze unbekante Ebene, deren Vorhandensein er ankündigt, gar keine Ausdehnung auf der uns bekannten Ebene. Die Austrahlungen oder vielmehr die erstaunlichen Einschlagstrichter und Hohlräume, durch die er sich innerhalb der historischen Anschaulichkeit bemerkbar macht, und, auch wenn sie "Leben Jesu" heissen, nicht die andre Welt, die sich in Jesu mit unsrer Welt berührt. (32)

This passage is extremely interesting. For one obvious concern about Barth's dialectical interpretation, is that an absolute separation between God and man would make difficult the idea of their unity in Christ in His incarnate existence. The 'infinite qualitative difference'

between time and eternity, between God 'in heaven' and man 'on earth', would not only exclude the pretentious claim of man to humanise the divine, but also the self-giving of God in taking the human to Himself in Jesus Christ. The 'separation' which cannot be overcome 'from the side of man' in 'possessing' God, would also exclude an action to overcome it 'from the side of God' in His initiative to make Himself present as a man among men. Divine self-giving is excluded along with human self-assertion; the Incarnation disappears with the rejection of an idolatrous 'having' of God by man. If Barth is committed to the unity only in terms of an eschatological realisation beyond the present world order, what sense can he make of their unity in the Incarnate Word within that order?

Barth's procedure is to present the Incarnation in precisely the imagery we have seen in the last two examples, namely that which allows only for a negative revelation of God to man in the world. The description of Christ as making himself known within historical perception (er sich innerhalb der historischen Anschaulichkeit bemerkbar macht) through 'bomb-craters' and 'cavities' (Einschlagstrichten und Hohlräume), tries to describe the impact of one whose reality is made known through His explosive incompatibility with this world, through His destroying rather than sanctifying it. Barth has a number of metaphors in this vein: another is that of the 'empty canal' whose corroded banks point to the lost reality of waters that have long since left it: again, the suggestion is that God is known 'in' the world only in the sense that the world's finite order suggests a lost infinity which is no longer joined to it. The Incarnation appears to be seen by Barth as a confirmation of this separation, expressed through the destructive consequences of an attempted unity: the two worlds can touch now only in the manner of a shell touching the ground, and leaving in the crater it creates the indicator of its inability to become a part of the earth.

Yet not all of the quotation in this example is the language of metaphor. The most significant section is plainly expressed:

Jener Punkt der Schnittlinie selbst aber hat wie das ganze unbekannte Ebene, deren Vorhandensein er ankündigt, gar keine Ausdehnung auf der uns bekannten Ebene.

The 'line of intersection' (Schnittlinie) marked by the Incarnation does not result in an extension (Ausdehnung) of the historical plane known to us (der uns bekannten Ebene). Its presence (Vorhandensein) - literally its 'being at hand' - does not result in any fusion with the known, historical plane of this world. It remains itself unknown (unbekannte). The question is inevitable: if the Incarnation results in no joining of the 'divine plane' to the human, if the Incarnation is not a 'making known' of the divine among men but a remaining 'unknown' among men (and what sense can be made of 'among' when, even as 'present' (Vorhandensein), this line of intersection has no extension on the historical plane?), then is there a real Incarnation in Barth's presentation at all? The same could be argued of Barth's metaphor of the Resurrection:

In the Resurrection the new world of the Holy Spirit touches the old world of the flesh, but touches it as a tangent touches a circle, that is, without touching it. (Über sie berührt sie wie die Tangente einen Kreis, ohne sie zu berühren ...) (33)

Again one may ask: is the unity of God and man suggested by a glorified humanity of the risen Christ any more affirmed in Barth's presentation of the Resurrection, than the unity of God and man in the humbled divinity of the Incarnate Christ?

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in reference to the Incarnation and Resurrection, Barth does not avoid the model of a 'negative presence' of God among men; that humanity bears within itself, in its own finite nature, an inherent self-criticism which suggests a reality outside itself, which it can never directly perceive or understand. If the Jew has an advantage, it is his perception that God could not be possessed by him without ceasing to be God. He has the

awe of God which recognises the grounds of the divine absence. If the 'Gentiles do the things of the law', it is because they arrive at a self-criticism, by way of their moral failure, which points to a wholly other reality which they have lost. If, finally, Jesus Christ is born of the flesh, of the seed of David, he does not unite God and man within Himself, but makes known to man their incompatibility.

In these three examples we see Barth's consistent interpretation of the relationship between the world, and man in the image of his Creator, on the one hand, and God on the other, in terms of a 'negative analogy', by which man and nature exist locked into their own self-critical finitude, which nevertheless leaves them with echoes of an infinite order of being which they have lost.^{33a} Arguably, Barth is more of an existentialist in this approach than he would like to admit! But what is most interesting, in his account, is his assimilation of the presence of God in Christ to the same order of explanation. No distinction is made between 'nature' and 'revelation' here - indeed Barth has, in this commentary, no specifically Christocentric theology of revelation at all, but rather a 'negative natural theology' which operates throughout his commentary. The problems this raises in reconciling Barth's understanding with traditional views of the Incarnation are immense. In a succinct statement, Barth declares:

In Jesus God is known to be the unknown God. (34)

The unknownness of God which had been recognised in the case of nature and history in general, in the awe of the Jews and the moral failure of the Gentiles, in the lost glory of God revealed in the dried-up canals of time and history, is also made known in Christ. The old canals become new and sudden craters and cavities in the earth. The echo of an unknown God becomes the shout of an unknown God. The separation of the worlds of God and man is proclaimed directly - but not overcome. The lost glory of the Creator is revealed in a point of history and time - but still as lost. There is no unity of God and man

in the Incarnation, but a revelation, in one concentrated span, of their incompatibility. That Barth is here committed to a complete paradox, namely that he has to overcome that incompatibility in order to proclaim it! - does not forestall him. The tangent touches the circle, even though it does not touch it: the Word takes flesh in order to reveal its inability to join itself to human history.

Barth is in danger here of wanting to have his incarnational cake and eat it. On the one hand, the otherworld 'touches' (berührt) our world in the Resurrection, and in that single word 'touches' is contained all that Christian doctrine affirms concerning the exaltation of a human life to glory through the raising of Christ. On the other hand, Barth wants to say that this other world is not observable (bemerkbar) within this one; the 'craters' and 'cavities' formed by the encounter of worlds is in fact only a point at which their separation is affirmed. The negative thrust of Barth's dialectic remains - no containment of the other world (durch die er sich innerhalb der historischen Anschaulichkeit bemerkbar macht), can be admitted.^{34a} The 'craters' and 'cavities' formed, in the poetic description of Barth's, by the Incarnation, like the religious reverence of the Jews and the consciousness of a kind of critical moral and cultural failure among the Gentiles, is an occasion of recognition that a dualism between man and God cannot be denied, a dualism that brooks no Christological interference. Yet committed to a dialectic of this kind, it is difficult to see what sort of Christocentrism Barth could admit to in this work, or to reject the criticism of Adolf Schlatter that, where this commentary is concerned:

... for Barth faith remains 'a leap into the void', and in this a deep gap between his exposition and the *Letter to the Romans* opens up. (35)

Moreover, the exclusion of Kant's moral theology from account in Barth's second commentary, and his fastening exclusively upon Kant's transcendental idealism in order to shore up the dialectic of 'infinite,

qualitative distinction' between God and man which has a merely eschatological resolution, makes it doubly difficult to make sense of the notion of Incarnation in Barth's scheme. For Kant's presentation of Jesus as a supreme exemplar of the moral law is a way of making sense of the Christocentrism of a Christian theology, and does offer a way of using concepts such as 'Incarnation' even within the constraints of a Kantian dualism:^{35a} but his way depends precisely upon the supreme importance of the moral law in Kant's theology, an option which Barth rules out in his second commentary.

If we compare the passages cited from Barth's first commentary as evidence of his belief that a unity of the divine and human orders can be realised in the commitment of conscience to the moral law, with the same passages from his second commentary, then we see that the moral law has lost its position as an 'absolute' which cannot be relativised along with the other moral, cultural and religious values of mankind. Commenting on Romans 7:11 ('and the commandment that was unto life, this I found to be unto death'), in which context Barth in his first commentary spoke of the 'eternal thou ought' (ewige du sollst) which man should realise in himself, Barth talks in his second commentary of a 'vast critical negation',³⁶ from which no human quality or capacity is excepted. By the 'commandment', he argues, men are 'thrown into contrast between relative and absolute, and there imprisoned'.³⁷ They have in themselves no 'absolute' which can join them to God, but must remain in the prison of their own relativity until 'established' at the eschaton through the death of all that they now are.

Again, in his first commentary on *Romans* Barth comments on *Romans* 7:7a (What shall we say then? The law is sin? God forbid.) by referring to the categorical imperative which man is obliged to obey, but cannot obey as an individual in isolation (in opposition to 'romanticist' notions), and no more devised than built the starry heavens (a suggestion, I have already suggested of the final remarks of

Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*). In his second commentary, however, Barth specifically disowns the view in his earlier work:

Why should we not return to the main theme of the first edition of this commentary, and, joining with Beck and with the naturalism of the leaders of the old school of Wurttemberg, set over against an empty idealism the picture of humanity as a growing divine organism? ... The answer is simply - God forbid! ... Law brings all human possibility into the clear light of an all-embracing KRISIS. (38)

Once again, Barth excludes all forms of 'human possibility' which might provide for an encounter between the divine and human worlds, and includes within his exclusion the moral law which had earlier escaped it, together with the belief in humanity as a 'growing divine organism', which might realise an ethical imperative in society.

Finally, whereas in his first commentary Barth remarks, (interpreting Paul's words in Romans 6:14b, 'ye are not under the law but under grace') that by grace an unrealisable good becomes the good that is in man and is man, in the second he declares:

Ye are, however, not under law, but under grace. That is to say, ye stand beyond the last and noblest human achievement, where only forgiveness matters, and where forgiveness becomes a matter of fact. (39)

Where in the first commentary man stands by grace in the noblest human achievement, in the second he stands 'beyond' (jenseits) it in the forgiveness that negates all present human 'possibilities' or capacities. Among these negated possibilities in the second commentary stands conscience itself: obedience to the moral law is 'relativised' along with other moral, religious and cultural ideals, as products of this-worldly ambitions that are condemned by the divine judgment which 'dissolves', and separates itself from, and affirms itself in separateness from, this world.

In his second commentary, Barth's theology reaches a critical impasse. Enclosed within the purity of its eschatological dialectic, it is unable to move towards any sort of recognition that Christianity is only theocentric insofar as it is Christocentric. It cannot confess to a unity, even within one single individual in history, of realities

which it has deliberately set in a final opposition to one another. It has jettisoned the option of exploring Kant's understanding of the moral law as a means by which the doctrine of the Incarnation could make sense. With a transcendental eschatology that represents a paradoxical formulation of the Kantian idealism whose deep influence on the work cannot be doubted,^{39a} Barth is left paradoxically affirming what his 'system' cannot, in fact, allow, that between 1 and 30 A.D. two worlds encountered one another, touched - and yet did not join.

Jesus is left to join the ranks of those who sought to make man conscious of a necessary separation between himself and God. Indeed the conviction is unavoidable that Christ is no more than the supreme exemplar, or teacher, of a negative theology that could have been learned from elsewhere in history, or from nature itself. Far from ruling out a natural theology, Barth's second commentary is a natural theology: the 'revelation' of God in Jesus is merely his reinforcement of the negative dialectic which is 'naturally' revealed in the physical universe and perceived in history. The 'paradox' of the Christ is that He reveals that there is to be no revelation, but this could have already been understood existentially by others, for instance, Abraham.

In the affirmation that man could not unite himself with God by realising in himself divine possibilities, Barth effectively excludes, in his commentary, the possibility of God's uniting Himself with man by realising in Himself human possibilities.^{39b} Barth falls victim, in fact, to a criticism which Professor H.R. Mackintosh makes of Kierkegaard,⁴⁰ whose 'system' Barth claimed for himself in his commentary. Committed to a 'paradoxical' nature of his subject-matter, Kierkegaard sees only one half of the paradox, claims Mackintosh, namely that the transcendent God affirms Himself in His otherness to man. The other half, that this transcendent God is nevertheless, even as wholly other, a man among men living and breathing (and capable of historical

recognition) during a period of time, is unaffirmed. What both Kierkegaard and Barth fail to see is this: that the 'paradox' of Christianity is not that Jesus proclaims the unknown God, but that he proclaims the knownness of the unknown God. Barth's second commentary is not, in this sense, a 'paradoxical' work: it eschews paradox in favour of a rigid adherence to a 'system', its negative dialectic. Rather than a 'theology of revelation', in which the unknown God nevertheless reveals Himself as known, it is a negative natural theology into which the Christian revelation is unhappily fitted.

An important casualty of Barth's approach is the lack of moral and political seriousness that it entails, which can be outlined in terms of his treatment of Romans 12-15. Barth applies the argument he used concerning God as the one who 'reckoned with no man', to judgments between particular political and moral principles. As no man may possess the privilege of the divine presence, as no human institution can claim to take hold of the divine and control it within itself, so no particular political order or moral principle can claim to possess a divine sanction or to express the divine will. Both 'Legitimists' and 'Revolutionaries',⁴¹ Barth insists, seek by definition to treat a particular political order as 'divine': they lose sight of the essential self-criticism by which any political order must judge itself. Both the 'reactionary' and the 'revolutionary' are attacked by Barth: the former because he absolutises the present order, the latter because, although he relativises the present, he absolutises some order with which he could replace it.⁴² One weakness in Barth's analysis clearly expressed by this crucial (but relatively short) passage in the commentary, is that he sees Paul as providing no principles by which to discriminate between the various political systems.⁴³

In his treatment of ethics, Barth's fundamental principle is the forgiveness of sins, rather than particular moral ideals realisable in this world. In passages in Barth's work one discerns clearly an almost

'Olympian' attitude towards humanity. Human beings are not capable of goodness, but God ignores this in forgiving them.⁴⁴ Similarly, the love which the Christian should show towards his fellow-men, is not that of 'eros', which loves them as they are, but 'agape', which 'accepts and rejects' them. It accepts what others are not (their goodness), and rejects what in their totality they are (evil).⁴⁵ The Christian is here in danger of looking past the faces of his fellow-creatures, past the concrete reality of their lives, to a mythologised idea of their eschatological being. The danger, in Barth's view of 'Christian love', is that the lives which our neighbours actually lead are considered unreal, and we are asked instead to love them in an existence which they do not have. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that a crucial weakness in Barth's work lies here: the sense that the political and moral choices made by people do not really matter, for they take place in the context of an order of reality itself condemned by God.

Barth's failure to see the expression of divine sanction or will in any particular political order or moral principle, may be connected with his failure to give value to the 'other half' of the paradox, namely the knownness of the unknown God in an historical life. 'All Reformers are Pharisees', for Barth, because they make 'Pharisaic' claims to have determined the divine will, to be changing society to correspond with the specific form of life which God sanctions. Yet Christians may well want to say that such correspondence is based upon what God reveals of Himself in the concrete historical existence of His son. For Barth, however, this 'concrete historical existence' may not occur: the 'other' divine world which 'touches' this world in Christ does not extend itself along it. For that reason, Christ trod no particular path of political and moral commitment in this world, and His followers have no authority to claim to imitate that commitment in their own efforts to reform. They have no example of a commitment

which, by virtue of the Incarnation, might have had a more than human justification. From the incompatibility of the divine and human worlds manifested by Christ's 'Incarnation' in Barth's presentation, follows the 'Olympian' rejection of all particular reforms and improvements insofar as they claim to realise the Kingdom of God. The 'crater' marking the impact of the divine world upon this, becomes the void of political and moral commitment suggested by Barth's commentary. He argues that the radical discontinuity between man and God in his dialectic is in antithesis to a 'bourgeois' search for a 'secure' God in this world: and it is true that the commentary provides no sanction for a bourgeois social order. But nor does it encourage any alternative to the bourgeois status quo: for it evacuates the significance of political options by undermining the historical order within which they are made. Any suggestion of a particular political and moral content in Christian teaching is cut off at source, since it presupposes a significance for the historical order which Barth has effectively refuted.

It is not as if Barth 'takes sides' in any debate over such content: he merely denies the debate. But in this light, it is surely right to conclude that since he aspired to a viewpoint too Olympian for politics, this must make him attractive to conservatives.

Whereas the transcendental idealism of Kant offered a 'denial of knowledge' which made possible a moral theology in which the teaching of Jesus was of supreme importance, that of Barth effectively rules out the Christocentric particularity which gives to specific moral and social values a divine sanction. In this resounding second commentary on Paul's *Epistle to the Romans* one may discern a dialectical system, a natural theology, an existentialist awareness of man's finitude, a paradox muted by the demands of a 'philosophical' system - of the centrality of Christ to Christianity, the 'primacy of revelation', the independence of theology as a discipline and the work of grace in overcoming the lack of

resources in man for understanding God, there is no convincing evidence. The problem of greatest urgency for Barth's thought in 1922, was that of how to introduce the concept of revelation into theology: for the overcoming of that infinite qualitative difference between man and God, which as a human undertaking must be an act of hubris, was as a divine undertaking the essence of the gospel, the good news of God's coming to man.

Notes on Chapter Two

1. ... nämlich die Gerechtigkeit Gottes durch seine Treue in Jesus Christus für alle, die glauben. (Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, p.66. ET, tr. E.C. Hoskyns, *The Epistle to the Romans*, pp. 91 ff.)
2. 'Das ist Abrahams Gottesgerechtigkeit. Ob Abraham "Gott hat?" Nein niemals, aber Gott hat ihn'. (Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.99: ET, p.123.)
3. ET, *op. cit.*, p.127.
4. *Ibid.*
5. ... also göttliches Trotzdem (nie als Darum!), als Vergebung (nie als Bestätigung!) dessen, was er ist. (Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.99: ET, p.123.)
6. Abraham's (or the man of faith's) realisation of this 'establishment through dissolution' is expressed through Barth's use of the Pauline word *κρίσις*, which means both 'judgment' and 'separation'. Man understands God's judgment to entail a separation of himself from the world-order in which he lives, and directs his faith to be eschatological. If 'krisis' represents the judgment under which man is separated from God, 'das Moment' (the moment) represents his eschatological establishment: this 'moment', however, is not a period of time-however short-for it is not realised within the parameters of a this-worldly spatio-temporal existence:

The moment of the movement of men by God is beyond men, it cannot be enclosed in a system or a method or a 'way'
(ET, *op. cit.*, p.110)

(Und dieser Moment der Bewegung des Menschen durch Gott ist selbst jenseits des Menschen, kann in keinem Sinn zum Weg, zur Methode, zum System werden)
(Barth, K., *Römerbrief*, p.85)

The concepts of 'krisis' and 'moment' function as key terms in the dialectical theology of Barth's 'Romans', ensuring that no unity of God and man will be realised within the present world-order.
7. ET, *op. cit.*, p.119.
8. *Ibid.*, p.112.
9. *Ibid.* Hoskyns translates somewhat loosely. The German reads (p.87):

Zwischen uns und Gott steht und wird stehen bis ans Ende der Tage das Kreuz, einigend, aber auch Distanz schaffend, verheissungsvoll, aber auch warnend.
10. Hence in being justified man is declared righteous (gerecht erklärt werden) rather than 'becoming' righteous, which would imply that through faith the separation between man and God could be overcome in the present world-order. Rather, faith exists as a promise and a hope. (See *Römerbrief*, p. 76, ET, p.101.)
11. ET, *op. cit.*, p.103.

12. Whereas under the wrath of God (Romans 1:18), 'the prisoner remains a prisoner and does not become a watchman', (ET, p.43). The German words are 'Gefangene' and 'Wächter' (Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.19).
13. Note these words (*Römerbrief*, p.151, ET, p.173) concerning the law:
 Es ist die im Menschen und unter den Menschen sich ereignende Erinnerung an die - verlorene - Unmittelbarkeit zu Gott.
 Barth's reference here to a 'lost immediacy' with God which the law brings to human 'recollection' illustrates this Platonic tendency of his thought.
14. ET, *op. cit.*, p.45.
15. Those who see in Barth an identification of the world as created with the world as sinful, and who see in this commentary a confounding of the two (e.g., E.L. Mascall, *Nature and Supernature*, p.92: 'I think that one of the most unfortunate things in some Protestant theologians, in Tillich as well as in Barth, is a tendency to confuse the fall with creation, ...') seem to us to forget that Barth does take account of the distinction, but in a negative sense. That is to say, he argues that:

Nur in dem, was die Dinge in ihrer Selbständigkeit und Gültigkeit beschränkt, nur in ihrem kritisch zu gewinnenden Begriff d.h. aber nur in ihrer Frag-Würdigkeit, in der Möglichkeit und Notwendigkeit ihrer Aufhebung, ihrer Negation, in ihrer Fähigkeit, als das, was sie sind, hinzuweisen auf das, was sie nicht sind ... (my underlining).

(Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.147).

The self-critical finitude of the things of this world is the negative means by which (through its visible absence) they reflect their invisible origin. It is in this, negative sense that this world displays its 'createdness' by God, even in its fallen, sinful condition.

16. ET, p.170, Barth, p.148. The German, loosely translated, reads:
 Keine Relativität, die nicht in ihrer verloren-unverliebaren Beziehung zurückwiese auf das Absolute, von dem sie eigentlich lebt, ...
 More literally than Hoskyns, 'there is no relativity, which does not refer back, in its lost and yet immortal relation to the Absolute, from which it essentially lives ...'
17. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith, pp.532-549. The ideas of reason are concepts which, whilst a source of illusion if taken as relating to objects of possible knowledge, perform a necessary function in the extension of our understanding when employed in a 'regulative' manner. The concepts of 'God', 'soul' and 'immortality' do not imply that we may form a definite idea of objects corresponding to them; but advances in psychology and science are, Kant argues, dependent upon our thinking of inner states 'as if' they were states of a single incorporeal substance, and thinking of the universe 'as if' it were the product of a divine intelligence. The ideas of reason are used, not as 'constitutive' of an object of experience, but as 'regulative' ideas which give unity to the understanding in its empirical employment. To quote Kant (ET, p.553):

This, then, is how matters stand: if we assume a divine being, we have indeed no concept whatsoever either of the inner possibility of its supreme perfection or of the necessity of its existence; but, on the other hand, we are in a position to give a satisfactory answer to all those questions which relate to the contingent, and to afford reason the most complete satisfaction in respect to the highest unity after which it is seeking in its empirical employment. The fact, however, that we are unable to satisfy reason in respect to the assumption itself, shows that it is the speculative interest of reason, not any insight, which justifies it in thus starting from a point that lies so far above its sphere; and in endeavouring, by this device, to survey its objects as constituting a complete whole.

The paradoxical dilemma of human reason, with which Kant's first critique begins:

Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which as transcending all its powers it is also not able to answer.

(Kemp Smith, p.7)

may be compared to the paradoxical sense of God from the natural world as presented by Barth in his commentary on *Romans*, as the 'invisible absolute' which makes itself known only indirectly through the self-critical recognition by the finite order of its relativity.

A further consideration might be whether this outline of a 'natural theology' in *Romans* might not accord more closely with some Catholic theology than the later theology of Barth which sets up a self-enclosed circle of revelation. There are echoes of this Barthian 'natural theology' in both Anglican and continental Neo-Thomist theology. The claim that it is the later rather than the earlier Barth, with a more 'positive' view of the created world and of humanity, which corresponds more closely with Catholic theology, forgets that this 'positive' view is firmly established on the basis of a 'primacy of revelation' which gives to this created order a freedom and an independence which is more apparent than real. It would probably be more appropriate to concur with Barth himself that it was not until ten years after the first publication of *Romans* that he finally managed to purge his theology of 'existentialist' ideas and of any suggestion of a natural theology.

18. It is the fate of reason, in Kant's view, to be forced beyond the limit of its powers by the nature of the challenge which it faces in the employment of those powers. This is the sense in which a finite order of being contains a principle of self-criticism that drives it to presume what it cannot conceive - an infinite order. See note 17.

19. ET, *op. cit.*, p.332. Immediately after this remark Barth declares:

The Grand Inquisitor!

He refers to the figure in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* who justifies, to the returning Christ, his actions in enslaving man to an ecclesiastical authority. He receives, for his endeavours, a kiss on his bloodless lips. Forgiveness? Approval? Both have been argued. Most likely forgiveness of the weakness of man in finding such authority necessary - for being unable to face 'the impossible possibility' of faith. (See *The Brothers Karamazov*, pp.288-311.)

20. *Ibid.* (Römerbrief, p.316 - das Göttliche zu vermenschlichen).
21. ET, p.332, Römerbrief, p.316:
Dem Evangelium steht die Kirche gegen über als die Verkörperung der letzten menschlichen Möglichkeit diesseits der unmöglichen Möglichkeit Gottes.
22. *Ibid.*, p.345.
23. *Ibid.*, p.191. Barth adds after the remark 'united with him in the likeness of his death' the words 'by our death' (nämlich in unsern Tode) in order to make Paul emphasise that this unity is eschatological, not present. (Römerbrief, p.171)
- 23a. This is not to say that Barth's eschatology is futuristic; rather, the eschatological 'Moment' represents the eternal and transcendent which is the boundary of every event within time.
24. *Ibid.*, p.148. Römerbrief, p.124.
... das Nicht-Seins.
25. ET, *op. cit.*, p.173. Römerbrief, p.151:
Es ist (das Gesetz) das licht göttlicher Gegenwart und Offenbarung, gebrochen und gefarbt im Prisma jenes zeitlichen Nacheinander und dinglichen Nebeneinander, das für die Welt des Menschen bezeichnend ist.
26. ET, *op. cit.*, p.79: Römerbrief, p.53
27. ET, p.66.
28. *Ibid.*, Römerbrief, p.41.
29. *Ibid.*, p.67.
30. *Ibid.* Römerbrief, p.42.
31. *Ibid.*, p.29. Römerbrief, p.5.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, p.30. Römerbrief, p.6. See chapter 8 for a discussion of Barth's treatment of the resurrection in his theology as a whole. In the commentary on *Romans* the resurrection functions virtually as a synonym for revelation, being that which relates the historical life of Jesus to the realm of the non-historical and invisible. It is the demonstration of a realm which delimits this finite realm, the frontier of history rather than an event in history.
- 33a. 'It is remarkable how often and how strongly the *Commentary on Romans* emphasises the positive in negativity and that which points to revelation or which parabolically reflects it in the world'. (Regin Prenter, 'Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Karl Barth's Positivism of Revelation', in, *World Come of Age : A Symposium on Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, ed., R. Gregor Smith, p.113)
34. *Ibid.*, p.114. Römerbrief, p.88.
Als der unbekannte Gott wird Gott in Jesus erkannt.

34a. Such a negative conclusion concerning history as a locus of revelation partly reflects the influence upon Barth of Kähler's disjunction between the 'Jesus of history' and the 'Christ of faith' (see *Der sogenannte historische Jesus und der biblische, geschichtliche Jesus.*) At the root of such historical scepticism was the philosophical problem of 'Lessing's ditch', that is to say the apparently unbridgeable divide between 'accidental truths of history' and 'necessary truths of reason', including truths of faith, such that the latter seemed incapable of being dependent upon the former, and such that the former, once admitted as the locus of revelation, seemed to provide too uncertain a foundation for those truths of dogma in which the Christian revelation found the means of expression.

35. See J.M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, p.125; translated from J. Moltmann, ed., *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, p.146. Note that the Robinson selection omits certain works from the Moltmann selection.

Schlatter's quotation continues:

Paul did not leap into the void, but joined himself to Jesus.

One might cite in support of Schlatter the sense given by Barth to being 'in Christ Jesus'. When Schlatter talks of Paul as having 'joined himself to Jesus', he is questioning Barth's eschatological interpretation of passages such as Romans 8:1 ('There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus'). Barth comments upon this passage (ET, p.272):

Comprehended in the dissolution of the man of this world, which is revealed in Jesus as the Christ, we are established as new men and pass from death to life. This is the meaning of the words - in Christ Jesus.

Schlatter rejects the idea that 'those who are in Christ Jesus' merely recognise their 'dissolution' as men of this world revealed in Christ and their eschatological establishment as 'new men'. The sense of the Pauline passage is of a present union with Christ which Barth's 'system' of 'infinite qualitative distinction' renders impossible.

However, it seems to us to be a merit of Barth's commentary that he does not talk of Paul having 'joined himself to Jesus', a phrase which represents the sort of nonsense to which Christian piety is constantly tempted. The failing of Barth lies, rather, in his inability to give ontological value to those central Christian mysteries of the Incarnation and Resurrection which do, as our chapter tries to argue, undermine his 'system', whilst remaining for Barth himself the very foundation of Christian belief.

35a. See Mackinnon, D.M., 'Kant's Philosophy of Religion', in *Philosophy* (1975) and Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*, Book Two, Section One.

36. ET, p.251. *Römerbrief*, p.234. The German refers to 'der Vollzug der kritischen Negation', literally 'the fulfilment of critical negation'.

37. ET, p.252. *Römerbrief*, p.235:

... Mensch qualifiziert, doch die er inden Kontrast des Relativen zum Absoluten gestürzt und verkettet wird ...

38. ET, pp.241-2. *Römerbrief*, pp.223-4.

39. ET, p.213. *Römerbrief*, p.194.

39a. Least of all by Barth himself. However, later he was to feel less happy with the philosophical influences upon his commentary, which in the preface to his second edition he had merely noted. In 1935 Barth commented that his desire 'to elucidate Paul's Epistle to the Romans' was 'done partly by means of a strange incrustation of Kantian-Platonic conceptions'. He goes on:

I was at liberty then to use these conceptions, but if I were to be told to-day that I had to use them, I should say with decision, No.

(Barth, *Credo*, ET, p.185).

In fact, as we attempt to show in the course of this thesis, Barth could never in his theology sit so lightly towards philosophical ideas as he was frequently to make out. He suggests here that he might almost pick them up or put them down at will, whereas our claim is to be that they represent a far more pervasive influence upon his theology, which could not indeed have been articulated without them.

39b. This is the conclusion reached by R.W.A. McKinney in *The Role of the Historical Jesus in the Theology of Karl Barth*. He says of Karl Barth's commentary:

Effectively, he has no doctrine of the Incarnation. (p.146)

And he goes on:

What we have instead, is a type of natural theology. (p.146)

Karl Barth himself remarked of his earlier commentary in his *Church Dogmatics*:

Readers of it to-day will not fail to appreciate that in it Jn.1:14 does not have justice done to it. (Volume 1, Part 2, p.50.)

40. H.R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology*, pp. 218-262.

41. ET, pp.480 ff.

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 480 ff.

43. Compare the extraordinary remark:

Alle Reformmenschen sind Pharisäer. (*Römerbrief*, p.493, ET, p.509.)

See also the discussion of Harnack below p. 58 .

44. This characteristic of Barth's treatment of ethics may in part lie behind hints of universalism in his commentary. It is as if human beings are ultimately so unimportant that God can ignore their sins at no cost to himself.

45. ET, pp.454 ff.

CHAPTER THREE

A Question of Hermeneutics

1. Barth's early thought

In a passage from Barth's *Romans* concerning the 'Incarnation',¹ we have quoted the remark:

The effulgence, or rather, the crater made at the percussion point of an exploding shell, the void by which the point on the line of intersection makes itself known in the concrete world of history is not - even though it be named the life of Jesus (auch wenn sie "Leben Jesu" heissen) - that other world which touches our world in Him. (1a)

Barth's commentary was bound to have implications for the attempt to write a 'Life of Jesus', indeed for the whole hermeneutical question of how Scripture was to be interpreted. In the quotation given above the implication is contained, that the attempt to write an historical account of Jesus is a methodologically unsound one. Such an attempt would presume what has not in fact been given - namely an extension of the 'ganze unbekante Ebene' to the 'uns bekannte Ebene', enabling there to be a real historical dimension to the Word of God in its state of incarnate self-giving. The suspicion of 'Gnostic occultism'² (gnostische Okkultismus) in Barth unsurprisingly followed publication of his second commentary, and focussed on a debate with Adolph von Harnack set off in a series of fifteen questions in the journal *Christliche Welt*. Barth rapidly published fifteen answers.³ The debate was something of an exercise in mutual incomprehension, but is interesting evidence of the methodological crisis to which Barth's dialectical procedure was subjecting him. An 'infinite qualitative difference' between God and man inevitably raises the question of how far Scripture itself can claim to bridge that gap, and of how far the 'relativising' of all human values, institutions and ideas under the pressure of 'krisis' (the judgment that is by way of separation) can avoid a 'relativising' of the Bible itself. Barth seems to be forced either to deny the authority of the epistle - as he has denied the authority of the moral law and all

'human' values - or to make scripture an exception to his 'system', in which case he would have replaced a Kantian moral theology with a biblical theology.

In fact, Barth affirms the authority of Scripture, but not by suggesting that a particular 'human' quality or action has thereby been given an absolute status. Rather, he denies that in elevating the *Epistle to the Romans*, he is effectively elevating the human capacity that engineered it:

Regarded as a "point of view" (Standpunkt), the point of view of *The Epistle to the Romans* is God's point of view. (4)

Barth claims that the authority of the epistle derives from God, not from man. Its status does not deny the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man, and implies no 'divine' power in man, for it originates only in the divine power of God. As we shall see, Barth's position brings difficulties.

The Prefaces to Barth's commentaries on *Romans* (certainly the first three editions) have been seen as a watershed in biblical hermeneutics, although an important and lucid earlier essay entitled 'The Strange New World Within the Bible'⁵, outlines aspects of Barth's hermeneutics based upon an address given in the church at Leutwil in the autumn of 1916, three years before the first commentary was published. Hermeneutics occupied Barth, then, as soon as he began to prepare a commentary on Paul, or even to discuss Pauline themes informally with Thurneysen.

In the Preface to the second commentary, Barth draws attention to Wernle's claimed list of 'uncomfortable points' in Paul's theology,⁶ including his depreciation of the earthly life of Jesus, redemption by the blood of Christ, Paul's use of the Old Testament, his attitude towards secular authority and the idea of double predestination. Barth claims that Wernle dismissed or overlooked these 'uncomfortable points', while he himself wrestled with them, refusing to allow that they be conveniently forgotten. How, then, did Barth come to terms with them?

It would be well here to remember the essay written in 1916, 'The Strange New World Within the Bible'. For a similar discomfort awaits the reader of Scripture in general, according to Barth's argument here. He describes the 'shock' which the Bible gives to those who imagine that what it says will conform to their human notions of history or morality:

The Bible is full of history; religious history, literary history, cultural history, world history and human history of every sort ... But the pleasure is short-lived; the picture, on closer inspection, proves quite incomprehensible and flat, if it is meant only for history. (7)

Again,

At certain crucial points the Bible amazes us by its remarkable indifference to our conception of good and evil. (8)

The consequence of our finding a discomfoting historical incomprehensibility and moral indifference in the Bible, Barth is suggesting, is to force us to ask the question: are we using the correct method in trying to understand the text? We would, after all, react to a mathematical puzzle which we found insoluble by attempting a new method in solving it. In a similar way (although more radical in its change of method) the Bible should shock us out of an all-embracing historical-critical methodology, when the consequence of applying that method alone to the text is, in Barth's view, a failure to unravel its meaning. We should not try to make the text yield more comprehensible results when interpreted according to our historical-critical approach, but should alter the approach itself. To shore up the historical-critical method by supposing it to have explained what in fact remains unsolved by it would be dishonest: yet this, by implication, is the failure of which Barth would accuse those who, like Wernle in Barth's view, conceal the 'ungemütlliche Punkte' emanating from the use of what they will not admit to be an inappropriate methodology.

A similar argument is to be found in the preface to the third edition of Barth's *Romans*. Here Barth confronts Bultmann's criticism

that his method of exegesis takes no account of the fact that 'other spirits make themselves heard, as well as the Spirit of Christ'⁹ in the text of the epistle. Barth's reply is an apparently modest one on behalf of Paul, namely that the 'other spirits' make themselves heard in every part of the text, and not merely in the parts which the interpreter has less enthusiasm for than others:

The whole is placed under the krisis of the Spirit of Christ.¹⁰

Yet from this 'modest' premise Barth draws the conclusion that Paul is beyond criticism! He comments:

Anything short of utter loyalty means a commentary
ON Paul's Epistle to the Romans, not a commentary
so far as is possible WITH him - even to his last word.⁽¹¹⁾

The grounds upon which Barth makes this remark are revealed in his subsequent comment:

I cannot, for my part, think it possible for an interpreter honestly to reproduce the meaning of any author unless he dares to accept the condition of utter loyalty. (12)

This point is hard to follow. Obviously if loyalty means 'describing what the author actually meant in context', then loyalty is a condition of any approach to the text which attempts to do justice to what is being said. This seems to be the meaning Barth has in mind when he continues, against Bultmann:

He asks me to think and write WITH Paul, to follow him into the vast unfamiliarity of his Jewish Popular-Christian, Hellenistic conceptions; and then suddenly, when the whole becomes too hopelessly bizarre, I am to turn round and write 'critically' ABOUT him - as though, when all is strange, this or that is to be regarded as especially outrageous. (13)

One would have thought that there was nothing odd or unreasonable about Bultmann's position. Loyalty to an author means seeing his point, but not necessarily accepting it. It means a fair contextual presentation, which is a condition as much of agreement as disagreement. Barth describes Bultmann's view as an 'error in literary taste',¹⁴ thereby seeming to confuse 'loyalty' in the sense of being true to what someone is saying with 'loyalty' in the sense of agreeing with him. The point

of Bultmann's remarks concerning the danger of confusing the 'Spirit of Christ' with 'other spirits', is not to suggest that Paul should not be read in context, but to suggest that having been read in context he should be criticised.

However, what we may understand Barth to mean by his remark concerning Bultmann's 'error in literary taste', is not that Bultmann reads Paul critically, but that he reads him in the wrong way. Barth feels that Bultmann does not see what sort of a work the epistle is - hence his treating it as a document deserving criticism on the basis of contextual historico-critical methods. His seeing 'other spirits' besides the 'Spirit of Christ' at work in the author's words, is a symptom of his viewing the text as an historical document, and this attitude, in Barth's view, doesn't do justice to the nature of the work. Thus the 'error in literary taste', namely to treat a scriptural text as an historical document. The problem, then, is to determine what kind of work Barth himself understands a scriptural text to be, and why he demands 'utter loyalty' to a text he admits to be infected in all its parts by 'spirits' other than that of Christ.

In each of these examples of Barth's hermeneutics, from the essay of 1916 and the prefaces to the commentaries on *Romans*, Barth's fundamental concern is not that biblical exegesis should be improving its accuracy but that it should be changing its method. His basic claim is that a scriptural text is not - or not simply - an historical document, and therefore that it cannot be studied by critical historical methods alone. If it is so studied, it proves perplexing, although purveyors of an exclusively historical method might deny this, or find in it merely evidence of the complexity of their task. However, for Barth such perplexity should lead us to question our method of analysing the text, and to ask whether this method is appropriate to the particular subject-matter, namely Scripture. The point is clearly

stated in the preface to Barth's first commentary:

The historical-critical method of Biblical investigation has its rightful place: it is concerned with the preparation of the intelligence - and it can never be superfluous. But, were I driven to choose between it and the venerable doctrine of Inspiration, I should without hesitation adopt the latter, which has a broader, deeper, and more important justification. (15)

Barth is claiming that a methodology of 'inspiration' is more appropriate than one of 'historical-critical' methods. The latter have a role in 'preparing' the intelligence, but this is merely preliminary: and from Barth's description of the application of historical methods to the interpretation of Scripture in 'The Strange New World Within the Bible', this preliminary role appears similar to that of the law and religion in Barth's second commentary, namely a form of 'witness by failure'. Because of the 'uncomfortable points'¹⁶ that inevitably arise when the text is interpreted according to historical-critical methods, those methods are seen to be inadequate: a consciousness of such inadequacy 'prepares the intelligence' to embrace a different method of elucidating the meaning of the text, which Barth here associates with 'the venerable doctrine of inspiration'.¹⁷ In the way that religion and the law provided important means by which man discovered that he could not 'humanise the divine', historical-critical methods are important means by which man realises that he cannot 'capture the divine meaning' by means of instruments of human reason. The gospel is proclaimed in antithesis to religion and the law, in the second commentary on *Romans*, and it entails a positive recognition (fulfilling their negative recognition) of the separation between God and man; similarly the 'doctrine of Inspiration', in Barth's view, entails positive recognition of the gulf between human understanding and the divinely-controlled meaning of the text.

Two quotations from 'The Strange New World Within the Bible' make clear Barth's view:

It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about man. (18)

In other words:

The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what He says to us; not how we find the way to Him, but how He has sought and found the way to us; (19)

The argument is that the historical-critical method treats the Scriptural text as capable of interpretation as a collection of 'human thoughts about God': human thoughts may be interpreted according to a human understanding. In fact, however, Barth claims, the Bible contains 'divine thoughts about man' rather than 'human thoughts about God', and these may not be comprehended by man, since man and God are set in 'infinite qualitative distinction'. They may be comprehended only by a particular act of God's grace - by inspiration.

These hermeneutical forays by Barth provide the background by which we may judge his debate with Adolf von Harnack in 1923.

Harnack's *Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific Theology*, recalls Schleiermacher's *Speeches on Religion to its Cultured Despisers*. He clearly fears that any theologian arguing in a Barthian manner will reverse a trend of accommodation with intellectual and cultural values which Schleiermacher encouraged, and thereby propel theology into isolation - an isolation in which it will not be able to judge with discrimination between various cultural, intellectual and moral attitudes, although it may still judge upon them. To the possibility of this discrimination history is essential, for the historical method reveals, in Harnack's view, the final importance of love, joy, peace and goodness as outlined in the life of Jesus. The fear that Christianity will lose the power to pronounce with a discriminating concern upon the importance of these values in society is indeed the main concern of Harnack's questions: his concern is not merely for the recovery of the 'historical Jesus' as such. Thus:

- (11) Whatever is true, honourable, just, gracious, if there is any excellence, anything worthy of praise, think on these things - if this liberating admonition still stands, how can one expect barriers between the experience of God and the good, the true and the beautiful, instead of relating them with the experience of God by means of historical knowledge and critical reflection? (21)

It is the extolling and support of certain moral values through 'the experience of God' (Gotteserlebnis) that is crucial for Harnack, and explains the fear he has of Barth's approach. But this 'experience of God' is historically-mediated, for it comes by way of the example of Christ historically known:

- (14) If the person of Jesus Christ stands at the centre of the gospel, how else can the basis for reliable and communal knowledge of this person be gained but through critical-historical study so that an imagined Christ is not put in place of the real one? What else besides scientific theology is able to undertake this study? (22)

Harnack's fear, which a reading of the last sections of Barth's second commentary on *Romans* might seem to justify, is that without critical-historical study the life and teaching of Christ will not be recovered, and the moral, religious and cultural values which he embraced will not be advanced as expressions of the divine will. Rather, good and bad alike will be lumped together as aspects of a 'finite' and 'sinful' reality requiring equal condemnation, and Christianity will surrender its power to discriminate between such values by taking an 'Olympian' position above and apart from them. Such an action would be, Harnack suggests, an 'Herostratean' deed, following the Ephesian Herostrates who set fire to the temple of Artemis in an attempt - which Harnack implies provides a precedent for Barth - to gain notoriety through barbarism. The tenor of Harnack's questions is not then simply that of an academic concerned with his discipline, but of a Christian fearing that the ethically significant and civilising nature of his faith will be lost.

Barth's initial reply to the fifteen questions could be said to give substance to Harnack's fears:

- (4) The faith awakened by God will never be able to avoid completely the necessity of a more or less radical protest against this world as surely as it is a hope for the promised but invisible gift ... For the 'utter contrast' of God and the world, the cross, is the only way in which we as human beings can consider the original and final unity of Creator and creature. (23)

The radical criticism of this world, the dialectical subsumption of all its values under the 'Krisis' of God's judgment, and their merely eschatological resolution, removes the possibility of discriminating between those values. This is perhaps the implication of Barth's merely replying to Harnack's question 6: 'If God and the world are complete opposites, how does education in godliness, that is goodness, become possible?' by quoting John 6:44: 'No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up at the last day'.²⁴ More explicitly, Barth suggests that 'the gospel has as much and as little to do with "barbarism" as with culture',²⁵ a view which unsurprisingly alerts Harnack to the exclusion of discrimination between human values under the comprehensive divine 'Krisis' of Barth's 'system' :

For your sentence 'the gospel has as much and as little to do with barbarism as with culture' can be only understood as a radical denial of every radical understanding of God within the history of man's thought and ethics. (26)

Since, Harnack goes on to explain, Barth argues for a radical disjunction between 'God's truth and our truth', no 'truth' of human culture or morality will more appropriately suggest or 'capture' the divine truth than any other.²⁷ All are condemned to separation from that truth and none may claim to possess God.

Critical-historical study of the Bible, Barth suggests in answer to Harnack's fourteenth question,²⁸ should remind us that we 'no longer know Christ according to the flesh'. The Pauline quotation²⁹ is interpreted to mean that no historically established 'Leben Jesu', or life of Jesus, may be written: to suppose such a work possible would be akin to believing in the continued physical presence of Christ. The belief that the historical-critical method alone should be applied to Scripture, rather than the use of it as a preliminary method which illuminates, through its inappropriateness to its subject-matter, that the text must be conceived 'after the Spirit',

expressed the mistaken view that Christ is still available 'in the flesh' to man, not through the direct view of a contemporary but through an equally 'fleshly' indirectness by means of historical reconstruction.

It is in answer to Harnack's subsequent letter to Barth, that the latter's own methodology is made clearer. Barth sees in Harnack's commitment to the historical-critical method the view that this is the only way of grasping the object of study epistemologically. Barth's own view, however, is that this methodology must be employed only as a preliminary exercise in order to demonstrate its fundamental inappropriateness to its subject-matter. More appropriate would be the 'venerable doctrine of Inspiration'. It becomes clearer in Barth's answer to Harnack's letter what he means by this methodology of 'inspiration'. He writes:

You had asked in question 1 how one might come to find out what the content of the gospel is without historical knowledge and critical reflection. I answered in the first instance that this understanding occurs exclusively through an action (through deed and word) of this very 'content' (Inhalt) (of God or Christ or the Spirit) ... In the second instance I said concerning critical reflection that it cannot be good to reverse the order and turn 'Thus says the Lord' into 'Thus hears man'. If there is a way to this the speaking voice must be the listening ear (Gibt es einen Weg zu diesem "Inhalt", so muss der Inhalt selbst der Weg, die redende Stimme auch das hörende Ohr sein).

This argument must be seen in the context of the accusation that if Barth deserts the historical-critical method of exegesis, then he will encourage a subjectivism that interprets the scriptures in any way it likes. Uncontrolled by the demands of what is historically accurate, it will be free to impose any desired meaning of its own. Barth denies that he is encouraging 'subjectivism':³¹ indeed his view is that this methodology is more 'objective' than that of critical history, since it respects the nature of the 'object' in question, the 'content' (Inhalt) of the scriptural corpus itself, which is not primarily a collection of historical documents. Thus Barth's methodology claims to be more 'objective' than Harnack's. Recognising the

particular nature of this 'object' or 'content', it accepts that 'if there is a way to this "content", then the content itself must be the way'.³² In other words, the content of the scriptural text determines the way in which it is to be understood, revealing itself to be of a different nature from historical documents like Thucydides' *The Peloponnesian Wars*; and thus requiring a different methodology in order to elicit its meaning. This methodology, Barth argues, is determined by the recognition that Scripture supplies not only the content which is to be apprehended, but the manner of its apprehension. It is precisely when man forgets that he is not only provided with the 'content' (Inhalt) to be understood, but also with the manner by which he is to understand it, and rather supposes that man must supply that methodology himself, that he becomes a 'speaking voice' rather than a 'listening ear': more precisely, man makes this error when he tries to hear and understand what God is saying with his own ears rather than through a capacity supplied by God himself. In this way Barth claims to have a purely objective approach to Scripture, one which recognises that its meaning must be perceived in the manner appropriate to it, which is by means of an activity of the 'content' of Scripture itself.

Hence Barth remarks, in the preface to the second commentary on *Romans*, that the historical-critical method has a merely preparatory role in the understanding of Scripture, because this method is an expression of the human understanding attempting to make sense of the text from its own resources, rather than from 'an act of the content itself' - Barth's understanding of 'inspiration'. Hence the emphasis, in 'The Strange New World Within the Bible', upon the fact that Scripture tells us, 'not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us'. Hence the 'error in literary taste' of Bultmann, which lies not in a lack of 'objectivity' measured by the standards of historical-critical scholarship, but in a lack of understanding that the appropriate methodology with respect to this particular 'object' is

one which recognises that the understanding itself is given by God, not by man. That is why Barth demands 'utter loyalty'³³ to the author - not because such loyalty would be appropriate to historical documents which must be understood by man's critical scrutiny, but because it is appropriate to scriptural documents which are to be understood through 'an act of the content itself' - the work of God rather than of man.

We can glimpse here on what grounds Barth would seek to deny the indiscriminate rejection of all human values and judgments, in the light of an absolute separation between man and God, which Harnack fears must result from rejection of that critical, historical method which brings to light the divine significance of certain of these values. He would argue that discrimination remains, but that it is God's, not man's. God himself ensures that the text is understood in such a way that it bears a particular meaning for man; indeed, far from 'subjectivism' this is the highest 'objectivism', for whilst man's attempt to reason objectively using criteria of human understanding may be errant, God's understanding does not err. God's Spirit leads man into all truth, human spirits do not. Indeed, important disagreements between 'critical historians' could be pointed to. Their 'scientific theology' had produced a variety of different assessments of the 'historical Jesus' in the previous century. Their accounts had culminated in Schweitzer's *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* which suggested that Jesus' eschatological concern was of more importance than his moral teaching - indeed that Jesus was an apocalyptic visionary determined by his own culture, not the purveyor of 'eternal truth'. Arguably it was the historical-critical method itself which was seen to be encouraging 'subjectivism' and Barth could claim to be presenting a fully 'objectivist' methodology, which removed the burden of understanding Christian origins from the whims of human criticism and established it as an infallible divine action that man should simply 'hear'. Inspiration (of the reader and interpreter, not simply of the author and the text)³⁴ had a consistency - an objectivity

it could be claimed - which the historical-critical method lacked, dependent as it was on the prevailing currents of cultural and moral association by which the historian himself was determined by his time.

Yet Barth's hermeneutic falls under the same criticism as his second commentary. Scripture in general is subjected to the same 'system' of 'infinite, qualitative distinction' as the Pauline text in particular, not only with respect to what it says, but with respect to its status in saying it. The problem, we found, with respect to the Incarnation and Resurrection in the second commentary, was that they were presented in the ambiguous form of a meeting between two worlds that cannot meet. The tangent touches the circle - that is to say 'without' touching it. The vertical line intersects the horizontal without forming a part of it. One plane fails to merge with another. Such mathematical metaphors do not explain - they only make confusion poetic. Our claim with respect to Barth's commentary was that in the Incarnation God and man do not become one in its presentation, but rather that the Incarnation is an occasion of affirming - in a concrete event - the absolute separation of God and man. 'In Jesus God is known as the unknown God'.³⁵ The knowledge of God is not Christological, by way of a theology of revelation centred on Christ, but is achieved by way of an existentialist natural theology founded on Platonic-Kantian dualism. God is the Other indirectly known through the existentially-realised failures of this life and incompleteness of this finite world.

In the correspondence with Harnack, a similar pattern emerges. The historical-critical method, like the law and religion, witnesses by failure; it too contributes to the merely negative information - anamnesis - of a 'vanished absolute'. It leads man to despair of his understanding, as the law leads him to despair of his moral and cultural values, and as religion leads him to despair of his religious values and finally of himself. In this sense, the more negative the conclusions arrived at by the historical-critical method the better. Thus, Barth's

hermeneutic is one of resignation before an understanding which only God can bring about, in the context of a rejection of human historical methods, prone as they are to failure - and subjectivism! Here, however, Barth's hermeneutic faces the difficulty of setting itself within an eschatological framework: and as in the commentary on *Romans*, Incarnation and Resurrection seemed set to challenge the idea of a separation overcome only at the eschaton, so the presence of a scriptural corpus in this present world-order provides a challenge to that separation. The words of Scripture, like the humanity of Christ, tug at the ropes by which two worlds are held apart in Barth's 'system'. The worlds are allowed to touch - 'but not to touch'. Scripture is allowed to be the Word of God - and yet it is merely the words of man. On the one hand, Bultmann is not critical enough of Paul, Barth claims - for 'other spirits make themselves heard in every part of the text, and not merely in parts ...'. On the other hand, Bultmann does not respect the fact that utter loyalty to the commentary is required, writing 'with' Paul rather than 'about' him, basing himself upon a conviction of the Inspiration of Scripture. Inspired and yet wholly corrupt, the Word of God and yet the word of man, the same dialectic recurs as Barth strains to make compatible what his system of 'infinite qualitative distinction' renders *a priori incompatible*.

The difficulties inherent in Barth's argument may be seen in the following remark from the preface to the third commentary, in Barth's criticism of Bultmann. He writes:

No human word, no word of Paul, is absolute truth ... But nevertheless, we must learn to see beyond Paul. This can only be done, however, if with utter loyalty and with a desperate earnestness, we endeavour to penetrate his meaning. (36)

It is clear from this remark that Barth does not uphold an idea of verbal inspiration. No 'word of Paul' is absolute truth. If it were, then the 'humanisation' of the divine would have been realised in a particular text, and the 'diastasis' of the Barthian 'system' rejected. But how, then, can Barth take such a critical attitude towards the text

itself and yet maintain its 'inspiration'? The answer is that Barth very carefully draws a distinction between the words of Scripture themselves, which are not 'absolute truth', and the Word of God, to which they bear witness. We need to recognise that the words of Scripture do not 'absolutise' themselves, but rather bear witness to an 'absolute' that is not themselves, but is indeed their 'content'. What we see here is a parallel to the cry of 'Romans' - 'In Jesus God is known as the unknown God' - namely, 'In Scripture the Word of God is known as the unknown Word'. The Word of God is 'no human word, no word of Paul'; but those words of Paul 'point to', 'witness to', 'reveal' that Word, which cannot however merge with the fallible words of Scripture.

Thus we have to be very careful with Barth's language when he talks about the 'content' (Inhalt), of the scriptural corpus, or about understanding it through 'an act of the content itself'. One would normally understand 'content' to mean 'the words themselves, the text', but to make sense of Barth's language concerning 'an act of the content itself' it must rather refer to the Word of God which 'appropriates' these words, that is, to the 'divine' content of the work. Indeed the success of Barth's argument must rely upon the ambiguity of his phraseology: unless he is in fact referring to the scriptural corpus, then the whole point of his commentaries and attention to Scripture is undermined. But unless he is referring to something other than the words of Scripture themselves, then these must fall under the criticism, levelled by Barth himself, that 'no human words, no word of Paul, is absolute truth'. He thus talks of the 'content' (Inhalt), which is something other than the words themselves, (for they, unlike it, are fallible), whilst in some sense 'belonging' to those words (for otherwise to say that it is their 'content' has no meaning). The tangent which touches the circle without touching it, the plane from above which intersects, but does not extend itself along, the horizontal plane below, has become the content which is not the words themselves, the Word that is in - but is not - the words.

The 'infinite qualitative difference' between man and God is maintained, in this case, by making what is 'divine' in Scripture something that is distinct from the human words which form the text and are open to criticism - whilst at the same time the divine Word is sufficiently closely associated with those words to bring the authority of Scripture in by the back door.

If we are to understand Scripture by 'an action of this very "content"; then how can we define 'content'? It cannot be the text itself, for that is human and fallible. Barth tells us in the preface to the third commentary that no word of Paul is absolute truth, and that we penetrate his meaning by 'seeing beyond Paul' (über Paulus hinaus). But in what sense, in that case, are we trying to comment on Paul, and in what sense then are the human words of the Pauline text in any sense a vehicle for the Word of God? We find ourselves confronted by the 'content' of the words as a 'pseudo-reality' which, while claiming to be a separate reality from the words themselves, is in fact entirely parasitic upon the view that it is their content, bound up with any relative human value which they may have, for any sense that may be made of it.

Barth's 'conversations' with Harnack revealed in one important respect an advance upon his thought in *Romans*, namely in their assuming a role for the Holy Spirit. In answer to Harnack's open letter, Barth commented that it was crucial 'to speak of the Holy Spirit if all the objections Herrmann rammed into our heads against a "mere credence" in historical facts apart from this basis of cognition are not to hold good'.³⁷

The role of the Holy Spirit Barth saw as being an epistemological one.³⁸ It is by means of the Spirit that we understand Scripture, despite the fallible nature of our human organs of comprehension: for these are bypassed in the understanding that is brought about 'in' man by the Holy Spirit:

Therefore I distinguish faith as God's working on us (for only he can say to us, in such a way that we will hear it, what we cannot hear, 1 Corinthians 2:9) from all known and unknown human functions, even our so-called 'experiences of God'. (39)

Later in the same answer Barth talks of God speaking 'the Word of Christ' through 'the witness of the Scriptures empowered through the testimonium Spiritus Sancti internum, so that I hear it and by hearing it believe'.⁴⁰

The appropriate methodology for comprehending the content of a scriptural text, then, is one which allows the reader to make sense of it not through his resources of an historical understanding, but God's resources given to man through the Holy Spirit. The fallible human words of Scripture witness to the Word of God as it is interpreted to man through the Holy Spirit.

The introduction of the Holy Spirit in this epistemological role gives Barth the opportunity to claim that a positive exegesis of Scripture can be made, and that the exegete is not condemned to silence by his recognition not only of the fallibility of the text but also the fallibility of his understanding. He can cease to be an historian burdened by the difficult task of interpreting the meaning of documents written in a very different time to his own, in order to understand, through the inner working of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God to which the words of Scripture bear an uncomfortable witness.

Barth is moving, at this stage, towards the methodology that will enable him to present a 'theology of revelation'. He is beginning to understand that the radical separation between man and God must be affirmed on an epistemological rather than an ontological plane. Positive knowledge of God is given to man, he will claim, but the sources and process of revelation by which this gift is made are divine rather than human, and involve investing no human institution, quality or capacity with the power to 'receive' or 'possess' God. In a manner that is only fully accomplished in his work on Anselm, Barth will in effect find his

way out of a natural theology into a theology of revelation. We shall examine this transition in detail in the next chapter.

Barth's treatment of hermeneutics leaves any critical reader in considerable difficulty. On the one hand, he finds that Barth, by talking of the words of Scripture as a 'witness' to the Word of God, and of the Word of God known through the 'internal testimony of the Holy Spirit', must be referring to a deeper and divinely assisted understanding of the words themselves than mere critical literary and historical reflection upon their 'meaning' could give. On the other hand, he finds it difficult to see how this deeper understanding, which finds the 'content' (Inhalt) of Scripture in the Word rather than the words themselves, could remain in any sense the meaning of the text. It is this difficulty which renders Barth's hermeneutics problematic, where that of Luther, for instance, who talks of a 'two-fold clarity' and 'two-fold obscurity' in the text, is not. For Luther cites the example of a person who knows the words of the Scriptures by heart, and yet does not understand their real meaning, which he may only know through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ In this presentation it is into a deeper understanding of the text that the Holy Spirit leads man. But in Barth's presentation, it appears to be into a 'content' which lies beyond the text altogether that man is led by the Holy Spirit. The suspicion then arises, that the reader is being encouraged, by a Barthian hermeneutics, to bypass the words of Scripture for mythological realities called 'Word' and 'Spirit', and that the words of the scriptural texts, like the life of Jesus as presented in *Romans*, excuse themselves from analysis as inadequate vehicles of that 'Other' which they nevertheless 'bear witness to'. The reader, in such a situation, feels frustrated by Barth,⁴² and although we have concentrated upon Barth's early thought in this chapter an outline of his later thought does not dispel the frustration.

A Review of Barth's Later Thought

An illuminating insight into Barth's later hermeneutical thinking may be gleaned through reading John D. Godsey's edition of *Karl Barth's Table Talk*⁴³, a selection of conversations between Barth and students at an English-speaking colloquium in Basel between 1953 and 1956. Asked:

What gives the present canon of Scripture its authority?

Barth replied:

There is no explanation for authority. The canon is the canon just because it is so. (44)

The claim that the Bible 'becomes' the Word of God through the Holy Spirit provides no humanly graspable explanation of why it is these books, rather than others, which are so 'exalted'. In this sense Barth's hermeneutics remains always in practical terms Fundamentalist, for although it is not the 'words' but the 'Word' which is regarded as 'absolute' by him, nevertheless the 'words' are admitted to, or 'become', the Word of God for reasons which Barth cannot explain, and thereby effectively obtain an unquestioned authority as in Fundamentalist hermeneutics. Even if, with Luther, Barth were to say that the authority of the words of Scripture comes from their speaking of Christ, being as it were the casket in which that precious jewel were contained, still Barth will not concede, as Luther will, that man may examine and judge how far they speak of Christ, or whether they speak of him correctly.⁴⁵

Nor has Barth any affinity with a principle of Catholic hermeneutics, that the Bible represents a selection made by the church, a view which may concur, if the word 'church' is carefully defined, with a form-critical approach to the texts. Barth insists, on the contrary, that:

The Books of the Bible have forced themselves upon the Church.⁴⁶

But why these particular texts? Barth can only say that these and these alone have been 'assumed' into the Word of God by the Holy Spirit, and moreover that to ask the question 'why these texts?' is to show a mistaken commitment to the capacity of man to make sense of God's

revelation in terms of the 'human' resources of reason and tradition. Barth grants that the Holy Spirit might lead the Church to accept a new gospel. This is intended to make the point that the Holy Spirit is sovereign over man, who cannot claim to have 'determined' its ways. But then the question arises, of how this new gospel might be in practice established as canonical. Barth concedes at this point that a general synod or council of the Church would have to decide upon the inclusion of the new gospel in the canon. However, we have seen already that Barth does not derive the canon from the authority of the church - indeed he presents it as somehow 'forced upon' the church. It is clear that were Barth to concede authority to a human 'institution' - or indeed to human reason - in determining the canon, then he would have also to concede that Scripture might in principle be assessed in terms of its 'innate' value, either as useful to the church or as appealing to human reason. Scripture would in effect be subordinate as an authority to reason or the church. Therefore having conceded that a general synod or council of the church must in practice decide upon an extension of the canon, Barth at once retreats to the view that only the Holy Spirit provides the means of assessment by which such a decision may be made, a means which transcends human reason and institutions, whose prior 'decision' the 'decision' of a general synod merely affirms.

Barth's hermeneutics is an attempt to obtain the advantages of a Fundamentalist position without incurring any of the disadvantages. His hermeneutics parallels his treatment of the Resurrection, which has been characterised by van Harvey in the same way.⁴⁸

Barth offers an extended discussion of 'Scripture as the Word of God' in the *Church Dogmatics*⁴⁹. In an important piece of Barthian 'small print',⁵⁰ he describes a reduction of the doctrine of Inspiration to a view which would transform the idea that the Bible is the Word of God 'from a statement about the free grace of God into a statement about the Bible as exposed to human inquiry and brought under human control.

The Bible as the Word of God surreptitiously became a part of natural knowledge of God, i.e., of that knowledge of God which man can have without the free grace of God, by his own power, and with direct insight and assurance'.⁵¹ Inspiration, in other words, became a quality of the Bible 'in itself' rather than of God in his gracious action: a human product was 'absolutised' in the seventeenth century doctrine of inspiration, and became a 'paper Pope', in a way that, Barth cleverly suggests, allowed the thinkers of the secular Enlightenment in the following century to treat the Bible as a purely historical document, which they found to be unreliable or even fraudulent. Freed by the seventeenth century from its constant dependence upon God's gracious activity for its authority, Barth is arguing, the Bible fell victim to the reductive historians of the eighteenth century, precisely because they too could treat it as an independent, 'self-sufficient' document.

But whilst Barth thereby seeks to lift the Bible out of the sphere of criticism as an 'historical document', he yet assumes, and takes advantage of, the historical fact that it is these texts - and these alone - which have come to form the 'witness to revelation' as Holy Scripture. Certainly:

The statement that the Bible is the Word of God cannot therefore say that the Word of God is tied to the Bible, On the contrary, what it must say is that the Bible is tied to the Word of God. (52)

But on what grounds is it the Bible that is tied to the Word of God? Why this collection of texts and not another? Not because the church selected them: but because of a 'free decision of God'⁵³ to make these texts 'become' the Word of God rather than any other. To ask: 'why these?', then, is to presume to understand the Word of God 'apart from' the Holy Spirit, through resources located in 'human' authorities. The question cannot be asked. God through his Word determines the canon: the 'decision' of the church merely confirms this divine decree.

The idea of the words of Scripture 'becoming' the Word of God through His 'free decision' provides the basis for the idea of a

'biblical Chalcedonianism' in Barth. This is the view that, as the Word of God in the Incarnation condescends to take upon itself the form of man, so it condescends to take upon itself the form of Scripture that it might 'become' the Word of God. The characterisation is, however, a precisely opposite one in the case of Scripture. For whilst the Word 'becomes' flesh in the Incarnation, the words of Scripture 'become' the Word of God. The association of Barth with this phrase is nevertheless interesting, since arguably the failing of Barth's hermeneutics lies precisely in his treating the Bible as if it might more appropriately be described in terms of a movement 'from God to man' than in terms of a movement 'from man to God'.

Barth, then, effectively makes use of the advantages of a Fundamentalist hermeneutics, namely in the claim that a particular set of texts are *de facto* authoritative, whilst trying to claim that he has a methodology 'above' a Fundamentalist one and immune from the critical opprobrium which such an identification might incur. The crucial point lies in Barth's refusal to offer any 'human' explanation of why it is the particular texts of the Bible which have, as a matter of historical fact, been regarded as canonical and thereby authoritative for the Christian: that these texts have 'become', through God's free decision, the Word of God, is a reality which Barth cannot explain but only confirms, as indeed the church in 'deciding' upon the canon merely confirms a prior decision of the free grace of God. He can only pronounce: 'It is so', adding that we misunderstand how it is so if we seek to have explained to us on what grounds the canon of Scripture has become authoritative for the Christian.

In adopting this viewpoint, however, does not Barth implicitly rely upon the authority of a tradition which he publicly denies as authoritative? In a beautiful metaphor Barth writes:

A genuine, fallible human word is at this centre the Word of God: not in virtue of its own superiority, of its replacement by a Word of God veiled as the word of man, still less of any kind of miraculous transformation, but, of course, in virtue

of the privilege that here and now it is taken and used by God himself, like the water in the Pool of Bethesda. (54)

The water in the pool of Bethesda! Sometimes one has to be ruthless, and wonder just what lies beneath the 'poetry', or whether the music of this Mozartian aria is let down by the libretto. The words of Scripture are an innately unassuming and unnoteworthy collection of texts which not only lack inherent authority but even, if this metaphor - even as metaphor! - is to be respected, lack any characteristic which might detract from their ordinariness. Only by a miracle of God's grace may they 'become' noteworthy - the Word of God: as the water in the pool of Bethesda is remembered only for what by God's grace took place there, and not for any properties of healing which it contained within itself:

If God was not ashamed of the fallibility of all the human words of the Bible, of their historical and scientific inaccuracies, their theological contradictions, the uncertainty of their tradition, and, above all, their Judaism, but adopted and made use of these expressions in all their fallibility ... (55)
(my emphasis)

And made use of them not only in their fallibility, but in their essential ordinariness, their almost nondescript character, as blank and common as the water in a pool. I may take a metaphor too seriously, and yet so much of Barth's theology is couched in metaphorical language. That God chose this particular collection of 'fallible' texts to become the Word of God is all the more a question which thrusts itself upon the theologian, when he is encouraged to believe that these words of Scripture possess no arresting and compelling properties which mark them out as extraordinary from their innate character, whatever the manner of their later use. Barth's concession to an almost impossible scepticism is quite amazing here.

Elsewhere in 1², Barth insists:

In and with the church we obey the judgment which was already pronounced, before the church could pronounce its judgment and which the church's judgment could only confirm ... when we adopt the canon of the church we do not say that the church itself, but that the revelation which underlies and controls

the church, attests these witnesses and not others as the witnesses of revelation and therefore as crucial for the church. (56)

The authority of the canon, then, derives not from the church but from revelation itself - revelation 'recognised' from itself. The Word declares the canon for the church, which 'confirms' this decision. That this collection and no other can be recognised as the canon or 'rule' for the church is grounded not on the decision of the church (which we see to be lacking to the point of denying any particular quality to the documents considered in themselves), but in the free decision of God's Word. In reality, however, it could be argued that Barth would not have recognised these particular texts as becoming the Word of God (especially in view of their intrinsic lack of value!), save through the tradition of the church; but in theory he claims that this 'tradition' merely acknowledges a prior 'decision' by the Word. Furthermore, Barth faces the problem of how this decision is to be recognised, and by whom. By individuals? By the Church? By a general synod? Certainly the tenor of Barth's remarks bears a Fundamentalist ring - the Bible is 'given to' the church rather than 'coming from' it, and is authorised directly by God himself as a necessary adjunct to His self-revelation in Christ. It makes itself known through the Holy Spirit not so much as a work of man which 'becomes' the Word of God, but as a work of God which 'becomes' the word of man when the church 'confirms' a divine fait accompli. The historical context of the emergence of the canon is effectively bypassed.

The 'pseudo-reality' of the Bible as having 'become' the Word of God renders it immune from criticism in its 'reality' as the historically-mediated work of fallible human beings. We have here the hallmark of a Barthian dialectic which will be closely examined in later chapters in other contexts from Barth's works. By its adoption of the words of Scripture the Word of God not only receives content, but renders that content immune to the sort of criticism with which 'liberals' and Fundamentalists alike agree that they must engage. Meanwhile it is not

seen how Barth is in fact presenting a reality, whose substance lies embedded in its temporal, historical emergence into being through a human response to the life of Christ, as if it were a reality delivered by God to man apart from any such response. Barth's theology is no less a movement 'from God to man' for his filling out the divine content from the resources of human experience! Nor is his theology any less a 'theology of alienation', giving content to the divine by removing the human from ordinary human experience. His view of Scripture is 'Fundamentalist' in that he shares with the Fundamentalist the 'alienated' belief that Scripture originated with God rather than man, loosening the Bible from the temporal, historical moorings of its gradual composition. Yet it is an attempt to avoid the criticisms which may easily be levelled at the Fundamentalist, in its refusal to deny any of the 'human' qualities of that work. It is beyond criticism not for what it is, but for what it has, through the Word of God, 'become'.

In *Kerygma and Myth*, Karl Barth wrote an essay entitled: 'Rudolf Bultmann: An Attempt to Understand him'. In it he declared:

For genuine understanding between man and man, however incomplete, the discipline of the Holy Spirit will undoubtedly be necessary. For it is only through the Holy Spirit that the Old and New Testaments can be appreciated as a testimony to the Word of God. Not even myths or persons like Goethe can be understood without this initial sympathy, that is, without something of the discipline of the Holy Spirit. (58)

Barth echoes, once more, the suggestion of a Bultmannian 'Geschmacksverirrung'. Yet no reading of Goethe that is 'sympathetic' eschews dependence upon the literary and critical tools of analysis required in order to understand a poet in his time. Appreciation of meaning is dependent upon them. A pure openness to the text of Scripture, however, which in Barth's view in this essay means approaching it without 'presuppositions' (and among such 'presuppositions' he finds Bultmann's emphasis upon an existentially sensitised 'Vorverständnis'), effectively bypasses such dependence. Scripture is not of such a kind - it is not an historical document but 'becomes' the Word of God, interpreted to its readers through the Holy Spirit. What it has become, however, is a

mythologised human reality rendered immune to criticism, a work that has proceeded on earth presented by Barth as declared to man from heaven.

The ambiguity of a 'content' beyond the contents of Scripture, with which the previous section of this chapter ended, a Word 'within' the words of the Bible, is not diminished in the later thought of Barth. Attacking Bultmann's 'demythologisation' of Scripture, Barth effectively mythologises Scripture. To the Fundamentalist Barth believes in the fallibility of the words of Scripture, whilst to the critical historian he believes in the infallibility of the 'Word', the 'content', the 'other' which admits within itself words whose meaning it does not change or make redundant but preserves from criticism. In unremitting commitment to a fundamental dualism between the Word of God and the word of man, Barth attempts to ward off both forms of criticism: yet he remains effectively caught within the crossfire of both. The critical historian remains convinced that Barth's affirmation of the fallibility of the text entitles him to criticise Scripture without an 'error in literary taste'. The Fundamentalist remains convinced that the infallibility of the Word in Barth's hermeneutics entitles him (the Fundamentalist) to claim that Barth believes in the absolute authority of the Bible. In the end it is the Fundamentalist who has more right to identify himself with Barth,- for in the absolute authority of the Word of God Barth affirms the supremacy of a reality whose only content is the fallible words of Scripture, and whose only purpose is to sanctify as divine a borrowed human plumage.

Notes on Chapter Three

1. See chapter 2, p.7.
- 1a. See chapter 2, note 32.
2. A remark of von Harnack to Barth, in the 'Fifteen Questions to the Despisers of Scientific Theology', originally published in *Christliche Welt* in 1923, and translated and reproduced with Barth's reply and further correspondence between himself and Harnack, in *Revelation and Theology, An Analysis of the Barth-Harnack Correspondence of 1923*, ed. H.M. Rumscheidt. Harnack asked rhetorically in his thirteenth question.

And what has one to offer once this Herostratean deed is done?
Is not even gnostic occultism rising up now out of the rubble?
(p.31)
3. The German may be found in Karl Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten*, pp. 7-31.
4. ET, *op. cit.*, p.516: Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.499.
5. The text of this address given in 1916 is translated and reproduced in Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, tr. D. Horton, ch.2, pp.28-51.
6. ET, *op. cit.*, p.11: Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.xvi. The German refers to 'ungemütliche Punkte'.
7. Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, p.35.
8. *Ibid.*, p.38.
9. ET, *op. cit.*, p.16. The review of Barth's second commentary by Bultmann can be found in Moltmann, J., ed. *Anfänge der dialektischen Theologie*, pp.119-142. On page 142 Bultmann comments:

Es kommen auch andere Geister in ihm zu Worte als
das pneuma Christou.
10. ET, *op.cit.*, p.17.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*, p.18.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.* This is Hoskyns' translation of the single German word 'Geschmacksverirrung'.
15. ET, *op. cit.*, p.1: Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.v.

Die historisch-kritische Methode der Bibelforschung hat ihr Recht: sie weist hin auf eine Vorbereitung des Verständnisses, die nirgends überflüssig ist. Aber wenn ich wählen müsste zwischen ihr und der alten Inspirationstheorie, ich würde entschlossen zu der letzteren greifen: sie hat das grössere, tiefere, wichtigere Recht ...
16. 'ungemütliche Punkte'.

17. 'der alten Inspirationslehre'.
18. Barth, *The Word of God, and the Word of Man*, p.43.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*,
21. *Ibid.*, p.30.
22. *Ibid.*, p.31.
23. *Ibid.*, p.32.
24. *Ibid.*, p.33.
25. *Ibid.*, Barth's reply to Harnack's eighth question.
26. *Ibid.*, p.37. Part of an open letter from Harnack to Barth.
27. *Ibid.*, p.38.
28. *Ibid.*, p.35.
29. 2 Corinthians 5:16 is the source of this interpretation.
30. Part of a reply by Barth to Harnack's open letter. See Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*, p.43. For the German see Barth, *Theologische Fragen und Antworten*, p.21.
31. The implication of Harnack's first question of his fifteen, which concluded

... may we leave the determination of the content of the gospel solely to the individual's heuristic knowledge (Erfahrung), to his subjective experience (Erlebnis), or does one not rather need here historical knowledge and critical reflection?

(Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*, p.29.)
32. Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Barth, *op.cit.*, p.21.
33. 'Treueverhältnis'.
34. This is an important point. An inspired text or author is of no benefit in guaranteeing the 'authority' of Scripture, unless there is also an inspiration of the reader to understand it. Indeed, in the preface to the first edition of 'Romans', Barth expressed his attachment to the doctrine of Inspiration of Scripture on the grounds that:

Sie auf die Arbeit des Verstehens selbst hinweist, ohne die alle Zurüstung wertlos ist.
35. ET, *op. cit.*, p.114.
- 35a. ET, *op. cit.*, p.16. Barth explains his remark:

I do not want to engage in a controversy with Bultmann as to which of us is the more radical. But I must go farther than he does and say that there are in the Epistle no words at all which are not words of those 'other spirits' which he calls Jewish or Popular Christian or Hellenistic or whatever else they may be.

Where Bultmann's criticism is that the Spirit of Christ is only 'here and there' in the text, and that elsewhere 'other spirits' are to be found, Barth insists that the 'other spirits' are to be found throughout the text. At the same time, Barth wants to argue that the Spirit of Christ makes itself known through these fallible human voices. The Spirit of Christ and the 'other spirits' should not be put on the same plane, and the text divided or apportioned between each; rather, both exist together in each part of scripture in a dialectical tension between the human words of man and the adopting Word of God.

36. *Ibid.*, p.19: Barth, *Römerbrief*, p.xxiii:
 Über die Relativität aller menschlichen Worte,
 auch der paulinischen, denke ich mit Bultmann ...
37. Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*, p.47.
38. See the interesting essay by Prof. T.F. Torrance, 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit', found in *God and Rationality*, pp.167-195. Barth's argument is of course particularly influenced by the Protestant Reformers, although it is not identical with theirs (see note 41). See, for instance, Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 1, Ch. vii, where the 'epistemological relevance' of the Holy Spirit is made abundantly clear:
 Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture, that Scripture carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit.
 (Calvin, *Institutes*, Vol. 1, tr. Beveridge, p.72)
39. Rumscheidt, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
40. *Ibid.*
41. See, e.g., 'The Bondage of the Will' in *Luther : Selections*, ed. J. Dillenberger, pp.174-5. For an account of Luther's view of Scripture, see K. Aland, 'Luther as Exegete', and G. Ebeling *The Word of God and Tradition*, ch. 6.
42. As might anyone reading the uncritically 'Barthian' commentary upon the correspondence offered by Rumscheidt himself!
43. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Occasional Papers, No. 10.
44. *Ibid.*, p.26.
45. See note 41.
46. *Ibid.*, p.27.
47. *Ibid.*, p.53.
48. A full discussion of this is given below, chapter 8.
49. Volume 1, Part 2, pp.473-538.
50. *Ibid.*, p.512-526.

51. *Ibid.*, pp.522-523.
52. *Ibid.*, p.513.
53. *Ibid.*
54. *Ibid.*, p.530.
55. *Ibid.*, p.531.
56. p.474.
57. Ed. Bartsch, H., pp.83-133.
58. *Ibid.*, pp.126-7.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fides Quaerens Intellectum

1. The Background to Barth's Work on Anselm

Barth's work on Anselm is the methodological manifesto of his later thought: but the methodology arose only out of an experiment in theology which 'failed' *Die Christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf* published in 1927.¹ Before concentrating upon *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*² something should be said about this earlier work.

'Du Römerbrief à L'Esquisse', Bouillard remarks, 'l'aspect platonicien et Kantien de sa (Barth's) pensée s'est estompé'.³ The dualism of these two philosophical systems was to be left behind by Barth in the 1920s, culminating in the work on Anselm which concluded with a firm rejection of what Kant viewed as insurmountable objections to the *Proslogion*.⁴ But it was not to be replaced with any form of philosophical monism, or of panentheistic Hegelian dialectic. Rather, Barth was to set out to liberate theology from dependence upon any sort of philosophical system:^{4a} the insights of human reason would be shown up as an impossible constraint upon the Word of God as it revealed itself, should they seek to determine how that Word might be known. This might not have been an argument from which Barth would earlier have dissented: yet in practice the notion of an unbridgeable separation between man and God, between time and eternity, does determine the possibility of human knowledge of God in Barth's commentary on *Romans*. Christian salvation-history is there torn apart and summarily made to accord with the demands of a negative natural theology. In 1922, when Barth talks about the 'paradox' of revelation, he only means that it cannot be squared with his system. In 1932, when he talks about the same paradox, he means that it has its system within itself. Partly for this reason, no later work of Barth's is as exciting as his commentary, for it does not give the impression of an attempt to find echoes, in an existentialist sense of the absence of God and the

philosophical revolution of Kantianism, of Paul's discovery of the gospel of Christ. The impression given to this writer at least, by the *Church Dogmatics*, is that of a prophet who has left the society in which he once spoke with critical authority, and retreated into an isolation, where he pursues an endless dialogue with himself. Naturally, such an argument about Barth requires defence, which we hope to give to it: particularly since the belief that Barth, in his later work, restored the emphasis upon God's *humanity*⁵ and the 'positive' nature of the created world⁶ believed to have been lacking in his commentary on *Romans*, has encouraged the view that the 'prophet' somehow came to look more favourably upon the 'society' he once condemned. Quite the opposite: he left it to form his own world, in which, certainly, there were 'positive' aspects, but these were never to be identified with the world he left behind, however much he borrowed from his former habitation, and however much he claimed to have found the 'prototype' of his former habitation. Barth was a prophet who left the world, not one who gave himself to it.

In *Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes*, Barth tried to take account of some of the criticisms which arose out of his commentary on *Romans*. His 'new approach' is signalled in a reworking of the Incarnation, previously irreconcilable with Barth's dualistic, eschatological scheme. Writing on 'Der Sinn der Christologie'⁷, Barth comments:

In der Wirklichkeit dieses Menschen (Jesus) ist die objektive Möglichkeit der Offenbarung gegeben, sie ist das in seinem Wie? unbegreifliche Dass der Offenbarung ... (8)

It has been argued that here is the crucial methodological shift which was to characterise Barth's later theology: in *Romans* the nature of Christ is to be understood according to the dictates of Barth's 'infinite qualitative distinction' between man and God. Now any conception of man's relation to God is to be understood according to the dictates of the concrete reality of Jesus Christ. The 'how' of the possibility of revelation is a question subsequent to the fact of Christ's being as the 'given' of revelation.

The fact of Christ as the 'given' of revelation ('given' is my translation of 'das dass') provides Barth with the possibility of outlining the true nature, as he sees it, of dogmatics, in a way that is not to change in his later theology. Whilst dogmatics needs to be aware of other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and history, - indeed '... er darf, nein er soll die Möglichkeiten aller dieser Denkart lebendig in sich tragen'⁹ - at the same time the theologian must recognise the 'appropriate form of thought'¹⁰ (angemessene Denkart) of his subject-matter (Sache), Dogmatics:

Er ist der wahre dogmatische Dilettant, wenn er nicht merkt, dass die Besinnung, die hier zu üben ist, ihren eigenen Richtpunkt hat, der nun einmal nicht von der Historik, nicht von der Psychologie, nicht von der Soziologie und auch nicht von einer allgemeinen Kulturphilosophie oder Geisteswissenschaft ihr gesetzt werden kann, sondern der ihr als Dogmatik so gut gesetzt ist, wie jeder anderen Wissenschaft ihre Richtpunkte. (11)

The given fact of Christ establishes, for Barth, the autonomy of dogmatics as a discipline, with its own appropriate 'aiming-point' (Richtpunkt). It is not dependent on history or sociology or philosophy for the establishment of its claims: these are built upon the reality of Christ as the Word of God which alone establishes the possibility of revelation. Where in *Romans* that possibility depended upon the determining system of the 'infinite qualitative distinction' between man and God, in the *Christian Dogmatics in Outline*, Barth's argument appears to be that this 'system' - and all other 'systems' of explanation - cannot determine the possibility of God's self-giving to man, which derives from the concrete reality of God's action alone. Theology is concentrated upon a Christological datum: 'from the fact of Jesus Christ as its delimiting 'Richtpunkt' (and 'Ausgangspunkt') theological reflection (die Besinnung, die hier zu üben ist) derives and is determined, without any requirement to establish its reasoning on the basis of what other disciplines claim about reality. The Kantian system which previously forced Barth to talk of the tangent which touched a circle without touching it, is now apparently removed from direct influence

upon the form of theological reflection.

There appears, certainly, to be a logic about Barth's argument. Having in the second commentary on *Romans* relativised all human values and made absolute the separation between man and God, he now appears to relativise the distinction also. Man may assume nothing concerning his relation to God - not even that they both exist in infinite qualitative distinction from one another. His understanding of that relation must be learnt from God, and in terms that God alone may give, not from any system of human reflection. From God's Word in the concrete reality of Jesus Christ man learns of his relationship to God, of his being as a creature before his Creator, of his reconciliation and of his hope for redemption. In so arguing, Barth could claim to be completing a process, begun in the commentary on *Romans*, of excluding all human 'claims' upon God, even the 'negative' claim of a fixed gulf between himself and God, whilst at the same time focussing theology upon a concrete fact (that of Jesus Christ in his humanity the Word of God) rather than upon an abstract system, a Christocentric theology of revelation rather than a theocentric natural theology.

Das Urbeispiel, von dem alle anderen letztlich herkommen, das die ganze Dogmatik zwangsläufig dialektisch macht, ist kein anderes als: Gott und Mensch in der Person des Versöhners: Jesus Christus. (12)

It is not the dialectic of distinction and eschatological reunification between God and man which determines the nature of Christ, as in *Romans*, but the 'prime example' of Jesus Christ which makes dogmatics obligatorily dialectical.

The question arises as to why, in view of the fact that the work sub-titled *Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* was intended as the first volume of an outline of Christian Dogmatics to be completed in another few volumes, Barth abandoned his enterprise and published another introductory volume to a *Church Dogmatics* five years later (1932). It was not that he had yet to discover the methodology of the *Church Dogmatics*, even if it had still to be fully articulated in

Fides Quaerens Intellectum. That methodology is already implicit in his earlier work of 1927. Did the reason lie, rather, in the fact that the *Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik* does not do justice in its details to the autonomy of theology as a discipline which it recognises in principle, at least insofar as too many of the existentialist resonances that filled the commentary on *Romans* remain in the *Prolegomena*? This seems to be the claim of T.F. Torrance in a study of Barth between 1910 and 1931,¹³ a view rejected by J.D. Smart,¹⁴ who in a study of Barth and Bultmann during the same period (Smart's study is in fact from 1908 to 1933) claims that the outline of a divergence between Barth and Bultmann was already apparent in 1926, and that Barth was never 'seriously tempted' by any form of the 'analogia entis', even 'in its existentialist form', in his *Prolegomena*. It would, however, seem that Barth himself took the view that the 1927 work might be construed as giving support for a 'justification of theology by existentialist philosophy', judging from remarks he made in the foreword to his first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* in 1932.¹⁵ Nevertheless, there is no reason to find these remarks of Barth's incompatible with a view that his purpose in making a 'new beginning' in the *Church Dogmatics* was a clarification rather than an alteration of his opinions. Busch indeed makes this point in his biography of Barth,¹⁶ pointing to the fact that in the *Christliche Dogmatik* Barth could deal with the whole of the prolegomena in 463 pages, whereas the first half of the first volume of the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, which would deal with the same range of study, is itself 514 pages. The length, he implies, suggests a reworking, expansion and clarification of an earlier work, not a disavowal of it. Moreover, he quotes Barth's remark from the foreword to the *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Part 1, that he sought in it 'to make my exposition much more explicit ... During the past five years I have found every problem very much richer, more fluid and more difficult. I have had to make more extensive soundings and to lay broader foundations'.¹⁷

Indeed it is not clear to us that there is a shift in Barth's opinions between the *Christliche Dogmatik* and the *Kirchliche Dogmatik*. What is evident is an amplification of the former in the latter, and the separate and very important publication, in 1930, of a 'methodological manifesto' in which Barth made clear to himself and to others the justification of theology as an autonomous discipline, not in the sense of the theologian having no regard to other disciplines, but in the sense of his bearing no obligation to direct his theological reflections to any other purpose than the explication of a datum given quite independently of what those disciplines might say about it, namely, the reality of Jesus Christ, the Word of God.^{17a} We shall not, then, present *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* as a 'break' with the past, nor the *Church Dogmatics* as a theology based upon such a rift with the thinking of the earlier *Christliche Dogmatik*. We shall concentrate upon these works as the mature representation of a theological development already outlined in 1927 as the 'system' of infinite qualitative distinction seemed to give way to a purely theological 'system', before which even the strangely thrilling sound of a humanity prepared to suffer self-immolation before God, appeared to contain echoes of an inverted hubris. At the same time we shall attempt to show that in an important sense the system of 'infinite qualitative distinction' in fact remains as a presupposition of Barth's later work, but in an epistemological, rather than ontological sense.

2. The Argument of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*

The argument of Barth's *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* is not easy to follow. An essential precondition of understanding it is the thought of Anselm himself, in particular the argument of his *Proslogion*, amplified by the discussion of Gaunilo's reply.¹⁸

The first point to recognise is that Anselm's original argument applies only to God. His argument is that God is 'something than which

nothing greater can be thought' (aliquid quo nihil maius cogitari potest).¹⁹ Now it is greater for something to exist in reality than for it to exist in the mind alone. Therefore, to think of that than which nothing greater can be thought is to think of what must exist, not only in the mind, but in reality. Furthermore, on the same line of argument, that which cannot be thought not to exist is greater than that which can be thought not to exist. Wherefrom it follows that God cannot be thought not to exist, by the same reasoning. God, Anselm concludes, 'necessarily' exists, a conclusion which has been derived merely from reflection upon what it means for something to be God (that than which a greater cannot be thought).

Now Anselm insists that this argument may only apply to the existence of God:

Et quidem quidquid est aliud praeter te solum, potest cogitari non esse (And indeed everything else there is, except you alone, can be thought not to be.) (20)

This must be clear from the fact that Anselm's argument not only establishes that God exists, but that He 'necessarily' exists, in the sense that He cannot be thought not to exist.

Gaunilo, however, in his 'Reply on behalf of the fool', misses this essential part of Anselm's argument. He introduces the idea of an island somewhere in the ocean which, because of the difficulty of finding it, is called the 'Lost Island'. Tales of its magnificence and the delights of life upon it abound - it is certainly the most excellent of lands, 'than which none greater could be thought'. Would Anselm like to apply his argument concerning God's existence to this island, on the grounds that since it would be more excellent for this island to exist in reality than in thought alone it must therefore, as the most excellent of places, exist beyond doubt in reality?²²

Anselm's reply to Gaunilo makes it clear that Gaunilo has, in his view, applied the argument beyond its proper range:

Now, I truly promise that if anyone should discover for me something existing either in reality or the mind alone - except 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' - to which the logic of my argument would apply, then I shall find that Lost Island and give it, never more to be lost, to that person. (23)

For in the third section of the *Proslogion*, Anselm has claimed to establish not only that God exists, but that He cannot be thought not to exist. This 'necessary existence' of God cannot apply to anything else. A Lost Island or any other reality, apart from God, can be thought not to exist. The second part of the argument is therefore crucial to Anselm's case, since by establishing that God not only exists but cannot be thought not to exist, Anselm makes it clear that his argument applies only to God. Immediately after the section quoted above, therefore, Anselm goes on:

It has already been clearly seen, however, that 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' cannot be thought not to exist, because it exists as a matter of such certain truth.²⁴

Anselm is reminding Gaunilo that since he has used his argument, not only to establish God's existence but His 'necessary' existence, it is an argument clearly limited to the establishment of God's existence.²⁵

Hick rightly states:

Anselm's reply, emphasising the uniqueness of the idea of God to show that the ontological reasoning applies only to it, is based upon his second form of the argument. The element in the idea of God which is lacking in the notion of the most perfect island is necessary existence. (26)

We may therefore conclude that Anselm's argument applies only to God. He alone cannot be thought not to exist. His existence alone is established merely by reflection upon what we mean by 'God'.

René Descartes is associated with a reformulation of Anselm's argument in his *Meditations*.²⁷ Here he argues, in similar vein to the *Proslogion* of Anselm, that since God is supremely perfect, that is to say contains all perfections, and since existence is itself a perfection, then God must exist. Once again, a way is apparently found from mere

consideration of the meaning of 'God' to the existence of God.

Descartes writes:

But nevertheless, when I think of it with more attention, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a (rectilinear) triangle ... (28)

However, there is a further discussion of God's existence elsewhere in the *Meditations (Meditation III)*,²⁹ which is of more interest to us in the context of Barth's discussion. Here Descartes' 'proof' of God's existence proceeds on different lines:

Hence there remains only the idea of God, concerning which we must consider whether it is something which cannot have proceeded from me myself. By the name God I understand a substance that is infinite (eternal, immutable), independent, all-knowing, all-powerful, and by which I myself and everything else, if anything else does exist, have been created. Now all these characteristics are such that the more diligently I attend to them the less do they seem capable of proceeding from me alone; hence, from what has been already said, we must conclude that God necessarily exists. (30)

The argument is that since the idea of God could not be built up out of the resources of the human mind, it must be directly placed in the mind by God Himself. Therefore, since we could not have an idea of God without God's existence to give us it, we may conclude, from the very existence of an idea of God the existence of God in reality:

... Descartes proceeds to enquire into the causes of his various ideas. As for his ideas of physical objects, various animals and so on, he sees no evident reason why these should not proceed from himself; his own degree of reality as a thinking substance may well be adequate to produce such ideas. But now he makes the crucial reflection that there is another idea that he has, for which this can scarcely be so. This is the idea of a Being 'sovereign, eternal, infinite, unchangeable, omniscient, omnipotent, and universal creator of everything that is outside' himself: that is to say, the idea of God... Hence there must be a perfect Being independent of Descartes himself who is the cause of Descartes' idea of God, and this perfect Being is of course God himself. Hence God really exists. (31)

From our examination of Descartes, we may conclude:

Although the argument from the Fifth Meditation reminds us most clearly of Anselm's 'proof' of God's existence, it is the argument in the Third Meditation which will be of most relevance to our interpretation of Karl

Barth. This argument proceeds along the lines that no other source for our idea of God is conceivable, save God Himself, and that therefore from the notion of God which we possess we may validly infer the existence of God to provide us with the notion. A clear presupposition of this argument is that we do indeed have an idea of God - that we can understand what we mean by 'God'. It is claimed that this idea is a gift from an infinite God to certain of His finite creatures. This gift, for both Descartes and Barth, serves to remind us that we can learn of God only from God Himself, as He wills to be revealed. Descartes, however, insists that the knowledge our finite minds may have of an infinite God is limited, to an extent which, in Professor Williams's view, compromises his assertion that we nevertheless have a 'clear and distinct' idea of God, and which, furthermore, compromises Descartes' assertion that the idea which we have of God must necessarily be God-given. The question arises as to whether this ambiguity exists in Barth's thinking also, or whether between Descartes and Barth an epistemological barrier has been overcome, the barrier between man and his knowledge, even God-given knowledge, of God. We shall return to this crucial point at the end of the chapter.

In the Preface to the second edition of his book on Anselm, Barth remarks that few of those who have written about his work (he specifically exempts Hans Urs von Balthasar from criticism in this respect) have understood how *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* contains 'a vital key, if not the key, to an understanding of that whole process of thought that has impressed me more and more in my *Church Dogmatics* as the only proper one to theology'.³² What was that key?

To understand Barth's argument two points about Anselm's *Proslogion* as presented by Barth must be recognised. The first is his conviction that prayer is the most distinctive feature of Anselm's theologising. The *Proslogion* is cast in the form of an address to God rather than a philosophical dialogue or monologue.³³ It is, indeed, the fruit of an encounter with God. It is this which enables Barth to argue that the

understanding of faith does not belong to human reason, but is bestowed by God as a *donum gratiae*, a gift of grace, which forms the basis of prayerful communication between the believer and God.³⁴

The second point concerns the words *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, the title of Barth's book, as being the 'vital key' to understanding it. *Intelligere*, the Latin word meaning to understand comes from two Latin words, *intus* and *legere*, which literally mean 'to read within'.³⁵ The understanding of faith is a process whereby faith 'reads within itself', understanding something already implicitly given but not yet explicitly affirmed and comprehended. Faith seeking understanding does not seek beyond itself but within itself: it is always working upon a 'given' rather than out towards an unknown. It is as if the seeking of understanding by faith was like the decoding of a message whose authenticity could not be doubted because it was the gift of God himself. As the idea of God, in Descartes' Third Meditation, is directly placed in the mind by God himself, so the understanding of faith, in Barth's presentation, is an effort to comprehend what is given by God's grace - by a God who 'comes within his (man's) system as the object of his thinking ...'³⁶ This methodology allows theology to proceed along the lines of developing and articulating what is by definition a true revelation, so that both the interpretation of Scripture and the explication of the faith of the Church in the articles of the creed take the form of 'reading within' a given and unquestioned faith. Theology, the speech of God, becomes by God's grace the speech of man articulating the truth of God given by revelation: Scripture or the dogmas of the Church work upon this given datum as their point of departure (Ausgangspunkt) and point of direction (Richtpunkt). They have absolutely no need to match their 'scientific' pursuit with the determinations of other disciplines, but only to remain faithful to a theological given.

Let us turn to Barth's consideration of Anselm's description of

God as 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought'. This description, Barth insists, does not show that one can decide upon the nature or existence of God through the resources of the human mind. The formula 'does not say that God is, nor what He is, but rather, in the form of a prohibition that man can understand, who He is'.³⁷

The prohibition is a prohibition upon what Barth calls 'an ontic conception of God',³⁸ a conception which man forms for himself by using his natural powers of reason to reflect upon the nature and existence of God. Anselm's idea of God, for Barth, is one which expresses 'who' rather than 'that' or 'what' God is: it is based upon the encounter of revelation in which God reveals His Name. What Anselm is trying to do, Barth claims, is to argue that what we call a 'theological methodology of grace' must be applied in the realm of reflection upon God's existence and nature. It is this 'methodology of grace' which Barth seeks to describe in the first half of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, ('The Theological Scheme'), before showing its application to the proofs of God's existence in the second half ('The Proof of the Existence of God').

By 'methodology of grace', I mean the view that grace, in Barth's words, is an 'actualisation of that power to know' in man.³⁹ Right knowledge is conditioned by the prevenient and co-operating grace of God: theology is not a discipline which can make sense of its object through the natural powers of human reason: '... the ultimate and decisive capacity for the *intellectus fidei* does not belong to human reason acting on its own but has always to be bestowed on human reason ...'⁴⁰

Barth refers in a footnote to a passage of the *Proslogion*:

*Ergo Domine, qui das fidei intellectum, da mihi, ut ... intelligam*⁴¹

In this passage Anselm asks God to grant as much understanding of Him 'as You see fit' (*quantum scis expedire*). To Barth, this request for illumination from God indicates that man's knowledge of God is

God-given, determined by God's will to reveal Himself. It is this theological methodology which Barth claims to find in Anselm. There can be no understanding of God without the 'encounter' with Him that exists in the 'fulness of grace':

In this attitude he (man) stands in encounter with God for he knows that God must stand in encounter with him if his intelligence is not to be delusion and if he himself is not to be a mere insipiens. The Proof, *Proslogion* 2-4, is also written in this attitude and in this knowledge. We cannot be indifferent to this if we are to understand and interpret him. (42)

Barth makes clear what he thinks Anselm did say in a rhetorical passage describing what he thinks he didn't say:

Or should Anselm have thought of it all quite differently - at least parts of it occasionally? Should he really have sought the law of the existence and particular existence of the object of faith in the human capacity to form concepts and judgments (as identical with its laws) and therefore have assumed as possible and necessary an independent knowledge alongside that of faith, able to draw from its own sources? Should he therefore have begun *quaerens intellectum* with nothing, that is within the rules of an autonomous human reason and with the data of general human experience, and therefore of his own accord as *inveniens intellectum*? (43)

Anselm's understanding of the knowledge of God is not of an autonomous exercise of the human reason '*quaerens intellectum*' (seeking understanding), Barth argues, for 'fundamentally, the *quaerere intellectum* is really immanent in the *fides*'. In his commentary on Anselm's *Proslogion*,⁴⁴ M.J. Charlesworth claims that Barth's interpretation of Anselm makes him 'into a fideist of a very rigorous kind',⁴⁵ but if by this remark Charlesworth means to identify Barth with a separation of 'faith' and 'reason', and the view that knowledge of God depends on the former alone, then this must be a misrepresentation of Barth's view. It is not, in this sense, fideist; rather, as Charlesworth himself remarks earlier of Barth's view, 'reason operates within the context of faith and always presupposes faith'.⁴⁶

What does Barth mean by the argument that the search for understanding is 'immanent' in faith? To follow his argument is particularly

difficult here,⁴⁷ but his point would seem to be that conformity of thought with its object in theological thinking can only be achieved through the self-revealing power of God. Conformity of thought with its object is the aim of human reason in its search for truth, but when reason is engaged in making theological statements such conformity can only be achieved in faith, that is to say by means of the illumination brought about by God Himself in His revelation, which is the presupposition of any correspondence of theological thought to its object, and therefore of theological truth:

The conformity of ratio to truth depends neither upon the object nor the subject but on that same revealing power of God which illumines faith and which faith encounters as authority. (48)

The 'quaerere intellectum' is immanent in the 'fides', in the sense that any theological statement which 'describes' God, for instance the statement that He is 'that-than-which-nothing-greater-can-be-thought', is not verified through man's autonomously operating natural powers of reason but through the Self-revealing activity of God made known to faith within the Church. Indeed Barth argues that the phrase is one of the 'revealing Names' of God:

Quo maius cogitari nequit only appears to be a concept that he (Barth refers to Anselm) formed for himself; it is in fact as far as he is concerned a revealed Name of God. (49)

For Karl Barth, Anselm's intention in the *Proslogion* is to apply what we call a 'theological methodology of grace' to the question of the existence and nature of God. Despite any appearance to the contrary, the early sections of the *Proslogion* set the problem of establishing God's existence firmly within this methodology. The 'Proof' of God's existence offered by Anselm is a seeking of understanding within faith, that is to say on the basis of God's revelation of Himself. It may seem that to 'prove' the existence of God is to seek to operate with the autonomous powers of the natural reason; in fact it represents the effort to hear the Name by which God lets Himself be known. 'Quo maius cogitari nequit' is not the conclusion of an argument (or its

premise) reached by a powerful mind employing its natural intellectual skills: it is the tracing out of the divine Wisdom given to man in faith.

The outlook of Barth is revealed in a passage of his book where he is considering the 'self-sufficiency' of God.⁵⁰ It is here that we may set his view of Gaunilo's misunderstanding of Anselm's description of God as 'maius omnibus' (greater than all things) in context:

The invalidity for proof which Anselm himself asserted of the Quod est maius omnibus stood in very close connection with a second consideration, namely that as a Name of God it did not possess that self-sufficiency that belongs to and befits the nature of its subject. (51)

The 'self-sufficiency' of God, to which Barth refers, excludes the view that God may be known by means of knowledge of other beings: it denies the way of reasoning about God in terms of reasoning about lesser beings which 'point beyond themselves' to the Supreme Being. Very clearly we see here echoes of Barth's fundamental and stated opposition to the 'analogia entis' or analogy of being which he identifies as the cardinal error of Catholicism.⁵² Although objection may be made to analogical reasoning about God on purely philosophical grounds,⁵³ Barth's objection is theological, namely that any reasoning about the Creator by way of reasoning about His creatures must make knowledge of Him dependent upon knowledge of Creation (hence the compromising of God's 'self-sufficiency'), and thereby, in denying that man may know God only by way of God Himself in His revelation, inevitably have a false idea of God. Barth's point is that a false idea of God is betrayed by a false methodology in determining how we may arrive at such an idea. Barth writes:

For the quod est maius omnibus to become admissible as proof, it required certain presuppositions not contained within itself. That is, in order to be the highest it must first presuppose the existence and nature of omnia, that is of objects which in their existence and nature point beyond themselves to the 'highest' which forms their peak. Without the rest of the pyramid the peak could not be a peak. (54)

The addition to 'maius omnibus' of 'quo maius cogitari nequit', the

necessity of which addition Gaunilo had failed to see, is essential in order to establish the 'self-sufficiency' of God in the sense described:

This self-sufficiency does, however, belong to the Name of God discovered in the *Proslogion*. (55)

What Gaunilo fundamentally has failed to see is that the proof of God's existence must be subsumed within the 'methodology of grace', that is to say it may be carried out on the basis of God's self-revealing activity alone. Gaunilo has preferred to understand the *Proslogion* in terms of 'ontic conceptions of God' which attempt to make sense of Him from the resources of an autonomous human reason, employing comparisons with other beings in order to ascend by analogy to the Supreme Being. Thereby the understanding of God's existence becomes dependent upon the understanding of other beings. Such dependence illustrates a failure to understand that the theologian learns of God from God, and not from other beings which, when he rightly understands them, themselves point to God. By insisting upon the error of Gaunilo's description of his idea of God, Anselm not only emphasises that 'proof' of God is independent of 'proof' of anything else; he implies by this that the understanding of God's existence may be approached only through the 'methodology of grace' which it is the theologian's task to pursue, in his apparently most philosophically rigorous operations attempting only to respond to God's address to Him, to hear the name of God spoken to him by God Himself, and not to operate with the false methodology of an autonomous human reason.

The 'self-sufficiency' (Selbstgenügsamkeit) of God in Barth's presentation of Anselm, may be linked to that philosophical approach to the so-called 'ontological proof' of the existence of God, which sees in the argument a merely *a priori* proof.⁵⁶ It is pointed out that whilst the other traditional proofs of God's existence, the cosmological and teleological, reason from the nature of the world (as contingent or designed) to the existence of God, the ontological argument is based

upon no such empirical claim. It reasons simply from the meaning of the word 'God', and is based merely upon a discussion of definitions. Now in Barth's interpretation the philosophical distinction between an argument based upon mere definitions of meaning, and one based upon observation of the reality to which words refer, becomes a quite different theological distinction, namely that between knowledge based upon revelation, and on the other hand, 'natural theology', theology based upon natural reasoning. The 'argument from words', the 'proof from definition', becomes an argument from revelation, from a 'donum gratia' or gift of God's grace. The argument from the nature of the external world becomes an argument based upon the resources of natural reason. Anselm's *Proslogion* becomes not a pure philosophical discussion, but an argument which refuses to proceed from its opponents' basis of argument, which is natural reason, and Gaunilo's misunderstanding of Anselm is presented as precisely his failing to realise this point:

... to whom are Anselm's writings addressed? First and foremost to the Benedictine theologians of his day. They are witness to a discussion being carried on between one of their own ilk and unbelief ... That discussion, however, is not allowed to take place on unbelief's ground. Rather, it proceeds as an exercise in faith seeking understanding. (57)

And Barth insists that Anselm, unlike the scholastics of the thirteenth century, is not arguing from his opponents' basis of argument, but basing his discussion on the definition of a 'Name of God' as an article of faith or revelation :

Anselm could not have begun less philosophically. He has absolutely no thought whatsoever of reaching an agreement with his opponent in the debate (or with himself in his capacity as a philosopher) over a universal minimum knowledge of God, still less of becoming involved in a movement towards his opponent's basis of argument. (58)

The 'self-sufficiency' of a proof which proceeds from words alone, becomes in Barth's presentation the 'self-sufficiency' of a proof based on the knowledge God gives as he manifests himself to the believer. Theology is therefore effectively insulated from philosophical criticism,

having a different basis of argument from the philosopher who uses his natural reason. For whereas natural reason may examine arguments from definitions of God to his existence, or from observation of the external world to his existence, it cannot hope to examine an argument which proceeds from a resource of divine self-giving which entirely bypasses its (natural reason's) workings. Effectively Barth has interpreted the *Proslogion* not in terms of a distinction between two forms of philosophical reasoning, but a distinction between philosophical and theological reasoning, forms of argument which proceed from quite different bases.

Earlier in this chapter, we drew out the 'logic' of Barth's development in the 1920s. Having made absolute the separation between man and God in his commentary on *Romans*, Karl Barth now sees that this too is a 'human' assumption which must itself be questioned. Man must know God on the basis of revelation alone, without presuming that this revelation will disclose an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between himself and his Creator.

We may now qualify this view. We now have the evidence to suggest that Barth's 'system' of 'infinite qualitative distinction' operates even more strongly to determine his theology, since it has now become the basis of his theological methodology. In other words, Barth has now presupposed an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between the use of natural reason and the understanding of faith.

For whilst we may wholeheartedly agree with Barth concerning the nature of the *Proslogion* as an 'address to God', concerning 'that-than-which ...' as a 'revealed Name' of God manifested to those who believe as a 'donum gratia'; and whilst we may even agree fully with the idea that "Quo maius cogitari nequit" only appears to be a concept that he (Anselm) formed for himself; it is in fact as far as he is concerned a revealed Name of God,⁵⁹ we do not see how Barth can move on to conclude that an absolute dichotomy exists between what is a concept 'revealed by God' and what is formed from the resources of human reason.

This dichotomy is a presupposition of Barth's system: the intrusion of the 'infinite qualitative distinction' has resurfaced, and theology is again being subjected to unjustifiable presuppositions from outside itself.

The problem is this. Given that one can refer both to what is learned as a gift of God's grace by revelation, and what is learnt by the exercise of the natural reason, upon what grounds does one insist upon an absolute distinction between the two? On what grounds does one resist the view that rationality is itself a gift of God, and that the exercise of the natural reason, far from being 'autonomous', is itself a manifestation of God to man? On what grounds does one conclude, from the observation that Anselm presents his work as a prayerful address, that it is qualitatively distinct from a philosophical treatise? We suggest that there are no grounds for doing so save the enduring power of that 'infinite qualitative Unterschied' that Barth viewed as a presupposition in the face of any theological evidence. The scholastics, after all, did not cease to talk of revelation: but they would have failed to see the grounds for an absolute distinction between 'the reason of faith' and 'natural reason' such as Barth insists upon. And Gaunilo would not have failed to appreciate that Anselm wrote piously for believers to whom he described the experience of God's revelation to him in faith: but might well have failed to see how this presumed that such experience must be distinct from the workings of natural reason.

In discussing Barth's commentary on *Romans*, we found that his 'system' made certain Christian doctrines very difficult for him to express. Recourse to unhappily ambiguous language has been discovered in Barth, as he strove to make sense of a unity in Christ of qualitative distinct realities: a kind of theological dualism was forced upon him. In his work on Anselm a similar ambiguity arises in the attempt to make sense of a methodology which separates theology from other forms of discourse. They 'touch' and yet 'do not touch', to recall the familiar

Barthian metaphor of the resurrection, in precisely the paradoxical manner of the second commentary.

We have already quoted Barth as saying that God 'comes within his (man's) system as the object of his thinking',⁶⁰ that he "'shows" himself'⁶¹ to the thinker and 'modifies "correct" thinking to an intelligere esse in re'.⁶² Such language suggests that God's grace allows Anselm to conceive of Him - the obvious sense of 'comes within his system as the object of his thinking'. By His grace, in a way that man's powers of natural reason could not achieve, God gives man an idea of His divine being. However, it is clear from other parts of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* that Barth does not allow for any denial of the inconceivability of God:

Knowledge of the inconceivability of God cannot be played off against knowledge of his (intra-mental) existence because as knowledge of God and therefore knowledge of faith it rather presupposes this latter. (63)

The knowledge of God granted to faith, then, does not exclude but presupposes his inconceivability. Barth finds support for this point of view in an argument of the *Proslogion* itself:

Ergo Domine, non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit,
sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit. (64)

God, then, is not only 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought' but indeed 'something greater than can be thought'. Barth insists that this remark illustrates, together with other passages of Anselm, 'the total hiddenness of God even for those who know Him in faith'. The statement of the 'incomprehensibility' of God is 'not in any sense denied by the presupposition of the Name of God'.⁶⁵

In this light, we can understand the earlier remark of Barth that:

Strictly speaking it is only God himself who has a conception of God. All that we have are conceptions of objects, none of which is identical with God. (66)

The formula of 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought', then, is not properly described as a concept of God. It is, Barth argues, a 'designation of God', which 'expresses nothing about the nature of God but rather lays down a rule of thought which, if we follow it, enables



us to endorse the statements about the Nature of God accepted in faith (example, the statement of his incomprehensibility) as our own necessary thoughts'.⁶⁷

Unsurprisingly, it is not clear what status Barth gives, in that case, to the Anselmic formula. What does it mean to call it a 'designation' of God, when at the same time it implies His incomprehensibility? Charlesworth, reviewing Anselm,⁶⁸ feels that the answer to the problem of using ordinary language to describe God will be found in the idea of analogical predication later developed by Aquinas, and this is hinted at by Barth to some measure:

It is possible for expressions which are really appropriate only to objects that are not identical with God, to be true expressions, per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem ... even when these expressions are applied to the God who can never be expressed. (69)

However, any theory of analogy must surely threaten Barth with a natural theology such as he expressly forbids. A full discussion of Barth's use of analogy will not be attempted here,^{69a} but we must examine how he attempts to retrieve his position from compromise with a natural theology.

Barth does not deny the use of a concept of analogy in theology. He quite clearly has stated in the quotation above that human conceptions, 'by a certain similitude or image' express what is otherwise (that is to say directly) inexpressible. At the same time, the description of God which employs analogical thinking cannot be one based on natural powers of human reason, for that would be concede ground to a natural theology, but upon the manifestation of revelation from God which gives understanding of faith. Hence Barth's use of analogy came to be designated as an 'analogy of faith'⁷⁰ rather than an 'analogy of being', that is to say a use of analogical language based on what God revealed rather than what man by his natural reason alone might determine. It is important to recognise that Barth seeks to maintain an 'infinite qualitative distinction' here, between what God reveals and what man understands through his natural reason, even when referring to the use

of analogical language which concedes that any idea of God must be one contained within the limitations of the human mind. In theory, if the ideas of God given to man are quite independent of his natural capacity to think and understand, there is no need for any concept of analogy at all: God could perfectly well enable man to understand him directly. But Barth seems to wish to avoid some of the implications of his alienation of the 'understanding of faith' from natural reason. He therefore shares with natural theology, which does not wish to separate the two, an apparent enthusiasm for a concept of analogy which he does not in fact need.

Barth therefore describes God as 'coming within' man's system when in fact he quite clearly wants to suggest that God builds his own system within man, a system in principle absolutely distinct from man's own. In this way he to some extent obscures the fact that natural reason has been effectively isolated from man's knowledge of God in *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, just as humanity itself has been effectively isolated from God in the commentary on *Romans*.

Schofner describes this work of Barth as follows:⁷¹

With the *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* book Barth succeeded in articulating a monumental scheme for the development of a consistent theological position. Anthropologically orientated contributions to the dogmatic enterprise no longer had a hold on him. Cartesianism in theology was now a defeated opponent. Henceforth the Denkform of his technical proposals would be 'the objectivity of revelation'.

The 'theological Cartesianism' which Schofner describes, is the 'religious antropocentrism' which appears to derive the knowledge of God from man's self-knowledge. But no exponent of 'religious antropocentrism' would quite put the point in that way. He would, rather, argue that man's self-knowledge is the locus of his understanding of what is revealed to him by God, that the channel of revelation cannot be set apart from the channels of natural reason. It is the separation between man's self-knowledge and his knowledge of God, rather than any attempt to 'derive' one from the other, which most clearly characterises

Barth's theology. *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* is the outline of a methodology based upon such a separation. It is neither primarily 'theocentric' as if it derived man's self-knowledge from his knowledge of God, nor anthropocentric', deriving the knowledge of God from man's self-knowledge. It is, rather, an epistemological dualism separating the two forms of knowledge, not in terms of 'faith' and 'reason', but in terms of reason acting within the laws of revelation established by God, and reason acting from its own autonomous powers. This is the proper designation of Barth's methodology as 'theological positivism' rather than 'fideism'.

However, such a dualism creates extreme difficulties for Barth's position. It presumes a dichotomy which, like that between God and man in *Romans*, cannot easily be reconciled with Christian doctrine. More especially the reason which 'understands faith' appears to borrow, and even in a sense to 'rebaptise' the terminology of natural reason:⁷² the appropriation of analogy into a scheme of 'theological positivism', like the appropriation of humanity into the Christology of *Romans*, is a paradoxical denial of the presupposed system of 'infinite qualitative distinction' which remains fundamental to Barth's position.

It might appear that Kant's influence upon Barth has now disappeared. On the practical level, illustrated in his growing association with Henrich Scholz among others, this is an unlikely conclusion to reach. Yet the conclusion of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* does contain a firm rejection of Kant's interpretation of Anselm as making a philosophical error in confusing words which provide part of a definition with those which claim that what is defined exists not in idea alone but in reality - the sharp Kantian reminder that 'existence is not a predicate'. Barth's work concludes:

That Anselm's Proof of the existence of God has repeatedly been called the 'Ontological' Proof of God, that commentators have refused to see that it is in a different book altogether from the well-known teaching of Descartes and Leibniz, that anyone could seriously think that it is even remotely affected by what Kant put forward against these doctrines - all that is so much

nonsense on which no more words ought to be wasted.⁷³

Yet Barth remained committed to his Platonic-Kantian inheritance in this sense - that he remained a dualist. However, whereas Kant's dualism remained that between phenomena and noumena, between things as they necessarily present themselves to, and are determined by, the understanding, and things as they are in themselves, Barth's is a different dualism. Kant had, after all, insisted that all knowledge, including 'metaphysical' knowledge, must be constrained by the conditions of human understanding. Barth consistently opposes this approach - it is behind his constant stress upon the almost 'idolatrous' belief that God can be 'possessed', 'contained' by the concepts of human reason: the idea that man's understanding must play a part in receiving revelation is presented by Barth as precisely as 'anthropocentric' as the belief that he may fashion a God in his image, or see God as an 'extension', in some sense, of himself.⁷⁴ For Barth, the road from Kant and Schleiermacher to Marx and Feuerback is a direct one and the whole of the nineteenth century lay under the sway of this 'anthropocentric' blight. By the time of writing his book *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, the echoes in *Romans* of Kant's own awareness of a dualism overcome through the 'ideas of reason' which intuit the nature of the world as a limited whole requiring an ultimate ground, are lost, alongside the Platonic 'anamnesis' of a world of 'being' in a world of flux. Kant's dualism now appears a complete one, and as such an unacceptable divorce between the reality of God and human knowledge, which in Kant's view touches nothing that it does not distort, and in Barth's does so in pursuit of an 'idolatrous' desire to 'possess' God and 'limit' Him to the framework of the human mind.

But Barth does not eschew a dualism as such. Instead he divides the natural reason, interpreted in terms of the constraints upon understanding reality as such indicated by Kant, from the reason which is directed by the Holy Spirit to the understanding of faith, whose

power and whose capacity come not from the human understanding but from the direct gift of God's grace.⁷⁵ The noumenal world does not cease to be a reality beyond the embrace of the human understanding, but it does cease to be inaccessible to man, simply because it may be made accessible to him by God's revealing gift of grace, which cannot be constrained by the limitations of man's natural ability to receive it. Rather than challenge Kant, Barth effectively bypasses him: rather than question the nature of his dualism, he adopts it in terms of a division between what man learns for himself and what he learns from God. Instead of a division between noumena and phenomena, Barth in effect introduces a division between the 'theological' and the 'secular', that which reason discovers from revelation, and that which it learns from its own autonomous working. Hence the conclusion of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* does not in effect reject Kant at all - it dismisses him as not germane to the issue - 'that anyone could seriously think that it is even remotely affected by what Kant put forward against these doctrines - all that is so much nonsense on which no more words ought to be wasted'.⁷⁶ Yet from Kant Barth derives his most important presupposition, namely that beyond the world which we order according to the form of our understanding, is another, a noumenal world, the nature of whose influence, upon that which we know, it is beyond our powers to trace. Beyond our powers, Barth wants to say, but not beyond the power of God.

Let us return to an earlier comparison between the problem of Barth's interpretation of Anselm and that of Descartes' argument in the Third Meditation. Descartes' argument, Professor Williams comments, presupposes:

an idea of God a great deal more determinate and articulated than Descartes' finite mind can be expected to have.

On the one hand, Descartes must claim that his idea of God is perfectly clear, in order to avoid the criticism that it is a hazy notion cobbled

together from his ideas of finite beings: on the other hand, 'both his religious faith and the exigencies of his argument require that he cannot really conceive of God's infinity, since this must be inaccessible to a mind which is, as the argument itself insists, finite.⁷⁷

This reflection of Williams is very pertinent. For the form of argument in the Third Meditation is akin to that of Barth's and the idea of a 'primacy of revelation' associated with the Barthian theology, namely the insistence that our idea of God, which may not be constructed out of our own resources of intellect or emotion, may arise only through the self-revealing activity of God Himself. The criticism Professor Williams levels at Descartes' argument is relevant to the problems of Barth's arguments too. For Barth seeks an understanding of revelation that is able to argue that finite minds, through their reception of God's Word, are provided with a knowledge of the infinite God, which it is beyond the resources of the finite mind as such to achieve.

Now Professor Williams identifies Descartes' weakest flank in his assumption that man may have a clear idea of God. This is especially so in that the argument that man cannot have fashioned the idea of God out of his intellectual resources requires Descartes to emphasise the imperfection of finite beings and their distance from a perfect God. They are, however, apparently able to have a clear and distinct idea of God! Williams quotes other passages of Descartes which seem rather to suggest that a man cannot expect to have a clear idea of God, for instance, a letter to Mersenne of 15 April 1630 where Descartes says:

We cannot understand the greatness of God; even though we know him. But the very fact that we recognise it to be incomprehensible makes us think all the more highly of it; just as a king has more majesty when he is less familiarly known to his subjects, provided they do not then think that they have no king, and that they know him enough not to be able to doubt it. (78)

This extract suggests that we may perhaps know a sufficient amount to claim that God exists, without knowing His nature, just as subjects may know that they have a king, whilst his majesty precludes them from any

familiar knowledge of him.

A more specific discussion may be found in the 'First Objections urged against the Meditations' together with Descartes reply.⁷⁹ The objection is made, that since Descartes declares:

I apprehend clearly and distinctly an infinite being,
someone will respond:

Do you apprehend clearly and distinctly an infinite being?
For what then, the objection continues, is meant by that well-known maxim known to all - The infinite qua infinite is unknown?⁸⁰

Descartes' reply is to agree 'that the infinite qua infinite is in no wise comprehended', but that nevertheless it is 'understood', a confusing remark which, however, he goes on to say enables us clearly to understand that God is 'infinite' (as opposed to 'indefinite', an idea which we could form merely from finite objects). He continues that we know the infinite 'positively ... though not adequately, i.e., we do not comprehend the whole of what is intelligible in it'. He suggests that we may best understand God by considering His perfections singly in turn, rather than try to comprehend Him in His totality at once. Yet surely difficulties arise when Descartes remarks:

Wherever I have said that God can be clearly and distinctly known, I have understood this to apply only to this finite cognition of ours, which is proportionate to the diminutive capacity of our minds. (81)

We say that difficulties arise, for if the only God we can recognise is a God planed down, as it were, to the size of our intelligence, then do we any longer possess the terms in which to claim that God's existence is demonstrated from the presence in our minds of the idea of Him, an idea which we could not possibly have fashioned from our own resources? For what may be comprehended only by being reduced to the limitations of our understanding, must surely be in principle capable of being built up from reflection on the finite world upon which that understanding operates. But then Descartes can no longer argue that our idea of God can have come only from God himself, whose existence as the author of

man's idea of him is thereby proved.

There is, clearly, a sense in which it can be agreed that an idea of an object could not have existed without the object itself to cause it. This is true of most of our ideas of objects: they arise from a form of encounter with the objects themselves. But what Descartes is referring to is an idea of an object which could not possibly have arisen by any other means than through the object itself. The mind is capable of imagining a fabulous monster without observing one, because a fabulous monster possesses no qualities which are not possessed by creatures which it has observed, albeit the monster possesses them in different combinations and to a different degree. God, however, it seems to be said, is so qualitatively other than observable beings that if we have an idea of Him it is not conceivably an imaginary construction of our minds. Yet if Descartes is bound to admit that the clear idea of God which we have is 'proportionate to the diminutive capacity of our minds', then he seems to be admitting that there is nothing in our idea of God which has interrupted or exceeded that capacity. But surely this is just what he must say. For unless we have an idea of God 'which exceeds the capacity' of our finite minds, then how can we have an idea of God which our finite minds could not in principle have created?

This problem in Descartes is strikingly similar to the problem which we find in *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*. For we can certainly imagine the criticism levelled by Professor Williams at Descartes being levelled at Anselm as interpreted by Karl Barth. As we observe in Descartes the attempt at once to portray the idea of God in our minds as possessing no other possible source save God himself, and yet as 'proportional to the diminutive capacity of our minds', so we have in Barth the affirmation that our knowledge of God proceeds from God alone, and yet that our concept of God is an 'analogical one'. Both writers wish to take account of the limitations of human understanding whilst

pointing to God alone as the source of our idea of Him. Both seem to be saying 'where else could the idea of God have originated from save from God Himself? 'whilst also saying: 'Of course man's idea of God must be the sort of idea of which his conceptual reasoning is capable - "proportionate to the diminutive capacity of our minds" (Descartes), or "per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem" (Barth). Both thereby raise in the reader's mind the suspicion, that what must be proportioned to the capacity of our minds to receive must be within the power of our minds to create, and the 'realist-idealist' controversy over what is in fact being discovered, and what invented, reasserts itself.

In Descartes, the conflict appears unresolved. In Barth, however, there is an 'epistemological shift' to try to solve the problem. Rather than an 'idea' which comes directly from God, Barth suggests a form of knowledge which comes directly from God. Yet is this to do anything different than repeat the argument of Descartes in the light of the 'Copernican Revolution' of Kant? The mind is not, as Descartes tends to present it, a passively existing 'land' in which ideas dwell, including the recognisably 'alien' idea of God which comes 'from abroad', a form of thinking which recalls the notion of the mind as a blank slate upon which the world attempts to trace out its meaning. It is not simply, as Kant has shown, our idea of God, but our idea of anything which is 'proportionate to the diminutive capacity of our minds',⁸³ since the mind itself demands that its ideas of 'objects should be determined by the form of understanding with which it necessarily operates. It is because Descartes operates with a pre-Kantian assumption of the mind's passivity in relation to its ideas, that he believes he can give sense to the notion of the mind 'having an idea forced upon it', which it cannot possibly have been responsible for itself. In the light of Kant, the remark that the mind possesses no idea that exceeds its 'diminutive capacity', is only saying that it cannot possess an idea which cannot be thought! All ideas must be proportioned to the mind's capacity to understand - otherwise they are unthinkable.

Thus when Barth talks about the idea of God, he cannot be talking about a particular idea which appears somehow 'unlike the rest', and which cannot have been built up, unlike its fellow-notions, by the mind itself, since such an idea could not even be entertained by the mind. He has, therefore, to argue that a certain form of thought operates quite independently of the human understanding whose structure, as Kant has shown, effectively determines the nature of human thinking. Barth introduces the idea of a form of thought based upon revelation, which is effectively separated from a natural reason that must be contained by the nature of the human mind acting as a kind of sieve determining what it is prepared to admit to human comprehension. In Barth, then, instead of the particular notion which has a direct divine origination, we have the particular form of thought which has a direct divine origination. Where in Descartes the idea of God is a stranger to the mind, in Barth the form of knowledge based upon revelation is a stranger to the mind; instead of an idea in the mind which cannot have come 'from it', Barth presents a whole process of reasoning 'outside' the mind altogether.

Does, then, the same criticism pertain to Barth as pertains to Descartes? Williams is puzzled by Descartes at once presenting God as inconceivable and yet the idea of God as a 'recognisable stranger' in the mind. We may be equally puzzled by Barth at once presenting God as inconceivable and yet the idea of God as a recognisable gift of revelation. Williams notes that Descartes still talks of an idea 'proportionate to the diminutive capacity of our minds', and we note that Barth still talks in terms of analogy. Williams notes that Descartes talks of an alienated idea in the mind which betrays a transcendent origin, whilst still somehow proportioned to the capacity of human understanding; and we, similarly, note that Barth talks of an alienated form of thought, the understanding of faith proceeding as a gift of grace from God, which also has a transcendent origin and yet

which also requires to be understood 'per aliquam similitudinem aut imaginem'. Descartes seeks an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between his idea of God and other ideas in his mind: yet at the same time he recognises the paradox of his position in the requirement that even the former idea be proportionate to the mind's capacities. Barth seeks an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between the 'understanding of faith', reason amplifying faith given in revelation, and the natural reason determined according to Kantian rules of thought: yet he recognises the paradox of his position in the recognition that the 'understanding of faith' cannot altogether separate itself from the constraints of the human natural reason whose concepts of God are only analogical. Both face the problem that in order to give substance to their ideas of God, they must deny the methodological ground of their enunciation. Descartes' idea of God ceases to be absolutely distinct from other ideas: Barth's form of thought based upon God's gift of grace ceases to be absolutely distinct from forms of thought based upon natural reason. Neither can maintain the dualism they wish to presuppose.

It will be clear that the argument of this chapter poses a challenge to Professor T.F. Torrance's reasoning in defence of Barth in his early work *Karl Barth : An Introduction To His Early Theology*. We attempt to criticise Torrance's theology specifically in chapter seven of this work, but in our criticism of Barth's development in the light of his work of Anselm we are conscious of opposing Torrance's own rationale of Barth.⁸⁴ Torrance writes:

It belongs to the rationality of theology that the reason should operate only with objects of faith, for faith is the specific mode of rationality which is demanded of theology when it is directed to the knowledge of God. (85)

It seems to us that Torrance in his apology for Barth repeats his unmaintainable dualism. On the one hand theological knowledge possesses its own 'mode of rationality', its own form of thought prescribed by the nature of the object with which it deals. On the other hand, the very term 'mode of rationality' indicates a necessary recourse to a

common concept of 'rationality' shared by all forms of thought in order that Torrance may talk intelligibly of the 'rationality' of theology, and indeed of the 'irrationality' of any theological reflection which operates in 'detachment' from its object. The nature of the specific, and yet in its own way like other forms of thought 'rational', mode of thinking which is appropriate to theology possesses precisely the ambiguity which we find in Barth; namely an epistemological dualism which denies itself as soon as it reaches for suitable means of expression.

3. Conclusion

Hence we must conclude by doubting the claims that Barth's thought between 1922 and 1930 profoundly changes. It changes more in key than in substance. We began by pointing out the evidence for profound development in Barth's ideas during this period: the 'relativisation' of all human values and ideas in *Romans* is extended to the crucial 'system' of 'infinite qualitative distinction' between man and God, so that, it is said, even that distinction must not be presupposed but rather all notions of God's relation to man derived from the concrete reality of Jesus Christ. If this were true, however, Barth would have had no *a priori* grounds for insisting, as he does, that the 'understanding of faith', reason working within the nature of revelation given by God's grace, is itself in 'infinite qualitative distinction' from the 'autonomous' workings of natural reason. That he does make this presupposition indicates, rather, that the distinction itself has been found to operate elsewhere, in the sphere of epistemology (between what we know by 'faith' through revelation and what we know naturally) rather than that of ontology (between man and God). In an important respect Barth does try to draw the workings of natural reason 'into' the knowledge based upon revelation, as the 'rebaptising' of a doctrine of analogy in terms of the idea of an 'anology of faith' illustrates.

For this reason, as we shall see in chapter five, Barth sets himself against the idea of other disciplines presuming independence of theology, despite his commitment to an epistemological dualism between knowledge of God and other forms of human understanding. He is not content merely to make theology immune to extra-theological criticism. This process of assimilation will be given careful scrutiny in later chapters.⁸⁶

But there can be no disguising the nature of the epistemological gulf which Barth establishes, or the essential alienation in Barth's thought of theology-knowledge of God based upon God's own self-revelation understood by reason within faith - from those disciplines which cultivate the workings of the natural reason. It cannot be stated too often that whatever the apparent humility of Barth's call that we understand God simply from the Word which He speaks to us, it is his own methodological presupposition which determines that that Word should be spoken by a channel of revelation entirely divorced from the autonomous workings of the human mind. Arguably, Barth has been frightened by Kant into the belief that any knowledge of God in which the human mind operated from its own 'autonomous' powers would require it to 'jump out of its cognitive skin'⁸⁷ into an impossible direct intuition of what it could not, in principle, understand. If so, it would perhaps have been better had Barth paid closer attention to the kinds of philosophical development which had in fact driven him in the direction of an 'alienated theology'.⁸⁸

Instead, his later thought appears to present itself as the humble conformity of theology to its object of study, whilst in fact pre-determining that object to be known independently of the natural resources of human reason.

Notes on Chapter Four

1. Barth, K., *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf: 1. Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur christlichen Dogmatik.*
2. Barth, K., *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes. E.T., Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God in the Context of his Theological Scheme.*
3. Bouillard, H., *Karl Barth, Genèse et Evolution de la Théologie Dialectique*, p.133.
4. Barth, K., *Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God*, p.171. The passage is quoted below, pp.82-3.
- 4a. Heidegger sought from the opposite end to purge philosophy of theology in *Sein und Zeit*, (1927).
5. See Barth, *The Humanity of God*. Note that Barth does not claim to have altered his opinion so much as to have restored an emphasis left out of sight in the writing of *Romans*.
6. A common view of the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, (Volumes three and four).
7. Barth, K., *Die christliche Dogmatik im Entwurf*, pp.254-259.
8. *Ibid.*, p.256.
9. *Ibid.*, p.116.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, p.117.
12. *Ibid.*, p.457.
13. Torrance, T.F., *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931.*
14. J.D. Smart, *The Divided Mind of Modern Theology, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann 1908-1933.*
15. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik, Volume 1, Part 1. Die Lehre vom Worte Gottes. Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik.*
 Barth remarks (p.ix) : ... I now have a better understanding of some things (among them my own proposal) in that to the best of my ability I have cut out in this second issue of the book everything that in the first issue might give the slightest appearance of giving to theology a basis, support, or even a mere justification in the way of existentialist philosophy.
 However, he also writes, (p.vii) :
 ... My experience of twelve years ago in re-editing the *Römerbrief* was repeated. I could and I wanted to say the same things as before, but now I could no longer say it in the way in which I had said it before.
 The work of 1932 is an amplification, and a purification of, rather than a departure from, the work of 1927.

16. Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth's Lebenslauf*. The reference is to the E.T, p.213.
17. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, part 1. p.viii. One should also bear in mind a remark made by Barth found in 'How I changed my mind', a collection of three articles in *The Christian Century*, in which Barth reviewed his thought over each of three decades. Of 1928 to 1938, he writes, (pp.42-3)

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

The *Church Dogmatics* was written in the light of this methodological purge.

- 17a. The essay 'Schicksal und Idee, in der Theologie' based on lectures given in Dortmund in 1929 also establishes the autonomy of theology in terms similar to those which we examine in detail from the *Anselmbuch*.
18. See the edition translated with commentary by M.J. Charlesworth, which contains the *Proslogion, A Reply on Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilo*, and *The Author's Reply to Gaunilo*.
19. *Ibid.*, p.116.
20. *Ibid.*, p.118.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.156-166.
22. *Ibid.*, pp.163-5.
23. *Ibid.*, p.175.
24. *Ibid.*
25. There is the further question of deciding what Anselm means by God not being thinkable as not existing. In the same section he remarks:

For if it could be thought not to exist, it could be thought to have a beginning and an end (cogitari posset habere principium et finem) - but this cannot be. (*Ibid.*, p.177).

Anselm identifies God with the absence of that coming to be and passing away that characterises all other beings. I have referred to this as the view that God 'necessarily' exists, but 'necessary existence' has other meanings in philosophy. It may, for instance, be understood in terms of God's independent existence, His existence 'from Himself' or aseity. However, my concern is merely to identify Anselm's conviction that his argument applies only to God.

26. John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, p.17.

27. Quotations from Descartes are taken from the English translation by E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross.
28. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p.181.
29. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, pp.157-171.
30. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p.165.
31. B. Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, pp.141-2.
32. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselm's Proof of the Existence of God*, p. 11.
33. *Ibid.*, p.36.
34. *Ibid.* p.37.
35. *Ibid.*, pp.40-1.
36. *Ibid.*, p.39. Gott selbst als Gegenstand dieses Denkens auf dem Plane ist'. The translator assumes that 'auf dem Plane' may be taken to mean 'within man's system' rather than simply 'into view'.
37. *Ibid.*, p.75.
38. *Ibid.*, p.89. (bei Voraussetzung eines ontischen Gottesbegriffs die Erkenntnis Gottes immer wieder in Frage zu stellen ist - p.84 of the German original.)
39. *Ibid.*, p.37 (die Gnade als Aktualisierung des dem Menschen ursprünglich eingeschaffenen Erkenntnisvermögens wiedererkennen müssen - p.36 of the German.) Barth describes this actualisation of the power to know by grace as a reawakening of an attribute with which man was created: yet the key point is that this 'created' attribute remains divorced from the other created attributes which make up his natural reason ...
40. *Ibid.*
41. *Ibid.*, footnote 4.
42. *Ibid.*, p.39.
43. *Ibid.*, pp.53-4.
44. M.J. Charlesworth, ed., *St Anselm's Proslogion, etc.*, pp.40-6.
45. *Ibid.*, p.41.
46. *Ibid.*, p.40.
47. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, (ET), pp.43-53.
48. *Ibid.*, p.48.
49. *Ibid.*, p.77.
50. The German word is 'Selbstgenügsamkeit'. (See p.82 of the German.)
51. *Ibid.*, p.87.

52. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Part 1, p.x, Barth remarks:
 I can see no third possibility between play with the analogia entis, legitimate only on Roman Catholic grounds ... and a Protestant theology, self-nourished at its own source, standing upon its own feet, and finally liberated from such secular misery.
 Note how Barth identifies loss of 'self-sufficiency' in theology with secularisation! We develop this point in chapter five.
53. There is a vast range of literature discussing this topic, which is not germane to my argument. A good introduction is Frederick Ferré's, *Language, Logic and God*.
54. Barth, *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, (ET), p.87.
55. *Ibid.*, p.88.
56. See, e.g., Hick, *Arguments for the Existence of God*.
57. R.D. Shofner, *Anselm Revisited*, p.75.
58. Barth, *op. cit.*, p.106.
59. *Ibid.*, p.77.
60. *Ibid.*, p.39. See note 36 for the original German.
61. *Ibid.*, p.38.
62. *Ibid.*, p.39.
63. *Ibid.*, pp.113-4.
64. Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, p.136 (*Proslogion xv*).
65. Barth, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-80.
66. *Ibid.*, p.29.
67. *Ibid.*, p.80.
68. M.J. Charlesworth, *op. cit.*, p.81.
69. Barth, *op. cit.*, pp.29-30.
- 69a. See chapter six, note 18, for a fuller discussion of analogy in Barth's theology.
70. 'Analogia fidei. In the *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 1, Part 1, p.279.,
 Barth describes the 'analogia fidei' as 'the meaning of the wonderful Pauline passages in which human knowledge of God is converted into man's being known by God'. But the real crux of Barth's use of the notion is not that it implies understanding man on the basis of understanding God, rather than vice versa, but that it insists upon an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between the understanding of faith and the understanding of man apart from God's gift of grace in revelation. The point about an 'analogy of faith' is not that it begins from God rather than man - so too does the 'analogy of being', beginning from God as 'being-itself' - but that it separates the understanding of faith from natural reason. The analogy of being', on the other hand, sees man's natural reason as itself the gift of God in revelation.

71. R.D. Shofner, *op. cit.*, p.84.
72. This process will come under close examination in chapters 6 and 7. A tendency for Barth to minimise the effect of the methodological dichotomy between the 'understanding of faith', and understanding which results from reason operating from its 'natural' powers, by assimilating the results of natural reasoning about God 'into' the 'understanding of faith', in a way that insulates that understanding from the sort of philosophical criticisms which make it doubtful, has been well illustrated by a number of authors, as we shall see. In particular the insights of Dr R.H. Roberts with respect to Barth's doctrine of time, and of Dr Peter Selby and Van Harvey with respect to his doctrine of resurrection may be mentioned. These are more fully discussed later (see chapter eight).
73. Barth, *op. cit.*, p.171.
74. See chapter six, where Barth's argument with Brunner over natural theology is discussed.
75. See chapter six.
76. Barth, *op. cit.*, p.171.
77. B. Williams, *op. cit.*, p.144.
78. Quoted in Williams, *op. cit.*, p.145. See Anthony Kenny, ed., *Descartes: Philosophical Letters*, p.11.
79. Descartes, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp.1-24.
80. *Ibid.*, p.5.
81. *Ibid.*, p.17.
82. Professor S.W. Sykes notes Barth's concession to the proportionality of our idea of God to the cognitive capacity of the human mind in his recognition of the fact that for Anselm the event of faith's knowledge of God not only happens from time to time but to some extent ('aliquatenus', quoted in *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, p.47). See S.W. Sykes, ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of theological method*, p. 38.
- Williams' recent criticisms of Descartes' treatment of the existence of God may be compared with his earlier challenge to religious belief 'Tertullian's Paradox', in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, eds., Flew and Macintyre, pp.187-212. The paradox considered here, of an idea of God which at one and the same time authenticates itself through its 'strangeness' and yet may only be received through 'normal' channels of human reception which remove the very mark of its authenticity, makes specific in epistemological terms a difficulty posed in a more general way in that earlier essay:
- If, then, the Christian faith is true, it must be partly incomprehensible, but if it is partly incomprehensible, it is difficult to see what it is for it to be true.
- (*Ibid.*, p.211.)
83. See above, chapter one, pp.15-17.
84. Torrance, T.F., *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931*, pp.182-196.
85. *Ibid.*, p.186.

86. See chapters six and seven.
87. A phrase of Professor D.M. MacKinnon.
88. See the conclusion of R.H. Roberts, 'The Ideal and the Real in the Theology of Karl Barth', in *New Studies in Theology*, eds., Sykes and Holmes.

It is noticeable how far theologians will go in order to deny this alienation. In his complex book, *The Doctrine of God in Charles Hartshorne and Karl Barth*, Colin Gunton remarks (p.121) of the 'theologian's task' as elucidated by a study of Barth's work on Anselm, that it is:

... not to establish the object of his reflection, for its nature is such that it can be established only by itself, but to reflect upon that object, and thus to make intelligible its nature, and hence its rationality and necessity. The aim of theology is undoubtedly proof, not in the sense that it is usually understood in philosophical theology, but as something that can perhaps be called intellectual conviction.

Having isolated the 'understanding of faith' from the autonomously working powers of human reason on the basis of a merely presupposed separation between the two, Barth's approach is here justified in terms of 'mythologisations' such as 'establish' and 'intellectual conviction'. The process of God's revelation to the 'understanding of faith' effectively isolated from his natural reason becomes the process of God's 'establishing himself'. The aim of a theology that is unable to speak of proof as a philosopher speaks of it, because effectively denied the use of natural reason in determining the existence of God, is left with the obscure possibility of 'intellectual conviction'. These hollow phrases disguise the reality of the theologian's alienation, and make it appear that he is, in fact, left with something to work with within a Barthian methodology. Against this one has to ask: 'What is it to be able to reflect upon something that "establishes itself"? Is that to make real reflection possible, or is it not in fact to demand that the whole point of reflection - to establish what is the case - is denied? And secondly, 'what sort of "intellectual conviction" is it, that cannot employ the means of proof offered within the ambit of a philosophic theology?' If this form of debate is denied, what sort of 'intellectual conviction' possibly remains? How far is Gunton's practice to suggest 'pseudo-realities' which appear to offer the theologian real scope for critical intellectual endeavour, when in fact the distinction drawn by Barth between 'the understanding of faith' and the autonomous workings of human reason make this impossible?

CHAPTER FIVE

The 'Religious' and the 'Secular'

Barth's epistemological dualism, outlined in the previous chapter, entails a distinction between theology and other disciplines. Reason as the inner self-explication of faith, the operation of 'fides quaerens intellectum', is contrasted to reason as the natural form of human reflection upon reality. We criticised the validity of this distinction in chapter four, and we tried to suggest difficulties which bore comparison to those undergone by Barth's earlier, ontological, dualism. We noted Barth's attachment to the independence of theology as a discipline whose mode of rationality is determined by the nature of its particular object of study. At the same time we may note that the claim of theology to be a form of rationality drives it in the direction of language whose meaning depends upon its usage in non-theological contexts. We tried in the last chapter to argue that the 'ontological' dilemma of *Romans*, in which Barth is forced to compromise an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man in order to do justice to their unity in Christ, is transposed in the works of the 1920s into an 'epistemological' dilemma, in which Barth is forced to compromise the qualitative distinction between theology and other forms of discourse. Barth's much-heralded Christocentrism in the *Church Dogmatics* is the overcoming of one dualism through the use of another, and represents a pervasive Kantian influence in this respect, despite the concluding words of Barth's work on Anselm. We shall pursue this argument in detail in subsequent chapters. In this chapter we propose to analyse the series of lectures originally given by Barth at the University of Bonn in the early 1930s, and subsequently published as a survey of Protestant theology in the nineteenth century.¹ From this study, and in particular from the long prefatory section on the thought of the Enlightenment which it contains, we propose to define the nature of

the challenge which the Enlightenment presented to Barth's understanding of theology, and to compare it with Barth's own criticisms of the thought of this period.

Although entitled *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, (*Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*), Karl Barth's survey of ideas in the century preceding his own devotes at least half of its six hundred pages to the eighteenth century background. The book in fact includes a prolonged discussion of the Enlightenment.

This period of history, Barth comments, was described by Walter Goetz as 'The Age of Absolutism' ('Das Zeitalter des Absolutismus'). It is a description, Barth suggests, that 'probably refers to the well-known structure of the political order of that period'. However, he continues, political structure is no more than 'an experiment of the order of life, the ideal of life in general' ('Ein Exponent der Lebensordnung bzw. des Lebens ideals überhaupt') and he goes on to give his own definition of 'Absolutism':

Absolutism in general can obviously mean a system of life based upon the belief in the omnipotence of human powers (... ein Lebenssystem, das gegründet ist auf die gläubige Voraussetzung der Allmacht des menschlichen Vermögens). Man, who discovers his own power and ability, the potentiality dormant in his humanity, that is, his human being as such, and looks upon it as the final, the real, and absolute (Letztes, Eigentliches, Absolutes), I mean, as something detached (ein Gelöstes), self-justifying, with its own authority and power, which he can therefore set in motion in all directions and without any restraint - this man is absolute man. (1a)

The 'absolutism' which Barth discerns in eighteenth century European life is far wider than a narrow political definition would permit; the 'Enlightened Despots' are for him but one aspect of a deeper absolutism than that of a ruler over his subjects. The absolutism which Barth describes is an absolutism of man as such when, 'loosened from' (as 'ein Gelöstes') his dependence upon God, he sets out to be a self-determining being.

Eighteenth century man, as Barth portrays him, has won independence from the world and from the Church: from the world, because in learning

to experiment upon it he has begun to develop the capacity to control it, and from the Church, because in the light of the Reformation she has not been able to restrain the individual soul from seeing itself as the real locus of revelation. Man has become by this time, both in spiritual and in worldly terms, 'the measure of all things'.

The idea that 'the proper study of Mankind is Man'², which in Barth's view expressed 'the conscious or unconscious idea of the whole century in its pursuit of science'³, implied not so much the egotism of a humankind bent only on the study of itself, as the absolutism of a humankind convinced that nothing at all might be studied save through the medium of human understanding. It was man who determined how the world might be changed, how God must reveal himself, and how his own nature might be improved. The egotist sees himself as the universe; the absolutist sees himself as the centre of the universe. It was the latter failing that characterised the eighteenth century, and the fact that two-thirds of his book on Protestant theology in the nineteenth century is concerned with this view of the eighteenth may be taken to illustrate that for Barth this failing is decisive for the whole course of modern theology.

Barth paints a comprehensive picture of the eighteenth century under this spell of 'absolutism', of a belief in the power of man to determine his relation to nature, society and God. The natural world in the age of Enlightenment is not only seen to be capable of being understood, but of being organised and even created. The tame constructions of the landscape gardener, with planned gardens cut according to human design, represent in their own way the sense of power not only to control, but to create, a natural environment, which followed from giant strides in the direction of understanding it. The popularity of travel books and atlases show not merely a chance fad but a new sense of man's power to search out and conquer the world around him. The esteemed figure of popular imagination is Robinson

Crusoe, the man who can be thrown onto his own resources in the face of nature, and not only survive but compel nature to be his servant.

The same confidence which prevailed with respect to the natural world, prevailed with respect to the social and political world. Here too man must learn that he is master of his own destiny. He is not bound to take his place in an existing social order determined by tradition and sanctified by the Divine Right of Kings; his reason may order a rational society as it may order the natural world around him. Barth illustrates this at both the 'micro' and the 'macro' level. At the former, he identifies the development of guilds, freemasons' societies, and even the popularity of the coffee-houses in which political questions were discussed and leading figures satirised, as evidence of the conviction that human community, like its natural counterpart, could be ordered by man, who did not merely inherit the 'given' order of family or nation into which he was born, but could actually create a society for himself, albeit at the relatively insignificant level of a club. On the 'macro' level were the political theorists, impatient of the influence of tradition and superstition upon the state, who sought to order society on a ground of rational order rather than inherited tradition, and whose efforts culminated in the French Revolution of 1789. Theirs was not primarily the motivation of compassion or concern for the poor; nor did they believe in any underlying social and economic forces beyond the control of man which ultimately decided his political destiny, as in the later philosophy associated with Marx. Fired more by impatience with an order bound by tradition, than by anger at a society designed to benefit its capitalist élite, they had no sense of an underlying materialist dynamic which might remove human reason from its position as the potential disposer of the social order. They set reason against superstition rather than proletariat against capitalist. They did not sense social forces beyond human control at work in resolving an

inevitable dialectic, but only social forces bolstered by ignorance which must fall as soon as human reason became the instrument of man's power to determine his own social destiny. With this went a confidence in their ability to understand man; a physical nature ordered according to laws of mathematics and science was the first step; a moral nature of man similarly ordered and contained within a social arrangement in which it would be designed to function harmoniously, was the second.

Barth extends his thesis even to the arts. Art in the enlightenment period, Barth feels, is designed more to prove human mastery and proficiency than to lead man into awareness of forces over which he has no power, and that remind him of the mystery of life. The musicians of the period 'subject sound to laws', although Barth cannot allow his favourite Mozart not to transcend this description. So do the sculptors, who reveal in the 'pliability' of plaster its essential manoeuvrability by man. The painters describe what man has fashioned, rather than the depths of a nature he can only wonder at; landscapes take preference over natural settings. Gardens are painted rather than waterfalls. The artists of the period are craftsmen rather than creators. They do not respect the material they hew into shape; they only want to demonstrate their power over it. Similarly, the philosophy of the period is not a metaphysical discussion of the limits to man's knowledge or understanding; it is more a 'practical teaching on life', instruction on how to be successful men of the world.

There is an obvious simplification in the broad, generalising sweep of Barth's survey, although it is immediately apparent from the scope of the work that those who regard Barth as a 'narrow theologian' have not read him comprehensively. Yet his survey succeeds very well in bringing together a number of artistic, intellectual and religious developments of the period, and in suggesting that they all in their various ways express that principle of an 'absolutism of man' which was to determine the course of nineteenth century theology as well as its own, and which lay behind what Barth regards as many of the 'heresies'

of the modern age. It is Barth's argument that the Enlightenment studied all things from the perspective of man's power to order and direct them; man demonstrated his power over nature, his power over the instruments of artistic accomplishment, his power over his social environment, and finally his power over God. He did not, of course, believe that he could direct God in the way that he might believe himself capable of directing nature. But he believed that he could direct the way in which God made Himself known to him, either by the claim that He must be assessed by human reason or that he must fire the human heart.

It is customary to see in the Pietism of the Enlightenment period a reaction to its Rationalism, to talk about a movement of the heart, an 'experienced' religion, that moved in a precisely opposite direction to the 'dry' and 'formal' religion of the head that developed out of the Protestant reformation in the 'Protestant Scholasticism' or 'Protestant Orthodoxy' of the seventeenth century. In England this is habitually seen in terms of the movement towards a purely 'natural' religion, in Deism, which is commonly taken to have provoked a reaction towards a more 'emotional', 'experienced' faith in the Wesleyan movement of the eighteenth century. Barth, however, sees in Rationalism and Pietism two sides of the same coin.⁵ Both movements seek to encompass God, the one with the head and the other with the heart. Rationalism makes human reason the criterion for determining God's existence and nature; Pietism, Barth claims, tends to make human emotion or religious experience the criterion. In both cases, religious belief follows from the capacity of God to satisfy certain demands made of Him by man, in the one case that He be intellectually intelligible and satisfy man's natural reason, and in the other that He be emotionally satisfying, and satisfy man's natural feelings. In either case, be it head or heart, man remains the 'measure'.

Karl Barth saw in the theology of the Enlightenment an error which he regarded as fundamental, that of man's believing that he could 'exercise

control' over God by means of determining the form in which God may make himself known. Barth's consciousness of this, to him crucial, failing in man's theological thinking is the linchpin of his debate with Brunner,⁶ at the root of his hostility to a 'natural theology' which he identifies as the cardinal error of Roman Catholicism,⁷ and allows him to defend Anselm's opologetic in the *Proslogion* in terms of the divinely-given rationality of faith.⁸ The space he gives to the eighteenth century in the work on *Protestant Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, illustrates the conviction that the errors of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries derive from those of the Enlightenment. The First World War might have been the immediate occasion of Barth's break with 'liberal theology', but his later reflection showed that what he wished to oppose had roots, in his view, which lay further back than the liberal theologians of the nineteenth century.

It is beyond the scope of this study to consider how far Barth's analysis of the 'Weltanschauung' of the Enlightenment accords with the view of other writers of the period. However, in one important respect we may comment upon Barth's work in the light of other histories of the Enlightenment. One development which is not made entirely clear in Barth's book, is that the very methodology of investigating different areas of knowledge, in each of which Barth believes that a certain overreaching self-confidence of man may be discerned, is itself a product of Enlightenment thinking. In other words, the consideration which Barth gives to art, natural science, politics and so forth, as fields of knowledge separate from theology, is a consideration which could only be made in the light of the Enlightenment, when these other disciplines began to withdraw from the domination and tutelage of traditional metaphysics and theology.

This crucial development associated with the eighteenth century is described by Ernst Cassirer as follows:

That which formerly had established other concepts (the concept of God) now moves into the position of that which is to be established, and that which hitherto had justified other concepts, now finds itself in the position of a concept which requires justification. (10)

Barth considers an 'absolutism' of confidence in the power of human achievement in different areas of knowledge, in the exercise of control over the means of expression in art, over natural forces in science, over social forces in politics, and a determination to find the support for such capacities in religion. He finds that the utilitarianism of rationalism does not do real justice to human nature, which contains elements of sheer resistance to designs for individual and social improvement; and that the mystery of the transcendent is lost in an art determined only to display its ability, or a religion determined only to make its belief in God an instrument of progress, and to display in its own heart and head the fruits of revelation. But when he examines the 'absolutism' of the Enlightenment in these terms he does not make explicit that the very separation of disciplines which he assumes was only achieved by it.

Barth cites a number of examples, from works of eighteenth century theology, which demonstrate the desire to measure theological beliefs according to extra-theological principles.¹¹ Johannes Franz Buddeus (1660-1727) thinks that human reason is capable of distinguishing between true and false revelation.¹² Christoph Matthias Pfaff (1686-1720) is quoted as saying that 'No revelation is true unless it accords with the light of nature and extends it'.¹³ Johann Salomon Semler (1725-1791) is 'resolved to unite Christianity with his own conception of morality',¹⁴ and in terms of the 'criterion of moral usefulness' sets out to question the authority of the biblical canon. In these and the other examples which Barth gives, we see what in the light of Cassirer's remarks may be understood as the natural tendency of an age, newly conscious of the independence other disciplines have of theology, to judge theological ideas according to the principles of these other fields of knowledge.

A philosophy whose actions do not derive from theology will naturally attempt to judge the Christian revelation according to the principles of reason; a system of ethics which does not see itself as founded upon the commandments of God will judge the authority of the biblical record, which has transmitted those commandments, according to moral principles. In this sense, the theologians of the eighteenth century are doing no more than attempt to come to terms with the independence of other disciplines from theology: they are not necessarily trying to 'reduce' or 'convert' theology to these other disciplines.

When Barth asks the rhetorical question: 'what sort of a Christianity was it that people needed and sought and therefore also found to fulfil this purpose?' His answer was that the religious writers of the Enlightenment had to present 'a Christianity that is understood and affirmed by man in accordance with his capacity'.¹⁵ The 'natural' or 'reasonable' Christianity, which these thinkers described, was a Christianity that encouraged and supported man's 'will for Form' in nature and society, his new found confidence in his own powers. The Christianity 'of the bourgeois man' is one that underlies his self-confidence and self-importance: the doctrines which it sets aside are those which cannot play this role. Thus 'it is difficult and even impossible to relate the patristic doctrine of the Trinity to the improvement of life that is to be brought about by man himself ... That doctrine clearly draws attention, rather, to a being and action of God in himself. For that reason it is contestable'. Similarly, 'the doctrine of the two natures in Christ does not talk of Christ as one who can be a teacher and a model and therefore an instrument of the improvement of life that we are to bring out by ourselves It is therefore suspect'. The doctrine of Christ's vicarious satisfaction, and in connection with this that of justification through faith in the righteousness of Christ 'which is alien to us and merely reckoned to our account', is seen as a doctrine which 'makes men rotten and wanton',

and is therefore 'not only suspect but reprehensible'. The doubts and opposition of religious thinkers in the eighteenth century, concerning doctrines such as the Trinity, the Person of Christ, Justification and the Atonement, are interpreted by Barth in accordance with his conviction that the 'Age of Reason', as an age of human 'power, capacity and self-sufficiency', sought to accept only those theological principles capable of being harnessed to a rational utilitarianism based on belief in man's power and duty to order his rational and social environment. There is nothing in the passage cited from Barth on possible criticism of the doctrines of the Trinity or the Person of Christ, when viewed from the perspective of principles of reason no longer required to base their understanding upon given theological truths. The threat to certain orthodox Christian beliefs derives, in Barth's presentation, not from their being open to criticism from disciplines which have won their autonomy from theology, but from the grandiose assurance of eighteenth century man that religion must be the divine sanctioning of his natural powers.

There is undoubtedly truth in Barth's remarks. The view that the hostility of the Enlightenment to orthodox Christianity was 'moral' rather than 'intellectual', for instance, and that it was more concerned with purging religion of beliefs that had made it a socially divisive force in the 'religious wars' of the past, than with the question of its inherent intelligibility, is one that is frequently made in works on the period.¹⁶ But the point made by Cassirer is important too. One of the reasons why the Enlightenment thought in terms of making religion an instrument of social improvement was that it had experienced the first steps of 'secularisation', through which it had learnt to assess theological ideas as part of a discipline which must not consider itself the foundation of all others.

Furthermore, if Barth himself had been concerned only with the profound complacency and bourgeois self-confidence of the Enlightenment

period, he would simply have confirmed the opinions of those thinkers who exposed such complacency and undermine such confidence. This process is well noted in the case of English Deism, whose arguments were effectively turned against themselves by David Hume, and a belief in the reasonableness of man shown to be profoundly unreasonable:

The more penetrating our knowledge of the nature of man
and the more accurate our description of this nature,
the more it loses the appearance of rationality and order. (17)

Above all, despite his sharing in certain respects the outlook of the Enlightenment, the belief that man had discovered an unlimited capacity to know and to order his natural and social environment was challenged by Immanuel Kant. It was Kant who pointed out that even as 'the measure of all things' there were strict self-imposed limits to man's knowledge of reality, and who evinced in many respects a profound scepticism concerning man's capacity for moral and social improvement.

For Barth, however, Kant's criticisms of the Enlightenment were not radical enough. Indeed in an essay of 1784, 'Was ist Aufklärung?' (What is Enlightenment?) Kant had declared with approval that the Enlightenment represented man's emergence from 'a self-inflicted state of minority' in which he had been unprepared to use his understanding without the guidance of other authorities. Kant remarked approvingly: 'Habe Mut, dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen, ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung. (Have the courage to make use of your own understanding, is therefore the watchword of the Enlightenment.)'¹⁸

Kant's challenge to the Enlightenment was not in any sense a challenge to the use of reason, which he enthusiastically supports in this essay, but lay in his exposure of the limitations inherent in that use. Barth neatly characterises Kant as a figure in whom the eighteenth century 'affirmed itself in its limitations': 'affirmed itself', because he joined with it in its enthusiasm for reason, but 'in its limitations', because Kant drew out the limited capacity even of an unfettered reason.

In his monumental *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant demanded that the understanding act as a judge interrogating nature, rather than as a spectator passively observing it. Yet at the same time he demonstrated that the very confidence of human understanding was based upon the inaccessibility to it of things as they exist 'an sich' - in themselves, apart from their being observed and understood. The understanding acted as the determinant of the form in which reality appeared to man, but at the same time it could for that reason claim no access to reality as it exists 'in itself'. It was as if the demand that things present themselves to man's understanding had to be accompanied by the concession that they could never present themselves in their true light. The result was a confidence in the use of the understanding combined with a narrowing of its range, and an admission of what it could not, in principle, know.

Kant's own philosophy of religion, Barth argues, described in *Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der blossen Vernunft* (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*), seeks to 'assess religion as a phenomenon of reason, as a cultural manifestation';¹⁹ this is not to imply that 'religion exists solely within the limits of reason'²⁰ but it does imply that it is solely within the limits of reason that religion may be understood. The self-examination of reason in Kant's first critique provides the criteria by means of which the philosophy of religion examines its subject-matter. Thus man 'the measure of all things' becomes 'the measure of religion too: of its practical and theoretical possibilities, and also, in particular, as God's measure'.²¹

For Barth reason became the measure of all things in Kant, even if he showed at the same time that not all things could be known by it. It became the measure of all things which man could know. The confidence of the Enlightenment was undermined by Kant only in the fulfilment of the 'secularisation' which it had brought about: uncrowning the confidence of the eighteenth century, Kant had crowned its principles.

Theology no longer supplied the principles according to which reality was to be understood, but was itself subject to assessment by criteria which considered themselves, whether or not they ever could be in reality, to be independent of theological reasoning. The real nature of 'ein Gelöstes', a 'detached' man of the Enlightenment with a belief in the 'absolutism' of human capacity, is now clear. He does not necessarily have faith in the ability of individuals or societies to perfect themselves, or of reason to know reality. What he does, however, believe, is that he may know himself and his world apart from his knowledge of God. In his knowledge of himself as artist, lawyer, scientist, moral being or social animal, he is separated from his knowledge of himself in relation to God. He enquires about his theological beliefs from a new-found 'secular' perspective, from which theology appears to be something which he may describe and criticise from principles which he derives from outside theology itself.

As soon as he begins to understand himself and his environment apart from his understanding of God, however, man finds himself and his world on the one hand, and God on the other, to be two separate realities confronting one another. Here lies the real ground of Barth's concern: he does not dwell at length upon the religious thought of the eighteenth century in order to question its optimism and self-confidence, but in order to discover there the beginnings of a process of 'secularisation' upon which the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were to build. Indeed we find in Barth's own works a certain tone of optimism and self-confidence: but ineradicably built upon the principle that apart from his knowledge of God, a knowledge given by God himself, man could have no true understanding of himself or his world. An intellectual scepticism, and a pessimism about man's moral and social potential, were not enough for Barth: his concern was to reverse a process of 'secularisation' in which sceptics and pessimists, as well as those confident in the intellectual and moral powers of man, all alike concurred.

The lectures on the Enlightenment were delivered by Barth in the light of the theological methodology outlined in *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, which we have examined in chapter four. That work, certainly, sought to separate the source of theological understanding from that of other forms of human knowledge. Yet Barth sought at the same time to 'include' man's 'secular' knowledge within the ambit of an all-embracing theological given, in which there was no understanding of man or of the world around him without a prior knowledge of God. That the Enlightenment was too 'optimistic' about man was hardly Karl Barth's main complaint against it, and, as we have seen, he cannot be classed with those, like Kant and Hume, whose scepticism and lack of confidence in human capacity was an instrumental force in challenging some of the most important assumptions of the period. For Barth, the real challenge of the Enlightenment was that of a 'world coming of age',²² learning to understand itself in moral, political, legal and scientific terms apart from any theological self-understanding, and thereby learning in turn that these 'autonomous' disciplines supplied principles of their own from the perspective of which theological doctrines might be criticised. This 'maturity' the Enlightenment and its critics both possessed: and against both Barth had to make his stand, resolving to integrate man and his knowledge of himself into God and the knowledge of Him in revelation. To this process of 'integration' we turn in the next two chapters.

Notes on Chapter Five

1. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, (translation of Barth, *Die Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*).
- 1a. *Ibid.*, p.19 (ET, p.36).
2. Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man*:
 Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
 The proper study of Mankind is Man.
 Yet Pope's *Essay* is a satire against human pretentions. The poet also writes:
 So, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule -
 Then drop into thyself, and be a fool.
3. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, p.40.
4. *Ibid.*, pp.33ff.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.80ff., esp. pp.84-5.
6. Barth, *Nein! Antwort an Emil Brunner*, (*Theologische Existenz Heute*, No. 14).
7. Barth, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur Kirchlichen Dogmatik*.
8. Barth, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum. Anselms Beweis der Existenz Gottes*.
9. It should be noted that Barth's *Protestantische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert*, published in 1947, was based on a series of lectures given at the University of Bonn, to which Barth moved in 1930. His ideas on the Enlightenment were therefore developing at precisely the time when the methodology upon which Barth would proceed in the *Church Dogmatics* was being sharpened by his study of Anselm, and his relation to Brunner and Roman Catholicism.
10. Cassirer, E., *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p.159.
11. Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, pp. 136ff.
12. *Ibid.*, p.142.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 144.
14. *Ibid.*, p.169.
15. *Ibid.*, p.105. See pp.105-6 for the discussion that follows in my text.
16. See, e.g., A.C. McGiffert, *Protestant Thought before Kant*, ch. x : Rationalism; N. Hampson, *The Enlightenment*.
17. Quoted in Cassirer, *op. cit.*, p.179.
18. Quoted in Barth, *op. cit.*, p.266.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 279.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 280.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
22. A phrase associated in particular with Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whose reaction to the Enlightenment, in his last thoughts from prison, was very different to Barth's; see chapter six, p.

CHAPTER SIX

The Problem of 'Integrating Man into God'

1. The Methodology of Grace

It was his 'methodology of grace' which enabled Barth to outflank Brunner in their debate over 'natural theology'.¹ This work is to be seen as something of a 'methodological manifesto' for the *Church Dogmatics*, although, as we have noted, Barth himself insisted that it was his book on Anselm which was of primary importance in this respect.²

The arguments between Barth and Emil Brunner over the nature and possibility of a 'natural theology' determined that their common commitment to the 'primacy of revelation' did not overcome important differences between them.³ It was Brunner's conviction, that whilst man may not 'exercise control' over God's self-revelation, there must nevertheless be within him a 'passive capacity' to receive it, an 'Offenbarungsmächtigkeit' or capacity for revelation.⁴ Brunner insisted upon a point of contact in man with the divine grace of revelation in Christ, a 'purely formal capacity of being addressed' (Wortmächtigkeit)⁵ by God, which distinguished man as the object of revelation from lesser forms of life that were incapable of receiving it.

Barth, however, firmly rejected the idea of a 'point of contact' (Anknüpfungspunkt) between man and God. In his view there was in man no 'aptitude for the revelation of God'.⁶ He even denied that man had the 'negative aptitude' of a capacity to despair of the possibility of revelation, which might in a negative way prepare him to receive it, a view identified by Barth with his own outlook in the early commentary on *Romans*.⁷ The revelation of God is for Barth a 'miracle of grace', created in man irrespective of his natural human capacity to receive it. Barth extracts two biblical quotations from their contexts - Mary's remark to the angel Gabriel: 'How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?', and the disciples' remark in the storm on the lake to Jesus:

'Master, knowest thou not that we perish?' - in order to 'illustrate' that God's revelation is completely unattuned to (Barth would say 'unconstrained by') any capacity of man to receive it.⁸ Hence its appearance as sheerly 'miraculous' to human beings who can make no sense of their being able to receive it.

Man's nature, corrupted by sin, has no 'capacity for repair' by which to be able to receive the healing work of Christ. There is, for Barth, no question of a 'capacity for repair' on man's part, because the 'repair' is a miracle performed on man by which he becomes - literally! - a new man. Thus Barth's taunt that Brunner does not understand 2 Corinthians 5:17, 'If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation'.⁹ What must be made clear, is that for Barth the saving revelation of Christ which heals man's sinful nature and makes him a 'new man', a 'new creation', is a work of renewal performed upon him to which he offers no contribution, either by active collaboration or passive receptivity. He is not even able, by despairing of himself and his capacity ever to receive renewal, to prepare himself by self-condemnation for God's healing work of salvation upon him. For Barth there is in man, as the receiver of revelation, neither a natural capacity to receive the Word of God, nor a 'supernatural capacity', as some modern Roman Catholic theologians have argued.¹⁰ God's revelation is a 'donum gratiae' or gift of grace which encounters no capacity in man to accept it, but rather itself 'creates' such a capacity.

This saving revelation creates its own 'capacity to be received' in man, a capacity which is to be identified with the work of the Holy Spirit in him:

The Holy Ghost, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is therefore revealed to be God, does not stand in need of any point of contact but that which he himself creates. (11)

It is notable that the discussion of man's sin and lack of 'capacity for repair' in the light of the Fall, is assimilated in Barth's argument to the discussion of man's lack of aptitude for revelation.

There is a clear parallel between the two, suggesting that Barth's theology might be seen in terms of a reworking of Reformation issues for the twentieth century.¹² The burning issue has become, not so much whether man may be saved but whether he may know God. The arguments of the Protestant Reformers concerning a salvation to be achieved 'beyond' the moral capacity of man, are transposed into arguments concerning a knowledge of God to be achieved beyond the 'intellectual' capacity of man.¹³ Barth transforms the 'imputed justification' of certain Reformers into an 'imputed knowledge of God'. Indeed, the whole of the nineteenth century for Barth partakes of an intellectual equivalent of the process of attempted moral self-justification from which Luther eventually broke free. The 'work of Christ' in giving man salvation 'beyond himself' becomes an all-embracing idea which includes the achievement of a knowledge of God beyond the limits of the human understanding, and the stick which Luther used in order to beat a mediaeval 'theology of works' becomes, in the hands of Barth, a stick with which to beat Kant and Schleiermacher. Barth provides a solution for the Nietzschean 'Angst' of the early twentieth-century man despairing of God's existence, in the way that the Reformers provided a solution for the 'Angst' of the early sixteenth century before a just God who would condemn man for failing to obey his will.¹⁴

The argument of Barth concerning man's sin and its link to a corruption of his nature and of its 'capacity for repair', then, is connected with his perception of the possibility of knowledge of God. It is associated with his opposition to a 'Catholic' doctrine of the 'analogia entis', and with his rejection of a 'natural theology'. In his argument he 'outflanks' Brunner, in the sense that whilst both agreed that there could be no knowledge of God save through Jesus Christ, Barth insisted that this knowledge presumed no prior capacity to receive it in man, and that man had no innate potentiality for accepting revelation which could 'tune in' to the Word of God like a wireless

receiving airwaves (a metaphor used by Brunner). Rather, for Barth even the capacity to receive and understand that Word was created 'in' man by God.

It was on this question of the capacity to receive revelation that Barth and Brunner clashed in their interpretation of the Reformers. Brunner insisted that the Reformers nowhere denied a 'theologia naturalis'. They gave it a limited but significant role, in his opinion. Brunner quoted Calvin to the effect that from nature we know the 'hands and feet' but not the 'heart', of God, that revelation in Scripture complements and clarifies God's revelation in nature, acting like an alarm call to waken a sleeping man who remains undisturbed by the 'natural' noises around him, and that man possesses, even after the Fall, a 'remnant' of the 'imago Dei' in which he was created. Man's conscience and inclination towards truth, Brunner cites Calvin as saying, is a 'natural light' (Lumen Naturale), a natural morality, which, like a natural theology, can be perfected in Christ alone.¹⁵ For Brunner, Calvin in fact restored a balance which Luther, like Barth, had threatened, namely the role of a natural theology in reflecting a natural capacity in man for goodness and for understanding God, although such a capacity was insufficient for salvation, a point upon which all the Reformers were in full agreement.

For Barth, however, Brunner's emphasis upon what Reformation historians might see as the humanist influence upon Calvin's theology, was an unacceptable compromising of the true heritage of the Reformation. Brunner had interpreted the Reformers in such a way as to open them up to precisely the sort of criticism which Barth was levelling at Roman Catholic theology.¹⁶ Barth's view of the Reformers was that they spoke of a 'natural theology' only in the light of the revelation of God in Christ, and not in any sense as a 'preparation' or 'capacity' for receiving that revelation. That giving of revelation was, as we have seen, to be understood as a 'miracle' in which man's natural power of

receiving was transcended, but this does not, Barth avers, exclude the sort of descriptions offered by Calvin of man's natural capacity for goodness and truth, so long as this capacity is seen to arise out of God's revelation in Christ, rather than exist independently of that revelation as a criterion by which to judge or accept it. Brunner found in the Protestant Reformers evidence that a 'natural theology', whilst it could not give man the means of salvation, did give the means of appropriating and receiving revelation. Barth found in the Protestant Reformers evidence that what Brunner read as indicative of a 'natural theology' arose in the light of, and not as preparation for, a 'revealed theology'. In this sense the Reformers could be justified in talking of a 'natural theology', in the way that talk of analogy was justified, once it was established that this 'natural theology' arose out of and within the ambit of God's revelation.¹⁷ It could never exist independently of the latter as a human standard by which to measure it. Prior to the acceptance of faith by the Christian, Barth insisted, he has no capacity for the reception of revelation, and the description of that capacity in the Protestant Reformers must be understood as a capacity arising out of the acceptance of faith.

2. The Problem of Analogy in Karl Barth's Thought

In *Natural Theology* Karl Barth, having remarked that the Holy Ghost

does not stand in need of any point of contact but that which he himself creates (bedarf keines Anknüpfungspunktes als dessen, den er selber setzt)

continues:

Only retrospectively (nur rückwärtsblickend) is it possible to reflect on the way in which he "makes contact" (Anknüpfen) with man, and this retrospect (Rückblick) will ever be a retrospect upon a miracle (Wunder). (18)

This comment of Barth precisely indicates the nature of analogy within his 'system', namely as 'retrospective', in other words as

derivative from revelation rather than as conditioning it. Once this is accepted, the use of analogy is justified. It is an 'analogy of faith' which grows out of revelation, rather than an 'analogy of being' which seeks to determine it.

A discussion of God which bears out this approach to analogy may be found in the *Church Dogmatics*, Volume 2, Part 1. Barth insists that in speaking of God the use of analogy is unavoidable:

But the object itself - God's truth in his revelation as the basis of the veracity of our knowledge of God - does not leave us any option but to resort to this concept. (My emphasis). (19)

How, then, may we use concepts of the human understanding with respect to the transcendent God? We must understand, first of all, that our concepts are really His.²⁰ He posits Himself as a comprehensible object²¹, and in so doing releases us to use concepts which we must understand firstly and properly to refer to Him. Hence when²² we use the terms 'Father', 'Son', 'Patience' or 'Love' of God, we use terms that God 'places at our disposal' in His revelation, whose original truth lies in their reference to Him. We are not attempting to 'extend' the meaning of terms whose primary reference is to our experience, but rather, Barth claims, we are being given by God the capacity to use those terms in their proper and original sense.

Barth's formulation bears comparison with the concept of an 'analogy of attribution', whereby two objects have a quality in common which makes them analogous, but one object possesses the quality in dependence upon the other. One object is the cause of the quality in the other. If God and man are both described as 'good', that is to say that the goodness of man is caused in him by God. In other words, 'goodness' does not belong to the intrinsic nature of the creature, but to the creature in its relation to the Creator - the analogy does not belong to the analogate 'inwardly', but only in its relationship to the analogans²³. To this extent Barth bears out Quenstedt's formulation of the analogia attributionis.²⁴

The obvious difficulty with the 'analogy of attribution' is that apparently it:

.... tells us nothing we did not know before: it merely tells us that whatever is capable of producing an effect may have applied to it ("virtually") the term properly signifying that effect thanks solely to the fact that it is able to produce that effect. In other words, whatever can produce an effect can produce an effect! Such an analogy can tell us nothing concerning God which theists had not accepted beforehand - that he is the cause of finite phenomena. (25)

However, Barth 'transcends' this problem of the analogy telling us 'nothing that we did not know before' by insisting that our use of analogical language is the result of God's active self-disclosure, so that on the basis of revelation we may know that in using concepts to refer to Him we are in fact using them in their proper sense, rather than 'taking them where they may not go'. Since, on the basis of His revelation, our surest use of language must be in reference to Himself, it is in fact when we use such words as 'father' and 'son' in a derivative sense to refer to our own experience, that we may have doubts concerning the appropriateness of our language! Such an argument recalls that of Barth against Descartes in Volume 3, Part 1 of the *Church Dogmatics*²⁶, where Barth argues that Descartes' 'proofs' of the existence of God in the third and fifth of his Meditations proceed in the wrong direction by grounding his assurance of God's existence in his assurance of his own existence as a thinking being - cogito, ergo sum - rather than grounding his assurance of his own existence in his assurance of the existence of God. The view of analogy in II 1, claiming that our language about our everyday experience is effectively grounded in the assurance of the appropriateness of our concepts in referring in their 'proper' sense to God, offers a parallel argument.

The view in II 1 and III 1 of human self-understanding and self-expression grounded in the understanding of God, and of 'human' concepts as 'divine' ideas which properly refer to divine, rather than human, being, reflects the 'absorption' of man into God which this chapter

discusses and criticises. One obvious difficulty is that it might appear to compromise the 'mystery' and 'transcendence' of God to claim that 'human' language is perceived by God's grace to be 'divine' language referring properly to Himself. It is as if man through God's self-disclosure may 'learn the language' by which God understands Himself, and thereby see God as God sees Himself! Hence Barth's argument in II 1 is ambiguous. On the one hand, words are given what by their nature they cannot have -reference to God. In this sense, words are 'raised from the dead',²⁸ when used to refer to God, and no direct comprehension of God by man can be claimed from the use of such concepts, even in what is said to be their 'original and proper' sense. On the other hand, the claim that we use words improperly within the confines of what is appropriate to us²⁹, and that their true reference is to God, only makes sense if we understand by that remark that the meaning of those words is primarily established when they are used of God, and that therefore we first know what we are saying in using them when we use them of God. If we used those words 'properly' only of God, and yet did not understand 'how' we used them 'properly' of Him, then what sense would it make to say that we 'used' them? To use a word in its proper sense must entail to understand its meaning: therefore Barth cannot argue that we correctly 'use' words to apply to God through His grace, and not admit that we understand what they mean when used of Him. Through God, he must be saying, we understand God.

This is borne out if we look at what Barth means by the 'hiddenness' of God in II 1. He argues³⁰ that the 'hiddenness' of God defines the fact that we know God not from our own capacity but from God's grace. The confession of God's hiddenness³¹ is to be identified with the confession of God's revelation as the beginning of man's knowledge of God. This interpretation of 'hiddenness', however, merely makes the point that we learn of God from God, not that there are limits to what we may learn of Him. Indeed Barth claims³² that the meaning of the

limit imposed upon our terms by the use of analogy is that we know God only through His grace, an argument which in effect implies no limit upon our knowledge of God arising from the concepts themselves.

The argument of this chapter and chapter 7, that in Barth's theology man is integrated so closely into the being of God that there is a 'reduction' of man to God, of anthropology to theology in precise antithesis to the reductive tendencies claimed by Barth to exist in the nineteenth century, is illustrated from this section of the *Church Dogmatics*. The logic of Barth's argument is that the 'limitation' upon man's knowledge of God entailed by his use of analogical language lies entirely in the fact that he is dependent upon God for such knowledge. It implies no limitation upon the knowledge itself arising from the limited power of human understanding, expressed through language, to make sense of God. The constraints of the human intellect are effectively bypassed in the knowledge of God that is based upon revelation (see chapter 5), a knowledge in which man learns to use words 'in their proper sense', to refer to their proper object. Man is admitted to God's knowledge of God, using God's language to refer to its proper object, God, rather than in an improper, strained manner to refer to 'human' reality, which man had taken to be the proper reference of his concepts when he had supposed them indeed to be 'his'. In fact, Barth's argument makes any need for 'indirect' language about God unnecessary; the indirectness of his language arises only when he refers to man. Understanding himself through his understanding of ^{God},³³ he uses language properly employed in speaking of God to apply - indirectly - to himself and his natural experience. He looks out from a divine reality into which he has been admitted by God's grace in order to make sense of the human.

The form of Barth's argument is to appropriate human realities, and present them as divine - in other words, his is a 'theology of alienation'. The concepts of 'father', 'son' - and even of 'arm' and

'mouth' - 'declare their truth only in the place where the reference is to the arm and mouth of God, His deeds and words'.³⁴ In reality, we learn of arms and mouths by observing them in fellow-creatures, but Barth's Platonic argument is that we understand them through understanding the nature of their divine 'original'. Analogy, rather than representing a speculation from human experience to the nature of God, is rather a speculation from a God-given 'divine' experience to the nature of man. What is ordinarily conceived of as a movement of thought and language from man to God, is presented by Barth as a movement of thought and language from God to man. However, the content of this knowledge of God, from which the knowledge of man is derived, appears to be that of human reality alienated from its proper condition. An anthropomorphic description of God, built up out of arms and mouths in the best tradition of idolatry, is defended on the grounds that 'arm' and 'mouth' properly belong to God, and only derivatively and improperly to man! Barth fails, in this respect, to substantiate the otherness and transcendence of God.

A doctrine of analogy which rests entirely upon the claim that God is the source of man's knowledge of Him, fails to concern itself with what would seem to be the central point of the doctrine, namely the limitations inherent in language itself, and implicitly in the understanding expressed in language, when talking of God. It is not clear to us that the 'analogia gratiae' or 'analogia fidei' is in fact a doctrine of analogy, since its primary concern is with the source of man's understanding of God, rather than with the indirect nature of that understanding. An exploration of the problems inherent in the indirect way in which man must try to refer to the nature of a reality other to himself requires a commitment to that otherness. In Barth's theology human language is 'taken into', and re-expressed as, divine in such a way that the need for an analogical description of that which remains effectively opaque to human understanding is, we believe, denied. Man

is so drawn into the being of God by God that a use of analogy is redundant: this is an implication of the 'theological constriction' which we attempt to outline at the end of this chapter.

In the discussion between Barth and Brunner on the nature of revelation and the place of a 'natural theology', the familiar theme of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* re-emerges, namely the insistence that our knowledge of God derives directly from God Himself in a way that renders our natural powers of understanding irrelevant, whether in a passive or an active capacity, to the attainment of such knowledge. But in the debate with Brunner it becomes clearer what we mean by a 'rebaptising' of man's natural powers within the context of an all-embracing revelation, to which we alluded in chapters three to five. In *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, we argued, an 'infinite qualitative distinction' originally conceived in ontological terms between two divine and human spheres, is re-expressed in epistemological terms as a distinction between the reasoning of faith and the reasoning of our natural powers of understanding. But we also saw that Barth couldn't leave these natural powers out of account altogether. He couldn't oppose the 'analogia entis', for instance, by refusing to talk about analogy at all. Rather, he sought to find a way of justifying analogical language about God without in any way presenting it as a means by which man's natural powers of reason either understood God or prepared themselves to receive his self-disclosure.³⁵ The solution was to talk in terms of an 'analogia fidei' - analogy of faith - rather than an analogy of being;³⁶ the 'analogy of faith' represented a use of human ideas about God which may arise only in the light of the reality of God's self-revelation. It is neither a substitute for that revelation, nor does it play any part in its welcome. It is in fact something which that revelation itself creates. By 'rebaptising', as it were, the language of analogy within the context of the understanding of faith, Barth appears to be allowing a role for

natural reason after all, but one which exists only 'inside', and not as the external assessor of, the understanding of faith.

This development in Barth's thought is clearly shown in the course of the debate with Brunner. The aspects of a 'natural theology' which point to a knowledge of God - inchoate and insufficient for salvation as they may be - apart from revelation, according to the view of Brunner, are transposed by Barth into aspects which exist only within revelation. The claim is that the 'natural knowledge' of God spoken of by the Reformers itself arises out of the gift of revelation, rather than preparing man to receive that gift. Indeed, Barth claims that were this not the case there would have been no fundamental disagreement between the Protestant Reformers and the Roman Catholic Church, since the latter was by no means as 'Pelagian', in Barth's view, as it was often understood to have been,²² and would never have spoken to man as capable of achieving salvation without the prevenient grace of God. The Protestant Reformers had a fundamental disagreement with Catholicism, Barth maintained, not over whether man could achieve his own salvation, but over the question of whether the grace of God awoke powers of response innate in man or created those powers from within itself - in other words, had the Reformers argued as Brunner believed they had done, then they would not have had any real disagreement with the Roman Catholic Church!

In a sense, then, Barth does not, in his debate with Brunner, deny a 'natural theology'.³⁸ What he denies is a 'natural theology' that is conceived to exist independently of God's self-revelation, whether as a substitute for the latter or as a preparation for it and standard by which to adjudge it. A 'natural theology' arises out of revelation itself, as part of the theological grammar about God which revelation creates. It employs the natural powers of human reason, but only as ordered in the light of, and on the basis of the revelation of God in His Word. The exclusion of natural reason from the understanding of faith is in this argument 'aufgehoben' - that is to say, using the word

in its technical Hegelian sense - the two are reconciled with the natural reason affirmed at a 'higher level' within the understanding of faith. Such a 'rebaptism' of natural reason makes it, of course, entirely subservient to the demands of revelation: it is still quite impossible to argue that man's natural reason is entitled to 'judge' or 'assess' the claim of revelation, of what is created in man directly by God's Word mediated to him through the Holy Spirit. Rather, the natural reason is 'recreated' by God's Word to operate within the parameters of revelation set up by that Word itself: it is affirmed from within revelation rather than excluded from it. It is the potential 'political opponent' of revelation who is bought by the offer of minor office, where it is accorded honour without power. It is not divided from the understanding of faith, but absorbed within it. It can never be the understanding of faith, but neither can it be said to be rejected by it.

Perhaps this epistemological transformation in Barth's thought requires us to take seriously the view that despite lack of overt reference to him in his magnum opus, Barth owes much, in his later thought, to Hegel.³⁹

There is a deeply attractive Christocentrism in the mature thought of Karl Barth.⁴⁰ The creation of man is treated as a kind of derivative spark from the eternal process of self-communication through which God makes Himself known to Himself, a process that is expressed for man in the person of Christ. The argument that nature is derived from revelation, the treatment of revelation as the prime creative act of God in which the being of man as the bearer of revelation is made subsequent to, and derived from, that revelation itself, is part of a deeply attractive and Christocentric vision of Christian theology. Barth's vision is of the original creation of the world seen through the light of revelation to have taken place only in Christ, through whom all things were made. By the Word of God who was man in the eternity of God before he was man for us, the natural order is gathered into Himself and re-expressed as deriving from the nature of His own revealed being. In the light of God's revelation

in His Word, nature appears to be nature only in the light of revelation; it is no longer nature 'against' revelation, 'beneath' revelation or 'prepared to receive' revelation. Barth does not so much assimilate God's gracious act to His creative act, as Baillie describes it, as assimilate His creative act to His act of grace in revelation, for only in the light of revelation may the nature of creation be understood.

There is, indeed, a deeply important corrective in Barth's theology to any failure to recognise the Christocentrism of Christianity. Behind the failure to unite 'form' and 'content' perceived by Baillie in Brunner,⁴¹ lies a more complex failure of Christian theology to avoid an account of Christianity which proceeds along the lines of 'first, the Father creates, then, the Son reconciles, and thirdly, the Spirit sanctifies', in which account there is no fulcrum, no centre or essence of a Christian theology about which all else must turn. Such a view could not have survived Barth's profound consideration of the Trinity in the first volume of the *Church Dogmatics* (1932),⁴² and in particular his examination of the doctrine of 'appropriation'⁴³ in the light of the belief that 'omnia opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt', in other words that the events of salvation-history cannot be parcelled out among the various persons of the Trinity (Triunity - Dreieinigkeit, is Barth's preferred expression),⁴⁴ or made to be a means of distinguishing between the persons in terms of their 'particular responsibilities'.⁴⁵

For Barth, the primary datum of Christianity is that God was in Christ, and His work of creation and redemption is to be understood only from that datum. God was not in the Father creating, the Son reconciling, and the Spirit sanctifying, but in His Word, through whom all things were made and in whom all things are brought to perfection. Barth is too deeply aware of the Christocentrism of Christianity to fall prey to the disguised Sabellianism of much 'process theology', the phrase being used not in the narrow sense of association with the school of Whitehead, but more broadly to refer to a prevalent tendency to think in terms of a

sequence of dealings, centred in History, between a resourceful God and a recalcitrant humanity, of which Christ forms but one daring initiative in the story rather than being the brief temporal expression, and even resolution, of the whole 'narrative'. Barth shatters the prevailing heresy (far worse than any overt denial of a particular Christological title, or some paraded academic discomfort with a certain credal formula) of a pre-arranged worldly stage which awaits the temporary appearance of the principal actor. Such a view manages to see Christ as a kind of brief intruder upon alien soil, an unwelcome guest who 'descends' and then 'ascends' back to the Father. It crucially misses the point of Christ's pre-existence, or 'eternal existence', ('Before Abraham was, I am'), which is intended not to suggest that Christ somehow waited in the wings for the right moment to 'become incarnate', but that what is summed up in the Incarnation is the eternal life of God Himself, from which the nature of the temporal world may also be discerned. The life of Christ does not represent the brief appearance of one ordinarily absent, but the historical, incarnate existence of one eternally present - and Barth confirms this truth in his insistence that all Christian doctrines are given a Christocentric reference. Since Christ was present at the creation of the world, He does not come into being only at the incarnation: nor, since He is with His people always, 'even unto the end of the age' (Matthew 28:20), does He 'go away' after his death and resurrection. And yet, there is a flaw in this vision of Barth's. It is located in the fact that his Christocentrism resolves itself into a form of Christomonism.

It is von Balthasar who tackles Barth's 'radical Christocentrism' and considers whether there are difficulties involved in it. The danger is that Christ the centre of reality will become Christ the whole of reality. That man understands himself no less as a created being than as a redeemed being through Christ, will be made to entail that he has no conceivable existence apart from Christ. But the revelation that

enables the creature to participate in the inner reality of God must not entail its losing its own nature. Or rather, since we have argued that the creature does not in fact 'lose' its natural characteristics, but rather receives them back in a different form in which they are tightly held within an all-embracing net of revelation, the problem is that the creature may lose its independence under a theology of 'radical Christocentrism', so long as it is understood that this independence is merely 'relative', and that in a sense it is a mere truism to say that no creature exists independently of God's creative will. It is the form of the creature's dependence which is at stake here.

3. The Nature of Man's Dependence upon God

An examination of Barth's treatment of the doctrine of man in Volume III of the *Church Dogmatics* may illustrate the argument of this chapter, that man is so 'absorbed into the being of God' in Barth's theology (as found in his mature years) that he loses that relative independence of his Creator which is a condition of God's freedom to give or withhold His grace from him, and which is grounded in a distinction between the 'orders' of grace and creation. A similar criticism in terms of the loss of this distinction may be made of both Hegel and Barth: and if Hegel is held responsible for what was later to be called a Feuerbachian 'reduction of theology to anthropology', it makes sense to talk of a Barthian 'reduction of anthropology to theology'. The purpose of this section is to illustrate this argument, which is developed in the main text, from the *Church Dogmatics*.

In III 1, Barth considers the story of the Garden of Eden. In the Garden is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This tree 'reveals the possibility of exaltation of the creature'.⁴⁹ God does not will that man realise the possibilities indicated by this tree. He prohibits man from eating from the tree, a prohibition which is part of His protecting man from death, the consequence of eating. The knowledge of good and evil,

in other words, the power of judgment, properly belongs to the Creator rather than the creature, and God determines that man shall live by His will, consenting to His power of judgment without seeking to share in it, and not aspiring to a responsibility (that of judgment) which exceeds his capacity.

If man should nevertheless eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he will not, according to Barth's presentation, achieve the capacity for judgment, for discrimination between good and evil. This capacity is one which God alone possesses, and is not transferable. God alone 'stands between' good and evil, able to pronounce judgment; man is equipped only for good, cut off from evil, and therefore with a 'freedom' to obey rather than to choose, not to 'decide' for God but to respect and obey God's decision for him. Man is invited by God to accept that judgment and election belong to God alone, and that God has elected him.

But man eats of the tree. This eating must imply his death: for the tree of the knowledge of good and evil 'says negatively' what the tree of life 'says positively'. As the latter affirms positively that man is made for life, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil affirms negatively that his life entails a consent of man to the judgment vested in God alone.

But man is not, as Barth presents the story, subjected to 'a curse eternally perpetuating his dying'⁵⁰ as a result of his misdeed. By being cast out of Eden he is preserved from the fate which would have awaited him within it. Barth presents man's expulsion from Eden, not as a punishment designed to wreak vengeance on man, but as a merciful act designed to protect man from death; God appears rather like the collaborator in the exile of a person wanted in his own country for some unforgivable outrage.

But what is the result of man's eating of the tree? He attempts to wrest a form of life which is 'inwardly impossible' for him⁵¹, to achieve

a power of judgment that is God's alone. His attempted 'robbery', however, has dire consequences. Man is like a child who steals sweets that turn out to be poison, which he eats greedily and from which he will soon die (my analogy!). To save him, God does not attempt any 'surgery': he sends him out of Eden into a kind of suspended animation in which he is frozen, as it were, in his moribund condition in a kind of half-life (although the analogy is mine, the sense is Barth's). In such a situation man is faced with a Hobson's Choice. Should he regain life, the disease will resume its course and kill him: should he seek to avoid this fate, however, it may only be by remaining in a 'shadow-existence', cast out from Eden. Man faces the choice of a terminally ill patient whose only chance of continued existence is to remain in a coma.

Let us consider two aspects of Barth's treatment of the Fall here.

Firstly, we may mention the distinction of man's freedom from 'freedom of choice'. Is 'freedom' capable of being considered as a particular form of action, rather than as a particular capacity or potentiality for action? In *The Refutation of Determinism*, M.R. Ayers draws an analogy between 'freedom' in man and 'horsepower' in vehicles. He points out that a car in a garage may still be said to have a certain horsepower: similarly a person in prison may still possess his freedom (Ayers is attempting to refute a form of determinism which is based on the view of freedom as 'absence of constraint'). Barth's conception of man's freedom, however, identifies it as a particular set of actions (ones that conform to God's will).⁵² The question must arise, then, as to whether Barth allows man 'freedom' in any recognisable sense. This question will not be pursued in the thesis: however, it is a further point in consideration of whether man possesses the 'relative independence' of God appropriate to his creaturely being.

Secondly, let us consider Barth's interpretation of the consequences of the 'Fall' as a way in which God denies man a now dangerous existence in the Garden of Eden. Man's stolen 'capacity' to know good and evil

would have brought death upon him had God allowed it to be exercised. Man has not taken upon himself a responsibility in the expression of which he will be tested and tried, (there is here none of the 'Irenaeus' theodicy centred around man's 'banishment' from the 'milk of his mother's womb' in the garden to a developing maturity outside it, as commended in Professor Hick's *Evil and the God of Love*), but has stolen a power which threatens to destroy him, to the possibility of exercising which he cannot be restored until he no longer wills it for himself, and God 'enforces definitively the judicial knowledge in which He was the Creator of all things'.⁵³

Now the result of this interpretation is that Barth identifies man's transgression of the Word of God, in the history of his relationship with God after his banishment, as a doing of evil or good after one's own will, rather than as a failure to do the will of God. For it is God who must choose to do good or evil, not man, who has the power of judgment only in a 'stolen' capacity, and who, precisely because he seeks to exercise his judgment, necessarily does evil. We meet here precisely the 'Olympian' judgment on ethics encountered in consideration of Barth's *Romans* in chapter two, and the same concern that Barth, by appearing to 'relativise' equally all moral judgments of man, fails to supply a principle according to which man may discriminate between them. The arguments are not original, and demonstrate the influence of the thought of the Protestant Reformers upon Barth. But Barth appears to give the 'theological ethics' of the Reformers an 'ontological' foundation which their thought lacked, grounding the idea of man's transgression of God's Word as his attempt merely to exercise his own judgment of good and evil in an ontology of man's 'unreal' existence in the world apart from God. Although prolonged discussion of Barth's ethics is not part of this thesis, one might ask a similar question to that concerned with his view of freedom. Is a view of man's 'sin' as the exercise of his judgment as his in general, rather than as a particular kind of judgment, satisfactory? It appears to

eclipse any notion that man should learn, 'apart' from God, to exercise true judgment, since the exercise of any judgment save that of 'recognising that the only judgment is God's' would appear to be identified by Barth with 'transgression of the Word of God'.

Let us move on to the 'theological anthropology' outlined by Barth in III.² "'Theological Anthropology" expounds the knowledge of man which is made possible and needful by the fact that man stands in the light of the Word of God'.⁵⁴ It is more specifically a Christological anthropology, insofar as the nature of the man Jesus alone is the key to the problem of human nature.⁵⁵ Human nature in general is determined from the human nature of Christ in particular, rather than vice versa,⁵⁶ and it is this determination which lies behind the 'ecce Homo' of Pilate - Behold, the man!

In the light of his conviction that we learn of human nature in general from the humanity of Christ in particular, we can understand Barth's 'theocentric' understanding of the nature of man as body, soul and Spirit.⁵⁷ This 'division' of man should not be understood in terms of 'trichotomism', as if these formed three separate compartments of man's being, but rather man is to be understood as body and soul, insofar as Spirit comes to him and 'has' him (rather than he 'has' it). Spirit cannot be identified with any part of man, and never 'becomes' a part of him. But through its determining him 'from without', it enables him to exist as body and soul - it acts on the body 'through' the soul. This is why, Barth argues, some passages of Scripture use the word 'Spirit' when referring to 'soul'. This should not lead us, however, mistakenly to suppose that Spirit does, after all, belong to man as a 'part' of him or an aspect of his being. Spirit as a divine gift of life making him man never becomes a part of him.⁵⁹ Anthropologies and philosophies of man which have separated man's soul from his body, for instance Roman Catholic anthropologies,⁶⁰ and have viewed man as a 'puzzling duality' of body and soul 'somehow glued together',⁶¹ have made their mistake

through failing to understand that man as soul and body presupposes man as grounded in Spirit. It is through abstracting from Spirit that this false dualist conception has arisen; however, 'man is as he has Spirit',⁶² a unity grounded in the immediate action of God.

It is apparent from Barth's description of man as body, soul and Spirit, that he does not regard him as a self-sufficient being, but as sustained in existence only through the continuous action of God, in giving him Spirit and thereby making him whole. That this gift never becomes a 'part' of him only reinforces his dependence on God for continued existence - for he never 'takes over' the life-giving gift of Spirit from God, but rather is constantly sustained by it as something received from without. The question that arises here, is that of whether once again the orders of creation and grace have been conflated; in other words, is the Spirit by which man is sustained in being conflated with the grace by which man is redeemed? Is man given that 'relative independence' of God in which he can be an object of God's giving or withholding grace, or is he made necessarily the object of God's grace as a condition of his being sustained in being, 'grace' which in this context is identical to 'Spirit'?

Barth's work is ambiguous here. At one point he presents a 'theological anthropology' which cannot fall victim to the above criticism.⁶³ Here he argues that the knowledge of Christ's human nature enables man to learn the distinction between 'real man' and the man who has perverted his true nature, and thereby to recognise in humanity as such 'symptoms' of 'real man'. This argument gives to man's humanity apart from Christ a 'real ontology'. Man has a nature apart from the human nature of Christ, in which he may recognise 'signs' of the latter's true humanity. But elsewhere we have an ontology of man which is, we would claim, more recognisably Barthian.⁶⁴ Here Barth explains the removal of our sin through Christ's atoning sacrifice in terms of God's judgment of man being determined, not by our sinful, corrupt natures but by Christ's

blameless nature. This judgment of God upon Christ's nature becomes a judgment upon ours, because the clarity and purity of his human nature become ours. Before God there now remains 'only the pure and free humanity of Jesus as our own humanity'. In this presentation, man has no real humanity in which he may recognise 'symptoms' of the humanity of Christ at all, but rather his 'humanity' is absorbed into, and negated by Christ's. He does not simply learn of his humanity from Christ's; his humanity becomes Christ's. It is here that we may see what in the main text of the chapter we have argued is a 'Christomonism' rather than a 'Christocentrism'. It would be 'Christocentric' to argue that, so far as the salvation of man is concerned, it is achieved insofar as he admitted to Christ; but this is conflated with a view that insists that the very existence of man as a created being may be understood only insofar as his humanity is that of Christ. Thus we find Barth easily move from man as an object of creation to man as an object of grace, without any apparent regard for the change.⁶⁵ Man is insofar as God relates Himself to him in His action, Barth declares, going on to say that in covenant with God he is maintained in relation to God only insofar as God remains 'for him'. This conflation must make us uncertain about Barth's systematic treatment of Creation in Volume III of the *Church Dogmatics* in terms of Creation as 'the external basis of the Covenant' and the Covenant as 'the internal basis of Creation'. Whilst Barth distinguishes the 'grace of creation' from the 'grace of the covenant', we may fairly wonder at the reality of the distinction (see also the remark: 'Creation is nothing other than the initiation, heading and sum of all the divine disclosures, promises, intimations and ordinances whose character, so inconceivable to man, serves in this chapter to bring out the no less absolutely miraculous nature of faith'.)⁶⁶

We may, then, identify the 'theological constriction' of Barth's presentation, NOT with a theological anthropology as such, but with the view that 'since the constitution of man is from God, it is a saving fact'

(my emphasis).⁶⁷ Man has no 'independence' of God in which to accept or reject God's grace. In his constitution, he is enabled to exist as body and soul only through Spirit, AND YET we read that Spirit is 'the element through which man is introduced as a partner in the covenant of grace',⁶⁸ and that Spirit is 'the divine operation of grace in its full scope',⁶⁹. Such an anthropology entails that man has no being apart from his determination by the grace of God, so that man has no possibility of rejecting God's grace, nor God any possibility of withholding it (save through man's ceasing to exist). Such an ontology is unacceptable for its conflation of grace with creation, not for its being part of a 'theological anthropology' as such.

From III 3 we discern a consequence of Barth's ontology of man - or lack of it - which is implicit in III 1 and III 2, namely an effective undermining of the reality of sin. Important for our discussion here is one of the most perceptive works on Barth, G.C. Berkouwer's *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*. For if man as a created being must be determined by the grace of God, if the Spirit which makes him a created whole is at the same time the Spirit of grace and election, then by his very existence man must stand within the grace of God as an elected being, unable to divorce himself from 'the triumph of grace'. Sin is ultimately unreal, because ultimately impossible.

Man can, of course, sin, in Barth's view - but his sin can never become a part of his humanity⁷⁰. In this sense, there is no ontological reality to his sin. We may compare this view to Barth's interpretation of man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden outlined in III 1, which we described above. There, we argued, Barth effectively argues that man's banishment is a protective measure by which God denies man the 'reality' in which he would exercise a stolen authority to his own destruction. God determines that, since man is bound to use his newly acquired power of 'judgment' to ill effect, He will deny him the existence in which to use it. It is possible to argue from this that man's sin lacks any

ontological reality, as indeed Barth himself writes⁷¹; for, knowing that having eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil man will act so as to bring death upon himself, God prevents the possibility of such action! Man sins, therefore, in an ontological vacuum in which his being remains unaffected. He sins in a way analogous to the 'sin' of someone who is encouraged to sublimate his bloodlust with wargames; a 'substitute' is provided through which the sinful inclination finds a harmless fulfilment. There is, in Barth, none of the frightening vision of the impact of sin upon man's character provided, to give a simple but effective example, in C.S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*, where the spectacle is provided of people 'becoming' their sins. In Barth the sin is never allowed to touch the man; for the man is what he is only through the grace and Spirit of God, which remain in eternal antithesis to sin. Man is effectively contained, simply as created, within the sphere of grace wherein sin cannot penetrate; and his 'sin' thereby becomes a form of shadow-boxing, in which he teases himself with an ontological impossibility. We find here, in a different way to *Romans* and the argument with Harnack, once more disturbing evidence of a lack of moral seriousness in Barth.

In chapter IX of his work,⁷² Berkouwer questions the:

.... shifting which Barth effects in the traditional interpretation of the mystery of sin to that of an ontological impossibility.... (73)

a characteristic which he regards as 'belonging to the most decisive and determinative aspects of his theology'⁷⁴. He ties his discussion in with that of Barth's universalist interpretation of the doctrines of election and predestination (*Church Dogmatics* II, 2). Chapter X ('The Universality of the Triumph') makes it clear that he feels universalism to be the logical consequence of Barth's view of sin, and his conclusion is forthright:

The unacceptableness of Barth's criticism of the inadequacy of the pastoral care allowed by the Reformed doctrine of predestination is the reverse side of the vacuum which appears in Barth's own doctrine of election. (75)

In other words, the 'pastoral implications' are not clear. Is Barth's way round 'predestination' itself something that lacks the moral seriousness of the absence of which that belief might be accused?

We may examine this question more closely by citing a very different consideration to Berkouwer's, that of John Hick in *Evil and the God of Love*. In examining the problem of evil in Karl Barth's thought,⁷⁶ Hick concentrates on the notion of 'das Nichtige', a term which summarises all 'opposition and resistance to God's world-dominion'.⁷⁷ What is das Nichtige? On the one hand, Hick quotes Barth's declaration that 'das Nichtige ist nicht das Nichts' to illustrate that it is not 'nothing'. At the same time, however, 'das Nichtige is that from which God separates Himself and in face of which He asserts Himself and exerts His positive will God elects, and therefore rejects what He does not elect'.⁷⁸ Hence 'in the light of Jesus Christ there is no sense in which it can be affirmed that das Nichtige has any objective existence, that it continues except for our still blinded eyes ...'. In what sense, then does 'das Nichtige' exist? 'Subjectively', rather than 'objectively', in those who have not yet perceived through Jesus Christ that evil is an illusion? But then, is not the implication of this that our sinful actions have no real consequences for our ultimate standing before God, because in the election of Jesus Christ and ourselves in him God has determined that evil or sin should be an ontological impossibility?

The approaches of Berkouwer and Hick are very different. Hick wants to show that any theodicy of the 'Augustinian' type, namely one that denies the purpose of man's fall to be a process of maturing through the experience of responsibility and freedom, and rather interprets it in terms of punishment for sin, is bound to view evil as something standing over against God and limiting His power, in other words a form of gnostic dualism is bound to be implicit in 'Augustinian' theodicies.⁸⁰ Berkouwer, on the other hand, whilst appreciative of Barth's Christocentrism, (which he refers to in terms of Barth's rejection of what he calls a "step-wise"

theology, in other words one which views salvation-history as a series of stages in a cosmic drama - a rejection we point to and appreciate in the main text of the thesis) - wishes to suggest that Barth, in refusing to let anything stand in the way of the 'triumph of grace', effectively denies reality to that power of sin which stands over against it. Although, however, they reach apparently opposite conclusions, Hick seeing the powers that resist God's grace in Barth's thought as the content of a force which ultimately limits God's freedom, and Berkouwer seeing in them evidence of an essential unreality in Barth's theology, which is thereby unbiblical and heterodox, both bring out the ambiguity in Barth's thought. Hick argues that Barth 'conceals the final alternatives facing any theodicy',⁸¹ by refusing to make clear what sort of 'reality' evil has. Berkouwer shows that Barth conceals the reality of a plainly universalist conception (he calls this the 'way of apokatastasis', a summing up of all in Christ)⁸² in his effective denial of the possibility of 'sin' as a power which may permeate man's humanity and remove him from Christ.

Barth's conception of the nature of the triumph (of grace) raises the problem of the place of man in this triumph. (83)

The problem of the place of man in salvation-history is the problem which arises from consideration of the *Church Dogmatics*, Volume III. We may summarise the examples of the problem outlined in this section as follows:

In the first place, does Barth's interpretation of the Fall and its consequences not deny fallen man real humanity, for does it not imply that God 'removes' this humanity from man precisely so that he may not exercise it to his own destruction following his eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

Secondly ^d Does not Barth present an anthropology in which man depends upon God's grace not merely for salvation but for his very existence, in that he criticises anthropologies which separate soul from body in man

because they fail to recognise that man is held in being as a body-soul unity through the Spirit that is also the grace of God and the Spirit of election?

Thirdly, does not the second point, point to a conflation of the 'orders' of creation and redemption in Barth's thought which is not a necessary consequence of his admirable refusal to endorse a 'step-wise' (Berkouwer's term) theology, but which issues in a lack of reality for man as a created being who may respond or not respond to the offer of God's grace?

Fourthly, do the terms 'freedom' and 'sin' have any reality in Barth's theology? Can 'freedom' make sense, not as a capacity, but as a particular form of action (one that conforms to God's will)? Can 'sin' make sense as something which does not affect the humanity of man which has 'become' that of Christ, but is rather a form of shadow-boxing with an ontological impossibility?

Finally, if there is substance to these criticisms of Barth, then must we not criticise a 'theological anthropology' such as he presents, not for wishing to understand the nature of man from the 'true man' revealed by God in Christ, but for doing so in such a way that the reality of free and sinful humanity seeking to derive an understanding of itself from Christ's humanity is denied? This is the substance of our argument in this chapter, of our concern to endorse the argument of von Balthasar with respect to 'nature' and 'grace', and of our attempt to suggest that Barth evinces an 'inverted Hegelianism' within which, rather than integrating the being of God into man in a false anthropocentrism, Barth integrates the being of man into God in a false theomonism.

4. Grace and Nature

Von Balthasar welcomes the Christocentrism of Barth's theology, its perception that the world was created for Christ, rather than that Christ's human nature was created for the world. He applauds the fact that Barth

excludes the temptation to talk as if Christ must be 'reconciled with the world', fitted with a human nature in order to adapt to its sinful condition, rather than the world fitted to Christ who is the ground of its existence. But von Balthasar fears that this Christocentrism extends to a point where God in his self-revelation no longer confronts an object to which he has chosen to ascribe a relative freedom from Himself. That man has no 'nature' apart from God's grace is made to entail that he has no 'nature' at all, that he exists only within the grace of God: the objectivity of man before God is effectively denied.

Before coming to the main point of our argument concerning the crucial Barthian denial of man as an 'object of revelation', we must consider the meaning of the term 'revelation' itself.⁸⁴ Literally the word means an unveiling or disclosure of what is hidden. Its meaning in general terms is knowledge achieved passively rather than actively, by disclosure to someone rather than discovery by him.⁸⁵ To talk of knowledge through 'revelation', then, is to suggest a knowledge in which the mind passively receives, rather than actively finds, although in Christian theology it has had a number of more specific meanings - a direct communication from God, or an authoritatively communicated set of truths, particularly as encapsulated in Scripture. This indicates an understanding of 'revelation' as a particular body of information supplied directly by God. It has also been interpreted as a set of truths about God that could not be attained by man's natural reasoning powers: in this sense 'revelation' is set against 'reason', the former supplying truths unattainable by, although uncontradicted by, the latter.

The idea of 'revelation' as a specific body of information communicated by God, which could not be attained by reason acting unaided by divine help, can be criticised for failing to interpret 'revelation' as the disclosure of a person rather than of certain divine 'truths'. The content of God's self-disclosure in revelation is God, not certain otherwise unavailable facts.⁸⁷ Such a criticism points less to an 'over-

intellectualising' of 'revelation', however, than to a failure to recognise the importance of human co-operation with God in the expression, in propositions or images, of the personal self-disclosure of the divine. The passivity of man in 'revelation' does not exclude the fact that he must interpret what is given him.

This does not require us to affirm, with Brunner, a prior 'capacity for revelation' in man. We agree with Baillie⁸⁸ that man acquires the capacity to receive revelation as he receives it, and this point serves to illustrate another important criticism of the view of revelation outlined above, namely its presumption that only a specific act or set of acts of God towards man may properly be termed 'revelation'. Man has no unchanging 'nature': his nature is constantly changing in the light of his historical experience. He is not waiting with a fixed 'nature' to receive 'revelation', but rather his 'nature' is constantly changing in the light of its appropriation of God's continuing revelation, or self-disclosure, in history. The discussion over a 'natural theology', a theology based on the evidence for God from the nature of the world and the moral nature of man, rather than from 'revelation', is in this sense a pseudo-discussion, for 'revelation' describes not merely a part, but the whole, of man's experience of God, an experience he receives and which transforms his nature in the receiving of it. There may be different forms of revelation - in history, in the natural universe, in man's moral sense - but they are all forms of revelation, of God's self-disclosure. Nor are they all forms of revelation 'to' nature, for the nature of man is itself determined by his perception of God's revelation to him. In this sense Barth is right to repudiate the concept of a 'natural theology', or rather to subsume it within a theology of revelation; a 'natural theology' may suggest a certain form of revelation, but not a knowledge of God 'apart from' revelation.

But this does not entitle us to subscribe to the grounds of Barth's rejection of a 'natural theology'. For however much the distinction

between 'nature' and 'revelation' is a misconceived one, and however much it is true to say that our nature is 'determined by', rather than simply 'waits to receive', revelation from God, nevertheless 'revelation' from God presupposes that there is an object to whom that revelation comes, an object that, although in part determined by the nature of that revelation, is not brought into being by it. In other words, God's revelation to man represents a 'gracious' activity addressed to him as its object (although at the same time determining his nature), rather than a 'creative' act bringing him into being. Whilst man's nature cannot be conceived apart from its experience of revelation, nevertheless it does not derive from revelation.

We may clarify this point by reference to Professor Baillie's judicious work *Our Knowledge of God*, which contains a consideration of the debate between Barth and Brunner.⁸⁹ Baillie is sympathetic towards what he perceives to be Barth's dislike of any notion that God first created a being capable of 'receiving revelation', and then revealed himself, much as one might first make a bucket and then fill it with water. If this sort of notion lies behind Brunner's insistence upon a 'formal power of being addressed' (Wortmächtigkeit) in man, a capacity for revelation, then it is rightly rejected, in Baillie's view, by Karl Barth. But the reason for Baillie's opposition to Brunner at this point is the thoroughly Kantian one, that all knowledge arises out of experience. Man is not reasonable 'prior to' the apprehension of truth, but develops his rationality in that apprehension. Similarly, any capacity for revelation is developed through the receiving of revelation itself. Baillie fully agrees with Barth's refusal to separate the doctrine of man as 'imago Dei' from that of revelation, for it is only as he apprehends God's revelation of Himself that man grows to perceive and understand his createdness.⁹⁰ Brunner's theology is based upon an un-Kantian separation of form and content, whereby man maintains the 'form' of the image of God after the Fall, but loses its 'content', or retains in his 'nature' the 'form' which may be able to accept the

'content' of revelation. Insofar as Barth questions any notion of a fixed 'nature' of man which awaits the coming of 'revelation' in Christ, Professor Baillie is wholly in agreement with him.

In another respect, however, Baillie identifies a central difficulty in Barth's theological method as outlined in his debate with Brunner. Revelation, Baillie insists, is a 'miracle of grace', not a 'miracle of omnipotence'.⁹¹ The creative and the gracious activity of God are not the same: Baillie quotes a remark of Canon A.L. Lilley:

God may create a universe ex nihilo, but
He cannot reveal Himself ad nihilum. (92)

Creation - ex nihilo - is a 'miracle of omnipotence'. God brings into being what in no way contributes towards, or conditions, its making. In his debate with Brunner Barth assimilates God's saving activity in Christ to the same model, as an act of 'recreation' in which, similarly, man as he exists as an object of God's saving revelation in His Word in no way contributes towards or conditions God's gracious activity. Baillie, despite his rejection of Brunner's separation of the 'capacity for revelation' from revelation itself, clearly believes that Barth is wrong to suggest that revelation creates its own means of appropriation, indeed creates a 'new man' who is remade through the saving activity of God in Christ. God's saving activity is directed towards a human object who is addressed by it even as he is determined by it. Revelation is 'to' man, even if not to a 'nature' existing independently of revelation, whilst creation is 'of' something out of nothing and 'to' - nothing! By suggesting a distinction between God's 'creative' and His 'gracious' activity, Baillie distances himself from Barth's view of revelation: by denying the separation of a 'capacity for revelation' from revelation itself as the subsequent fulfilment of an already existent capacity in man, Baillie distances himself from Brunner's viewpoint. We disagree with Brunner in taking the view that nature cannot exist independently of revelation; but we disagree with Barth in taking the view that nature

does not derive from revelation. Whilst man's nature is not separable from his receiving of revelation, it nevertheless exists in distinction from it insofar as man, in his created being, remains an object addressed by God's gracious action in revelation.

The crucial point is that revelation is always an address of God directed towards a reality which exists in that relative independence of God which is demanded simply by its being the real object of God's address. This remains true despite the inadequacy of describing that which is addressed as 'nature', since the nature of man is itself determined by the encounter with the personal reality of the self-revealing God. Revelation is not a creative action, an act by which God brings into being something out of nothing, and thereby has no need to take into account any of the constraints which are exercised upon His actions through His free choice to address an object 'outside' Himself, whose capacity to respond to Him He must respect. Creation 'ex nihilo' means, in effect, action without constraint: unlike the sculptor forced to comply with the limitations exercised upon his 'creative' work by the material with which he deals, God, who brings into being even the materials themselves, is limited in creation by nothing outside Himself - not even by the 'abstract' possibilities of alternative worlds from which he chooses the best according to a Leibnizian constraint. Yet this freedom from constraint cannot be applied to God's address to an existent creature: here the result of an essential self-limitation of God in creating a being 'outside' Himself comes into play. Barth, however, does not recognise this. He continues to use the language of divine freedom from constraint, appropriate to God's creative activity, in respect of His gracious activity.

If we are to discover the roots of Karl Barth's essentially reductive Christocentrism, then we shall discover them here, in the assimilation of God's gracious activity to his creative. It is not simply that Barth adopts the language of a 'new creation' in speaking of man as the object

of God's revelatory activity, for there is a respectable Pauline pedigree for such a reference. It is that, whilst admitting that there is a being who is the object of God's self-disclosing activity (to whom He discloses Himself), Barth claims in addition that this object derives its entire being from the revelation or self-disclosure itself. That God's revelation is to man is itself only something that is made known in the light of that revelation, from which man recognises his nature as a created being: but for Barth it is possible to add to that that man is only brought into being as the object of God's revelation by that revelation. This claim entails, we would contend, the omission of a crucial distinction. Whilst Barth is right to reject a view of salvation-history which sees 'creation' and 'salvation' as separate acts in a drama, he cannot go on to obscure the distinction between God's action in bringing into being an 'object', and his relation to that 'object', however much the being of the object is rightly seen to be determined through its continuing relation to its creator.

Barth's intention is to claim that the object of God's self-disclosing address arises out of the self-disclosure and is conditioned by it: but we insist upon the essential falsity of this idea, namely that in revelation God speaks, and the object of His speech is built up out of the speech itself. 'Let there be ...' is the logic of creation: in revelation God speaks to an object whom He addresses, however much it may be moulded in its nature through the address. The distinction between 'creation' and 'revelation', whatever the dangers of its interpretation such as Baillie highlights in Brunner, and however much it may threaten the proper Christocentrism of Christian theology, is a crucial one to maintaining the reality of man as an object of God's address, as a being who exists only through God's sustaining will and in dependence upon him, and yet a being who, simply as being, possesses the 'relative independence' of God that expresses the fact that he is an object of God's grace.

The point is made well in the subtle discussion by von Balthasar of

the relation between 'grace' and 'nature'. There is no such thing, von Balthasar argues, as 'pure nature' in this world, for man in his natural being exists only in relation to his supernatural end in God, whether positively or, if he rejects God, in a negative relationship. Man's nature is thus determined through his relationship to God's grace. Von Balthasar may be described as being in perfect agreement with Baillie's reluctance to talk of a 'nature' of man abstracted from God's grace or revelation, even the man who consistently rejects God. The nature of man is continually formed and reformed through its relationship to the self-revealing God, and any separation of 'nature' from 'grace' or 'revelation' must break down at this point.⁹³

Where Barth and von Balthasar differ, however, is in the latter's argument that from the premise that nature without grace is inconceivable, one must not conclude that grace creates nature. We cannot conceive of nature without grace, and yet, von Balthasar argues, the concept of 'pure nature' (das System der reinen Natur) must remain as a residual concept that cannot be specified concretely.⁹⁴ Without such a residual concept, the reality of man as an object of God's grace is effectively denied.

Von Balthasar's concern is partly to protect the freedom of God to refuse His grace to man: 'nature' represents that minimum which must be evident and present in every situation where God might choose to reveal Himself to creation.⁹⁵ If this minimum did not exist, then God could not withhold His grace from creation without effectively destroying it: simply as created, the creature would thereby necessarily exist within God's grace and could not be sustained in being save in such a relation. In this sense it is von Balthasar rather than Barth who protects the 'freedom' of God, for he concedes that 'relative independence' to the creature which allows God to choose the extent of His relation to it, without fearing that to withdraw His presence would be to destroy it.

This is but the sense in which a parent is 'free' to choose the nature of his relationship to an adolescent offspring, in the way that he or she is not free to choose the nature of a relationship to a young child, at least insofar as they wish to guarantee its survival. What von Balthasar sees, in fact, is that in one sense the freedom of God is extended through the relative 'independence' of Him enjoyed by man.

Unless man is conceived to be the object of God's gracious activity, God is not free to give or withhold His grace from him. If man is somehow 'brought into being' by God's grace in revelation, and God's gracious activity described in terms more appropriate to His creative activity, then God has, in this sense, no choice but to give man grace: grace, rather than the free gift of God, becomes a necessary part of His creating him. Once existent, the creature has an absolute claim upon God's grace - in that without it the creature will cease to exist. That the creature may in principle exist without God's grace, is precisely the condition of God's being free to withhold it.

What we are trying to point out in Barth's theology, is a form of theological constriction, a Christocentrism which does not allow, in its ontology, for the reality of that which is not Christ. There is a similar constriction to that which, it has been argued, characterises Hegel's mature reflection on Christianity,⁹⁷ although Barth squeezes theology from the other end, namely by subsuming nature within grace rather than grace within nature.⁹⁸ For as in Hegel's argument man, by being conceived a necessary part of God's self-realisation as God, is a necessary expression of His being rather than the object of his freely-given grace, (a gift which could have been withheld without God's ceasing to be God), in Barth the grace of God is necessary to the self-realisation of man as man, and is therefore a necessary expression of his (man's) being rather than a free gift which God might choose to withhold from him. In Hegel's dialectic, God is so absorbed into the being of man that God's freedom to determine Himself without man is compromised. In Barth's

dialectic, man is so absorbed into the being of God that man's freedom to determine himself without God is denied (and therefore, indirectly, God's freedom to withhold His grace from him). The failure to conceive of a real distinction between the order of creation and the order of grace, in other words, is evident in both thinkers. The criticism in this regard which Professor Taylor levels at Hegel⁹⁹ might also be levelled at Karl Barth. In Hegel a theological constriction in which God cannot be God without man is to be observed: in Barth the constriction lies in the fact that man cannot be man without God, not merely in the order of creation but also in the order of grace, so that it becomes not only the case that as a created being man depends for his existence upon God and could not exist without His sustaining will, but also the case that without God's grace he would cease to be. Hegel presents a theology in which the being of God is threatened with absorption into the being of man, a criticism which looks knowingly forward through Hegel to Feuerbach and Marx. Barth presents a theology in which the being of man is threatened with absorption into the being of God. This is a much more difficult point to make, perhaps, and yet its implications have been illustrated in chapter five, where we have tried to show how Barth's treatment of the Enlightenment, and indeed the nineteenth century, as insufficiently appreciative of the Godness of God, of His transcendence and of the theocentric nature of Christianity, is in fact a programme of resistance against a process of 'secularisation', of the removal of theology to a status in which it cannot claim to provide the principles in terms of which other disciplines may be articulated. For these disciplines, in describing man and his environment, do not need to do so on the basis of a theological *a priori*. Such a development in human thought does not necessarily imply the rejection of theological claims: but it does imply something which Dietrich Bonhoeffer captured so well in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, namely that man's 'coming of age' represents his awareness that:

God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him ... we cannot be honest unless we recognise that we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur* God as a working hypothesis in morals, politics or science, has been surmounted and abolished; and the same thing has happened in philosophy and religion (Feuerbach!). For the sake of intellectual honesty, that working hypothesis should be dropped, or as far as possible eliminated. A scientist or physician who sets out to edify is a hybrid. (100)

If one is to understand the implications of Barth's theological error in subsuming 'nature' within 'grace', then it lies in his rejection of the spirit with which Bonhoeffer accepts that 'secularisation' may in fact reflect the maturity with which man recognises that he has been given by God the capacity to understand himself and his environment without Him. Where Barth sees in the spirit of the Enlightenment an 'anthropomorphic' desire to understand the being of man apart from the being of God, Bonhoeffer sees in the same spirit a 'coming of age' whereby man attains the 'independence' of God which God wills for him. If Bonhoeffer's conclusions give rise in Barth to misgivings that he, too, is subtly caught upon an anthropomorphic hook, Barth's conclusions express a note of triumphalism, and of the desire once more to re-integrate 'secular' disciplines within an all-embracing theological scheme, which may appear ultimately hollow. To read volume III of the *Church Dogmatics*, is to perceive the dangers of reducing anthropology to theology - and the dangers are profoundly theological ones. In the last resort, they reflect what Bonhoeffer might designate an edging of God back off the cross into the world, expressed through a failure to live in the world without God.¹⁰¹

That our thesis should have begun by questioning an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man in the commentary on *Romans* and now be stressing the importance of an independence of man from God as the object of His freely-given gracious activity, is explained by the development of a methodology by which Barth seeks to overcome this 'infinite qualitative distinction' by integrating man 'into' God, his natural being deriving from the divine self-revelation. Man's power to

'confront' God, originally denied in terms of their inhabiting two separate orders of being, is now denied in terms of an 'absorption' of man 'into' God, where he no longer possesses the independence that is a condition of such 'confrontation'. The process by which the being of man is effectively 'aufgehoben' within the being of God in Barth's thought, not so as to threaten the Godness of God (as in Hegel), but the humanity of man, is a dialectical shift which undermines the real dialectic of man's relationship to God in precisely the way that Hegel's dialectic does, despite the fact that Barth claims to present an alternative - even an opposite - system to that of Hegel. It is usual to regard the treatment of God as an 'extension' of man's knowledge of himself as a characteristic danger of idealism in the Hegelian mould: our claim is that the treatment of man as an extension of God's knowledge of Himself is an accurate characterisation of Barth's theology, and that in a crucial respect it works away at a 'theological realism' as much as Hegel's dialectic, eroding it from the other end. This claim will be substantiated in the next chapter.

Notes on Chapter 6

1. Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, *Natural Theology*, with an introduction by Professor John Baillie. Barth's reply to Brunner, 'Nein!', can be found in the original in *Theologische Existenz Heute*, No. 14.
2. See chapter 4, note 17.
3. For a brief account see Smart, J.D., *The Divided Mind of Modern Theology. Karl Barth and Rudolph Bultmann, 1908-1933*, and Busch, E., *Karl Barth*.
4. See the introduction by Baillie to *Natural Theology*, p. 9.
5. *Ibid.*, p.8.
6. Barth took issue with an article of Brunner's, 'Die Frage nach dem "Anknüpfungspunkt" als Problem der Theologie', in *Zwischen den Zeiten*, 1932.
7. Barth, K., and Brunner, E., *Natural Theology*, p.115.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 123-4.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
10. See, for instance, Karl Rahner's *Hörer des Wortes*, esp. chapter 5, 'Der Mensch als Geist', pp.71-91. Man as spirit is 'die absolute Offenheit für Sein überhaupt' (page 71), and revelation, the emptying of the depths of God into man, giving him thereby the possibility of participation in the divine being, is only possible because man is himself Spirit, a 'place of transcendence':
 Eine Offenbarung, die die Tiefen der Gottheit enthüllen soll und im Grunde die reflexive Objektivation der Berufung des Menschen in die Teilhabe am Leben des Überweltlichen Gottes selber ist, kann nur dann als möglich begriffen werden, wenn der Mensch als Geist, das heisst als der Ort der Transzendenz auf das Sein schlechthin begriffen ist und er diese immer schon vollzogene Transzendenz auch notwendig thematisiert. (page 87)
11. Barth, Karl and Brunner, Emil, *op. cit.*, p. 121. This theme is taken up in Professor Torrance's essay, 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit', in *God and Rationality*, pp. 165-195.
 Applied to our theological knowledge, it is in the epistemological reference of the Spirit that we find the answer to our most difficult questions. How is it that we think by means of our human thinking what utterly transcends our thought? How is it human beings, by means of human language, have come to speak of what is ineffable? How can we through human words which are correlated to created realities speak truly of the Supreme Being who transcends them altogether? (page 186)
 And in answer to his own question Torrance goes on:
 This is what takes place through the operation of the Holy Spirit who relates the Divine Being to our forms of thought and speech.... what cannot be done by our thinking or stating is done by His action as Spirit of God (*ibid.*)

As we shall show in the next chapter, Torrance is in fact straining at the Kantian leash: he is trying, in Mackinnon's telling phrase, to 'jump out of his cognitive skin' by means of the Holy Spirit. For 'to think by means of our human thinking what utterly transcends our thought' is precisely the epistemological dilemma of theology in the light of Kant.

12. '.... the doctrine of justification by faith alone assumes for Barth an epistemological value which must be taken with complete seriousness by a theology which hopes to remain faithful to the Word of God'. (Louth, A., 'Barth and the Problem of Natural Theology', *Downside Review*, 1969, p.273.)
13. See Barth and Brunner, *Natural Theology*, p.97:
 there can be as little question of a co-operation of reason in the knowledge of the true God, as of a co-operation of the human will in the fulfilment of the divine commandments
14. For this view of the Reformation, see the compelling arguments of Jean Delumeau, in *Naissance et Affirmation de la Réforme*, pp.49-78. Delumeau talks of 'une grande angoisse collective' (p.50) to which the Reformation 'fut d'abord une réponse religieuse'. However, his thesis is heavily reliant upon the portrait of late mediaeval society in J. Huizinga's *The Waning of the Middle Ages*.
15. Barth and Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 35ff.
16. In Barth's view Brunner's understanding of Roman Catholic Theology was narrowly Pelagian, precisely in order that he might distinguish it from the teaching of the Reformers - while in fact, Barth wishes to argue, Brunner's interpretation of the Reformers does not effectively distinguish them from Catholic teaching. See Barth and Brunner, *op. cit.*, pp. 95ff.
17. See Brunner's remarks in *Natural Theology*, p.55:
 The characteristic of Christian theology, and somehow also the difference between Roman Catholic and Protestant theology, is not the issue whether the method of analogy may be used, but how this is to be done and what analogies are to be employed.
18. *Theologische Existenz Heute*, Vol. 14, p.56: E.T. *Natural Theology*, p. 121.
19. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Part 1, p.225.
20. *Ibid.*, p.227.
21. *Ibid.*, pp.226-7.
22. *Ibid.*, p.229-230.
23. *Ibid.*, p.238.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Ferré, F., *Language, Logic and God*, pp. 73-4.
26. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part 1, pp.350-363.

27. *Ibid.*, pp.351ff.
28. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Part 1, p.231.
29. *Ibid.*, p.229.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
31. *Ibid.*, p.192.
32. *Ibid.*, p.232.
33. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part 1, pp. 351ff.
34. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 2, Part 1, p.230. One here senses that Barth confronts similar problems to Plato where considering the question of whether there existed an Idea or Form of mud and other common substances.
35. See above for criticism of Barth's use of analogy.

36. See *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1. Part 1, pp.243-4:

Our reply to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the analogia entis is not, then, a denial of the concept of analogy. We say rather that the analogy in question is not an analogia entis but according to Romans 12:6 the ἀναλογία τῆς πίστεως, the likeness of the known in the knowing, of the Word of God in the word that is thought and spoken by man

37. Barth and Brunner, *Natural Theology*, p. 95.

38. In Barth's own words:

Natural theology (theologia naturalis) is included and brought into clear light in the theology of revelation (theologia revelata); in the reality of divine grace is included the truth of the divine Creation. In this sense it is true that 'Grace does not destroy nature but completes it' (gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit). The meaning of the Word of God becomes manifest as it brings into full light ... the forgotten truth of the Creation.

(Barth, K., *Theology and Church*, p.342.)

39. Bouillard admits that:

Il était facile de saisir une affinité entre la dialectique du Römerbrief et la dialectique hégélienne.

(Bouillard, H., *Parole de Dieu et Existence Humaine*, Vol. 2, p.297.)

It is also possible to extend the affinity to Barth's later works, even to his *Church Dogmatics*, in fact perhaps particularly to that synthetic work. Bouillard makes the point that Barth's work is more accurately viewed in the context of the Protestant Reformation than that of German Idealism, but this forgets that the latter was itself deeply influenced by the religious thought of the Reformation. That Hegel sought to be a Lutheran Christian - even, at one point, a pastor - as well as a 'modern' philosopher is a point made by Barth himself in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, which devotes a long and interesting chapter to Hegel.

Nevertheless, Bouillard feels that the differences between Barth and Hegel are as significant as the similarities, and that in the last resort:

Prenons donc la pensée barthienne pour ce qu'elle est: son originalité est irréductible. (*Ibid.*, p.299.)

However, we feel that the differences outlined by Bouillard are not in fact as real as he imagines. Above all he draws attention to the difference in terms of the fact that Hegel's dialectic, unlike Barth's, suppresses the freedom of God in His revelation:

Enfin, et c'est le grief décisif, l'identification de Dieu à la méthode dialectique de la logique supprime la liberté de Dieu dans sa révélation. (*Ibid.*, p. 298.)

As we argue in the course of this chapter, however, there is a sense in which Barth's theology itself suppresses the freedom of God in his revelation, namely by failing to make the creature a distinct object of the Creator's grace, which may be freely given to or withheld from it: for God to withhold His grace is effectively for Him to annihilate the creature within the scheme of Barth's dialectic, a fact that denies God's freedom to relate Himself to the creature by giving or withholding His grace. Barth, we argue, makes precisely the opposite mistake to Hegel, namely to make man too dependent upon God rather than God too dependent upon man. Of course in one sense man cannot be too dependent upon God - he exists only through the sustaining will of his maker. Nevertheless, within the ambit of that dependent existence, he possesses a real objectivity before God which allows his Creator freely to give or to withhold His grace from him, a divine gift which is distinct from that gift by which the creature is given life and being. This we discuss at length in the main body of the text.

Our conclusion is that Barth and Hegel make antithetical errors, but through a common failing, which is one of undermining a real ontological separateness between God and man which is the foundation of a 'realist' perspective (see chapter 7). In Hegel the separateness is denied in a way that assimilates God too closely to the reality of man: in Barth it is denied in a way that assimilates man too closely to the reality of God.

Von Balthasar also sees an affinity between Barth and Hegel:

Die Darstellung der Hegelschen Philosophie in Barths Geschichte der Protestantischen Theologie ist von solchem Schwung, solcher Überzeugungskraft, dass eine Art Kongenialität des Denkens gar nicht zu übersehen ist.

(von Balthazar, *Karl Barth : Darstellung und Deutung Seiner Theologie*, pp. 218-9.)

But von Balthasar also sees the deeper point of similarity between Barth and Hegel:

Doch übersehe man nicht, dass die Vereinbarkeit von Gott und Geschöpf auch in der Zeit der Dogmatik zuletzt auf der Christologie basiert, dass aber gerade in Christus die beiden naturen, die göttliche und die menschliche, nur in der Identität der einen göttlichen Person beieinander sein können, und dass alles, was im geschöpflichen Raum Geist und Person heisst, ohne diese ursprüngliche Identität wiederum nicht gedacht werden darf. (*Ibid.*, p. 219.)

Certainly Barth's Christocentrism appears to set himself apart from Hegel: yet the manner of his Christocentrism is one in which the whole created order is to be understood in the light of an original unity of the divine and human in the Person of Christ. Our contention is that Barth's Christocentrism is one that fails to allow for a distinction between the orders of grace and creation, which is precisely the charge brought against Hegel by Professor Taylor (*Hegel*, pp. 489-495).

40. See the essay by D.M. Mackinnon in *Essays in Christology for Karl Barth*, ed. T.H.L. Parker, pp.256-297. Mackinnon comments:

For Barth there are no problems in theology which are not in the end christocentric. (p. 282)

Mackinnon draws an interesting parallel between the concern of the logical positivist to 'substitute logical construction out of the observable for inferred, unobserved entities', and what he sees to be an analogous 'logical economy' in Barth:

We must, he insists, substitute for abstract, general statements concerning the being and purposes of God, and of men, statements that show them in terms of, or set them in relation to, Jesus Christ. (p. 284)

41. Baillie, John, *Our Knowledge of God*, OUP, 1939, pp.30ff.
 42. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1, pp.348-384.
 43. *Ibid.*, pp. 373-4. See also *Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, p.49.
 44. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. I, Part 1, p.369.
 45. In Barth's words:

It would be pagan mythology to present the work of God in the form of a dramatic entry and exit of now one and now another of the divine persons, of the surging up and down of half or totally individualised powers or forms or ideas, of a shifting co-existence and competition of the three hypostases Per appropriationem this act or this attribute must now be given prominence in relation to this or that mode of being in order that this can be described as such. But only per appropriationem may this happen, and in no case, therefore, to the forgetting or denying of God's presence, in all His modes of being, in His total being and act even over against us. (pp. 374-5).

46. 'Die Mitte, die Barth einnimmt, ist sachlich bestimmbar als radikale Christozentrik' (Balthasar, Hans Urs von, *Karl Barth : Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, p. 46.
 49. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part 1, pp. 258ff.
 50. *Ibid.*, p. 273.
 51. *Ibid.*, pp.273-281.
 52. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part 2, pp. 196-7.
 53. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 3, Part 1, p. 275.

54. *Church Dogmatics.*, Vol. 3, Part 2, p.20.
55. *Ibid.*, p.43.
56. *Ibid.*, p.44.
57. *Ibid.*, pp. 344ff.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 355.
59. *Ibid.*, pp. 365-6.
60. *Ibid.*, p.380.
61. *Ibid.*, p.393.
62. *Ibid.*, p.394.
63. *Ibid.*, p.96.
64. *Ibid.*, p.48.
65. *Ibid.*, p.349.
66. *Ibid.*, p.156.
67. *Ibid.*, p.347.
68. *Ibid.*, p.357.
69. *Ibid.*, p.358.
70. *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.
71. *Ibid.*
72. *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, pp. 215-262.
73. *Ibid.*, p.231.
74. *Ibid.*
75. *Ibid.*, p.295.
76. *Evil and the God of Love*, pp. 132-150.
77. Quoted in Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 134.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
79. *Ibid.*, p.141.
80. *Ibid.*, p.150.
81. *Ibid.*, p.149.
82. Berkouwer, *op. cit.*, p. 290.
83. *Ibid.*, p.261.

84. See Baillie, John, *The Idea of Revelation in Recent Thought*.
85. See Schillebeeckx, E., *Revelation and Theology*.
87. See Baillie, John, *op. cit.*, p. 39. The point is made, Baillie reminds us, most strongly by William Temple. See Temple, W., *Nature, Man and God*.
88. Baillie, J., *Our Knowledge of God*.
89. In chapter 1.
90. Barth is right in this respect to insist upon the Christocentrism of Christian theology, and to reject what Berkouwer calls a 'step-wise' theology.
91. Baillie, J., *op. cit.*, p.24.
92. *Ibid.*, p.26. Quoting Canon A.L. Lilley, *Reason and Revelation*.
93. von Balthasar, Hans Urs, *Karl Barth : Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*, pp. 294ff.
94. der Inhalt des Begriffs einer reinen Natur ist nicht exakt anschaulich zu machen (*Ibid.*, p. 294).
95. Man wird diese Natur in jenem *Minimum* zu erfassen suchen, das sich in jeder möglichen Situation, darin Gott sich einem Geschöpf offenbaren wollte, verwirklicht zeigen muss, und das ausgedrückt ist in der *analogia entis*. (*Ibid.*, p. 295.)
97. See Taylor, C., *Hegel*, CUP, 1975, pp. 489-495.
98. cf. Barth's own account of Hegel in *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, ch. 10. Note Barth's remark on p. 420:
 Hegel, in making the dialectical method of logic the essential nature of God, made impossible the actual dialectic of grace, which has its foundation in the freedom of God.
 Taylor quotes this remark too - *Hegel*, p. 493.
99. See note 98.
100. *Letters and Papers from Prison*, p. 360.
101. *Ibid.*, pp. 360-1.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Barthian 'Realism'

In an important essay,¹ Dr R.H. Roberts comments upon Barth's theology as follows:

Both (Hegel and Barth are being referred to) tried to do what Kant had criticised as beyond human possibility, namely to regasp the infinite, a pretension precluded by the Kantian critique of human knowledge. (2)

They went, however, in different and opposite directions, Hegel in that of an infinite grasped by the finite, Barth in that of a finite grasped by the infinite. As we indicated at the end of the last chapter, the problem for Hegel's interpretation of Christianity is that of whether God remains free from man, able to give or withhold His grace without compromising His divine being, or whether in fact man is a necessity for God in Hegel's system. 'Would God still be God without man?' is the question which Hegel must answer.

The problem for Barth's interpretation of Christianity is the opposite one. Does man remain free from God in Barth's thought, free from God in the sense that - at least in principle - God may withhold His grace from him? Or is the giving of grace so assimilated to the bringing of man into being that without God's grace the creature ceases to exist? Is God a necessity for man in Barth's 'system', not only in the sense that without God's grace man cannot be saved, but also in the sense that without his grace he cannot exist, even in the form of an unredeemed sinner?

In chapter four we sought to outline Barth's theological method in the light of his work on Anselm, *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*. We saw that Barth's defence of Anselm was accompanied by a refutation of any understanding of the *Proslogion* as the rightful object of Kant's attack upon the ontological argument for the existence of God. For the benefit of our argument in this chapter, it would be well to recall the nature of Kant's attack, which concentrates upon a failure in Descartes (the

object of his attack on the ontological proof) to distinguish the order of knowing from the order of being. In the well-known statement, 'Existence is not a predicate', Kant is arguing that to say of an object, that it exists, is not to describe an additional quality of the object, in addition for instance to saying that it is round and yellow. It is not an attribute of the object that is being described when it is said to exist, but rather a statement about the whole object is being made, namely that it exists not only in thought but in reality. Kant's way of illustrating this was to say that a sum of money does not become greater by imagining it to 'exist'; it is the same sum, but now claimed to exist in the order of being and not merely in the mind. Hence, when Descartes treats 'existence' as one of the 'perfections' of God, he is treating existence as a quality or predicate in the false sense described. He thinks it describes an additional characteristic of God, rather than saying of God as already characterised that He exists in reality as well as in idea.³

For most critics of the ontological proof, Kant's argument applies to Anselm himself.⁴ For it appears to be essential to Anselm's argument that it is 'greater' for a thing to exist than not to, and clearly implied here is the idea that existence is a quality of God, one of the attributes that make Him that than which nothing greater can be conceived. Anselm does not recognise, that so far as what is conceived is concerned, God remains exactly the same and therefore exactly as 'great' whether He exists or not. He supposes that saying God exists changes the content of the idea of Him, rather than saying of the same content, that it exists in reality and not in idea alone.

It is precisely this distinction that Kant insists upon, between what exists in idea alone, and what in idea and reality, which makes it possible for him to argue, both that reality can never be part of our idea of it, and that our ideas can never be part of the reality known through them.

The Kantian epistemology represented in this refutation of the 'ontological proof' is precisely what Barth overcomes in his work on Anselm, as indeed Hegel seeks to overcome it in his own assertion of the validity of the proof.⁵ But where Hegel overcomes it by assimilating reality to our ideas of it, Barth overcomes it by assimilating our ideas to the reality known through them. It is the purpose of this chapter to make clear this argument in relation to Barth. We shall do so by examining the philosophical arguments of a modern interpreter of Barth, Professor T.F. Torrance. Our claim is that in Torrance, as in Barth, the professed distinction between knowledge and reality, fundamental to any philosophical realism which attempts to distinguish between the mind and the world which exists as the object of its understanding, and to which its concepts refer, is obliterated.

In 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit', Torrance professes to recognise the distinction between thought and being:⁶

We proceed by establishing relations between thought and being but always by rejecting any confusion between them (7)

In all our knowledge, even of created things, where we are concerned with the relation of thought to being, we are up against what is transcendent to thought and always reaches beyond what we are able to specify. (8)

In relation to knowledge of God, Torrance appears at the start of his article to be committed to the inevitable role played by human conceptual apparatus in theological understanding:

Even though God transcends all that we can think and say of Him, it still holds good that we cannot have experience of Him or believe in Him without conceptual forms of understanding (9)

However, in the same paragraph we find Torrance arguing that the 'epistemological' role of the Spirit is to carry us 'beyond' such conceptual forms:

It is only through the Spirit that such trans-formal experience is possible, for it is by His power that we are enabled to know beyond ourselves and to distinguish what we know from our knowing of it, so that our knowing of Him falls under the continual informing and shaping of what He makes known of Himself. (10)

In other words, the Holy Spirit enables us to 'know beyond ourselves' (p. 185), to be drawn across the conceptual forms of our understanding so that we are no longer knowing 'through' them and therefore are no longer bound by their limitations, into a state where our knowing is directly determined by God himself in his Spirit. This is the answer to the question which Torrance asks: 'How is it that we think by means of our human thinking what utterly transcends our thought?' (p. 186).

Man in his estrangement from, and enmity towards, God, cannot know the divine being through his own powers of knowing. But through the Holy Spirit he may, in Torrance's view, bypass those powers damaged by sin to reach a 'direct' knowledge of God in which man is carried 'above and beyond himself' to 'real knowledge of the divine being'. There is a merely peripheral role for the natural human understanding as such, namely that of acknowledging, in its inadequacy for direct knowledge of God, that it has been 'carried beyond itself' and given understanding through the leading of the Spirit:

Thus theology does not know God by virtue of its own ideas and concepts but only in response to God's Word and only under the leading of His Spirit, and therefore only in humble acknowledgement that its own thought is inadequate to its object, and only in thanksgiving and wonder at the mercy of God who in spite of all is pleased to confer upon our thought, as it falls under the action of His Spirit and Word, the truth of His own Being. (11)

The problem, for Torrance, is that of how our knowledge can be 'carried beyond itself' and yet remain our knowledge. Certainly it can be extended, receive new ideas, encounter new objects - but only as it assimilates them according to its own receiving capacity can it have knowledge of them. Torrance's understanding of the notion of 'knowing beyond ourselves' is that we 'know beyond our knowledge', so that the framework of understanding for receiving revelation is the Holy Spirit itself and not our limited conceptuality - and this is the argument of Barth against Brunner too (see chapter six). However, if the framework of our understanding is the Holy Spirit, then this might seem to mean

that the Holy Spirit understands God, not that we do. If we are to understand God, then we must surely know Him from our own epistemological resources; in order to accommodate this criticism Torrance has our own natural powers of understanding in the background 'acknowledging', in a kind of humble aporia, what the directly conferred knowledge that we have 'beyond ourselves' has received from the Holy Spirit. Such 'acknowledgment' points to the untroublesome, passive role played by the natural reason 'rebaptised' within the ambit of God's revelation.

Yet it may still be argued that we are in fact determined, in an important sense, merely by this role which our natural reason has of 'acknowledgment'; and that the so-called 'knowledge beyond ourselves' is a knowledge to which we cannot be admitted, since our knowledge can only function where the forms of a natural human conceptuality are maintained.

The 'acknowledgment' of which Torrance speaks, echoing Barth's concept of 'Denken heisst Nachdenken' - literally that theological reflection is a thinking of God's thought 'after' him - does not solve the epistemological paradox at the root of his argument. If our knowledge of what God reveals is our knowledge, then it must be assimilated by us. If, however, it is assimilated by us, then it has to conform to the nature of our understanding. But in that case, how can it be knowledge of God? Either, then, it is our knowledge, but not our knowledge of God, or it is knowledge of God, but not our knowledge.^{11a}

Torrance's claim that it is our acknowledgment of a knowledge of God in which we are 'carried beyond ourselves' to a capacity for revelation conferred by the Holy Spirit,¹² then, raises difficulties. He sees it as the acknowledgment of a miracle by which we are enabled to 'know beyond ourselves' - in Barth's language we become 'new men' altogether in the grace of revelation (hence the referring of Brunner to 2 Corinthians)¹³ and are given by grace a capacity not previously possessed to understand God. We are admitted to knowledge of Him through the conferring of a

'donum gratiae' which provides a supernatural power of cognisance. In the conferring of that gift of grace, however, what right have we still to refer to ourselves as the possessors of that divinely created knowledge within us? As 'new men' in the grace of revelation we must remain in continuity with our former selves. Barth is concerned to protect this continuity insofar as he emphasises the role of the natural reason 'rebaptised' within the revelation in Jesus Christ from whose reality that reason is derived. Torrance is also concerned to protect this continuity in his emphasis upon our 'acknowledgment' of the knowledge had from 'beyond ourselves': for without such acknowledgment it could be argued that we have ceased to exist altogether, or that the beings who have knowledge in the light of revelation are not in fact the beings who existed apart from it, to whom that revelation came. Man cannot become a 'new creation' in Christ in the sense that he first came into existence at that moment; for the first creation came out of nothing, the second comes out of the old Adam. The old Adam 'acknowledges' its transformation into the new Adam.

This process of 'acknowledgment' is an 'Aufhebung' of our natural reason, through which it is denied in an autonomy set apart from God, but reaffirmed 'within' the divine being in the grace of revelation. As 'aufgehoben', however, man's nature, even as it exists in the light of God's grace, must continue to make sense of the distinction between itself and God. Even as transformed by the grace of God, man must remain man, separate in his knowledge from God as the object of that knowledge. Even when 'taken up into' the reality of the divine being, and knowing God in his 'being known by' Him, man is not God, nor a part of God, nor can he cease to be distinct from God. If we look more closely at Torrance's scheme, however, we begin to discern a failure to mark this distinction: we observe a tendency to forget the distinction between thought and being which in turn ensures a distinction between the knower,

be it man or God, and the known, be it God or man. The fundamental sense of knowledge as knowledge 'of' something, of a reality external to itself, is effectively lost. In man's knowledge of God, we find the knowing subject made part of the object which he knows, as the reality of God in His self-definition swallows up and devours man as a being set apart from his creator and given grace, in his apartness, to understand Him. We see, in effect, the destruction of man in God. Despite the assurances in 'The Epistemological Relevance of the Holy Spirit', deeper exploration of Torrance's thought convinces us that the man who knows insofar as he is known by God effectively ceases to be man at all: he becomes an absorbed part of God's self-knowledge, no longer able to be seen as a source of knowledge and reaction in 'relative independence' of his creator. The reality of man is denied by the reality of God and the only reality becomes that of God himself, with the creation the unsubstantial content of a projected divine vision.¹⁴ In these claims concerning Torrance, lies our conviction that an 'acknowledgment' of a knowledge which we have 'beyond ourselves' makes no sense, and that what we know 'beyond ourselves' we cannot acknowledge, since in no sense can we be the possessors of such knowledge.¹⁵ The idea of 'acknowledgment' is merely the means by which Torrance tries somehow to earth in humanity a knowledge which humanity cannot have.

In a highly suggestive section of his book *Space, Time and Resurrection*, the final chapter on 'The Lord of Space and Time',¹⁶ Professor Torrance attempts to examine the benefits to theology today:

.... from dialogue with the natural sciences, within the radically transformed outlook upon the universe which they have brought about (17)

He takes up a theme mentioned in the preface to his book, where he discusses the relation between Barth's attitude to 'natural theology' and Einstein's account of the relation of geometry to physics. He put the point, Torrance recalls, to Barth in the following way:

With relativity theory Einstein rejected the Newtonian dualism between absolute mathematical space and time and bodies in motion. He argued, therefore, that instead of idealising geometry by detaching it from experience, and making it an independent conceptual system which was then used as a rigid framework within which physical knowledge is to be pursued and organised, geometry must be brought into the midst of physics Instead of being swallowed up by physics and disappearing, however, geometry becomes the epistemological structure in the heart of physics, although it is incomplete without physics. It is in a similar way, I argued, that Karl Barth treats natural theology when he rejects its status as a preamble of faith, or an independent conceptual system antecedent to actual knowledge of God instead of rejecting natural theology tout court, Barth has transposed it into the material content of theology where, in a changed form it constitutes the epistemological structure of our knowledge of God (18)

Barth's reaction to this argument of Torrance was apparently to say:

I must have been a blind hen not to see that analogy before.
(19)

In Newtonian science, Torrance claims, it was possible to separate or abstract the theoretical form in which reality was to be grasped from the facts so understood. It was therefore possible to have a 'conceptual system' ('epistemological structure') which prescribed to the reality which it set out to understand how it must appear if it was to be understood at all. The reality of bodies in motion had to conform to the theoretical understanding of 'absolute mathematical space and time'. To take another example:

The older view of reality was one in which its analysed particulars (atoms, particles, etc.) were conceived of as being externally and invariably connected in terms of causes. (20)

In other words, the conceptual system according to which reality must be understood in terms of a theoretical framework of cause and effect prescribes to reality itself (atoms, particles, etc.) how it shall be seen to behave.

We might wonder whether Torrance's opposition is really to the 'older' view of Newton or to that of Kant. He would have to face Kant's insistence that 'objects must conform to our knowledge',²¹ in the sense that the only reality which we may understand is one received by, and therefore ordered according to the nature of, the mind. His radical argument is not to question Kant's emphasis upon the active role of the

human mind in understanding, but to question the distinction between the structure of the understanding mind and that of the reality through contact with which the mind embarks upon the process of comprehension.

Let us examine Torrance's claim that natural theology has become a conceptual system divorced from the reality of God's actual self-revelation, prescribing to that revelation what its nature shall be. The natural theologian's determination of what may be known of God, according to Torrance's criticism, prescribes what He may actually reveal of Himself. In this sense, it attempts to rule God. Barth's 'transposition' of natural theology into 'the material content of theology', Torrance is claiming, makes its role one where it derives its form from revelation rather than prescribing a pre-determined form to revelation. This was indeed our understanding of Barth's argument against Brunner discussed in chapter six.

However, Torrance seems to slide from the point that modern physics, unlike its Newtonian predecessor, cannot be understood in terms which abstract space and time from the 'material content' of both, to the point that our understanding of reality is not capable of being abstracted from reality itself. This latter point is more doubtful, and must threaten Torrance's insistence in *God and Rationality* upon the distinction between thought and being. Unless there is a separation of knowledge from reality, there cannot be knowledge at all, again for the Kantian reason that all knowledge is the knowledge of objects, presupposing a distinction between knower and known. And because knowledge is mental, our understanding cannot be divorced from the determining structures of the mind.

Our worry is with Torrance's use of the term 'epistemological structure'. Epistemological structures are structures of knowledge, and sometimes Torrance seems to be suggesting that we must find these structures 'inside' the realities with which they seek to deal. It is this that we are attempting to question.

On the other hand, it is clearer to see what Torrance is saying when he talks of a 'dynamic view of the world' as:

.... a continuous integrated manifold of fields of force in which relations between bodies are just as ontologically real as the bodies themselves, for it is in their interrelations and transformations that things are found to be what and as and when they are. (22)

The point here seems to be a different one. Einstein disproves the idea that space and time exist independently of the bodies that are 'in' them. Rather, space and time exist only 'in relation to' bodies in motion.²³ The discovery that objects at very high speeds experience a slower passing of time, for instance, shows that time, far from being an independent backcloth to the behaviour of matter, can only be considered in relation to that behaviour. Time is not an entirely independent context for the activity of matter, and as Torrance argues in his book, *Space, Time and Incarnation* in criticism of a 'receptacle' view of space, nor is space.²⁴ Space has been similarly viewed as an independent backcloth for the behaviour of material particles, or in Torrance's analogy as a bowl or receptacle may be considered as a vessel containing contents which behave within its confines in an entirely independent manner.²⁵ Torrance's advocacy of a 'relational' rather than 'receptacle' view of space and time in this book parallels his treatment in *Space, Time and Resurrection*.

But Torrance wants to do more than this. In *Space, Time and Resurrection*, he wants, by identifying space and time with a 'conceptual' rather than a 'real' system, to argue that modern physics illustrates how our knowledge of reality, rather than prescribing to reality its nature, must somehow proceed from 'within' it and be determined directly by it. At least, this seems to be the only possible ground for his finding an analogy between such developments in natural science as Einstein has helped to bring about, and those which Barth has encouraged or even initiated in what Torrance refers to as 'theological science'.

Torrance commends Barth for refusing to treat natural theology as an independent conceptual system antecedent to actual knowledge of God.

Instead, Barth treats a natural theology as something which derives from what God actually reveals of himself: what 'may be known' of him is derived from what is known of, because revealed by, him. Reality precedes possibility. Natural theology thus plays a subordinate role to revelation, as the attempt to understand what is already there as given, a process that Barth believed to be in essence what Anselm meant by 'faith seeking understanding'.²⁶ God does not reveal what man is able to grasp; rather, man's ability to grasp what God reveals derives from God's actual revelation of Himself. The mistake of the natural theologian is to demand that the content of revelation conform to his understanding of what may be revealed, an understanding which is mistakenly believed, in Barth's view, to exist independently of the actual content of revelation. To Torrance this Barthian rejection of natural theology is analogous to the rejection of the Newtonian view that bodies in space and time, rather than existing in an essential relation to their spatio-temporal context, merely conform to the prescribed demands of that context, which exists entirely independently of them.

But the analogy is not a real one. For the point of Einstein's discovery is surely to show that several factors in an understanding of reality which were once thought separate are in fact related. Hence the use of terms like 'fields of force' or 'energy fields' to point to areas of mutual interaction. The idea that all physical activity in the universe may in principle be reduced to a mathematical equation indicates that the possible integration of forces in relation to one another in any physical understanding of the universe is much greater than was once thought possible.

On the other hand, the point of the theological remarks of Barth concerning natural theology is surely quite different. It is designed to show that what we know of God is somehow directly conferred upon us by God Himself, so that the question of 'how' we know anything of God is made secondary to our actually knowing. This is a quite different

argument, and an attractive one if we hope to free the knowledge of God we may claim to have from our doubts concerning its possibility, doubts which beset any theologian who tries to come to grips with Kant (and in the present day with logical positivism). The grounds for such a move lie in the claim that the question of the possibility of theological knowledge arises only out of its reality, in the way that for Barth theological understanding can only be woven out of a God-given faith - as if theology was a search for the questions to difficult answers!

The point of Einstein's transposition is to talk of 'space' and 'time' existing only in relation to bodies in motion. But the point of Barth's transposition is surely not to talk of theological equivalents which play a role analogous to that of space and time in a physical understanding of reality. Rather, Barth's transposition is intended to talk of our knowledge of God as if that were a part of the complex reality described by the theologian. In other words, if Barth's treatment of natural theology were truly analogous to Einstein's work in natural science, then this would be, if Torrance's argument were correct, to see our knowledge of God as itself a 'theological relation' to be considered together with other constituents of the reality which forms the object of theological inquiry. If the work of bringing our knowledge of God into relation to the other constituents of the reality known to the theologian were to parallel the bringing into relation of space, time and bodies in motion within a single field of force, then this would be to question the fundamental distinction between knowledge and reality. But there is no real parallel, and the developments in natural science referred to by Torrance do not intend to question this distinction. They do not re-value the distinction between knowledge and reality, but between various constituents of reality itself which were previously considered to have been independent of one another, namely space and time on the one hand, and the moving bodies supposedly taken to operate independently 'within' them on the other. By talking of space and time as a 'conceptual

system' Torrance makes it seem as if the point concerns, not the highly integrated nature of reality itself, but the integration of reality with our knowledge of it.

In the last pages of *Space, Time and Resurrection* Torrance considers 'the correlation between the different levels of knowledge and the different levels of reality'.²⁷ He argues that:

the more intensively we probe into the inherent profundity of the universe the more we find our epistemic relation to it being reversed: we are up against a reality that towers above our intelligence, which we cannot know or reflect about by trying to occupy some epistemic stance "above" it. (28)

The higher the 'level of reality', Torrance seems to be saying, the more 'passive' towards it our minds must become, 'allowing our understanding to fall under the power of its intrinsic but transcendent unintelligibility' - the theological epistemology of 'Denken als Nach - Denken'.²⁹ In treating of the highest reality, God, we can only show 'reverent submission of our minds to his uncreated Light and Majesty', so that:

Only the mind which surrenders in awe and wonder to the transcendent reality of God Himself will be able to approach the resurrection in a way appropriate to its intrinsic significance. (30).

Thus the 'higher' the level of reality with which we deal, the more 'passive' our minds in relation to it, until in the case of our knowledge of God the structures of our knowing are not only submissive to, but derived from, even are intrinsic to, the object of knowledge itself. We are encouraged by Torrance to believe that the resurrection, being part of this 'highest reality' as an act of God, draws our appropriately submissive minds into its own explanation of itself, and that any difficulties which we have in understanding the resurrection only appear to be difficulties if we refuse to be led by the reality of the resurrection itself into those mysterious noetic ways which are appropriate to its intrinsic nature, whilst being unintelligible to our minds.³¹ Our incomprehension is only the sign of our being lifted out of ourselves into

the epistemological structure which exists within the reality being understood itself. Here again the distinction between knowledge and reality is being obscured by Torrance, where knowledge treats of the 'higher reality' of God which somehow contains within itself the means by which we understand it.

The 'highest reality' of God explains itself not so much 'to' us as 'in' us, His reality carrying within itself its own explanation, and His grace making this our explanation of Him in a way that neither conforms to nor seeks to extend our understanding. In appropriate passivity (knowledge as acknowledgment) we are drawn into the explanation intrinsic to the reality itself, which to our own understanding is unintelligible.

In Torrance's epistemological scheme, then, we are drawn into a knowledge which both becomes 'ours' and yet is beyond our understanding. We are enabled to 'jump out of our cognitive skins', to recall Mackinnon's phrase, for we are absorbed into the epistemological structures in the heart of God himself, knowing God in His knowledge of Himself.³²

But how may we know God in his knowledge of Himself? How can such language make sense without effectively destroying us as knowing subjects altogether? How can we fail to pay the price of denying the distinction between knowledge and reality, which is that of ceasing to know? How can the knowledge 'given' to us by God's grace ever be knowledge 'had' by us? Does not the 'integration' of man within God, outlined in the last chapter in terms of the lack of an ontology of man apart from God, have its epistemological equivalent in terms of an essentially meaningless idea of our 'knowing beyond ourselves'?

Torrance argues that in the 'acknowledgment' of such a knowledge lies our continuing identity as knowing subjects. But what we acknowledge must be our knowledge. In the 'hierarchy of intelligibility' which Torrance suggests, the reality of man as a knowing subject is threatened

by the process of theological knowledge itself. Confronted by an object whose intelligibility is 'within' itself, man is required to 'leap out of himself' into an alien epistemology in order to 'receive' the understanding which he cannot attain from the employment of his own intellectual resources. But how can this make sense unless in the receiving of such knowledge man ceases to have a mind apart from God, epistemologically integrated into the divine self-understanding in the way that he has also been ontologically integrated into the divine being? The claim that no more is being suggested by Torrance than something analogous to developments in the understanding of reality within the natural sciences is unjustified.

The epistemology of Torrance and Barth may be seen in the context of the supposition that in the light of what Kant had determined concerning the limits to knowledge, knowledge of God would be impossible.³³ To bypass the problems raised by Kant, or to overcome them, the distinction between knowledge and reality must be overcome, for this distinction lies at the root of the Kantian denial of access for the mind to reality as it exists in itself. One way of overcoming the problem would be to deny the distinction from the side of reality which, it could be said, exists only 'in the mind'.³⁴ 'Barthian Realism', on the other hand, denies the distinction from the side of our knowledge. Our knowledge, it is said, exists only as the 'epistemological structure in the heart of being itself'. But in both cases a questionable step is being taken.

The Idealist has, in spite of himself, to talk of a reality which is distinct from his ideas of it. In doing so, he relies upon a certain ambiguity in the word 'knowledge'. It may either mean the 'act of knowing' or 'what is known'. Where Berkleian idealism is concerned, it has been said that his philosophy relies upon this ambiguity when it is said that knowledge must be 'of' something, and that there must be a distinction between knowing and what is known. Since the word 'knowledge' can be used of both, it may appear that the distinction does not demand that

there 'be' anything that is known. In fact, however, 'knowledge' in its second sense of 'what is known' only makes sense in distinction from its first meaning as the 'act of knowing' if in fact there are objects outside the mind.

The Barthian 'Realist', on the other hand, denies the distinction between knowledge and reality from the side of our knowledge. He too relies upon an ambiguity in speaking of the knowledge of God, which may mean either man's knowledge of God or the knowledge which God Himself has. Barth and Torrance attempt to solve the problematical dichotomy between knowledge and reality by subsuming man's knowledge within the reality of God in His thinking and being; knowledge of God, in their epistemological scheme, can only be knowledge had by God. But the ambiguity of 'knowledge of God' enables them to maintain the idea that this knowledge is in fact man's knowledge of God. In fact Barth's approach to theological understanding might appropriately be termed an 'idealism grounded on God', denying the otherness of man to God rather than that of God to man, and projecting a universe in which there are no beings beside God.³⁴

We have suggested, in the course of the last two chapters, that Barth's theological method contains an inverted relation to aspects of nineteenth century Hegelianism. If we look at the history of the latter school of thought, we can see that it has been associated with an absorption of God within the structures of human existence, a process outlined indeed by Barth himself,³⁶ as an imaginative projection through which individual man realised,³⁷ or man in society was frustrated in realising,³⁸ his human potential. But in Barth's thought we find the antithetical process of man's absorption within the structure of God as He declares Himself in revelation. The distinction between man and God, the subtle tracing of an order of grace within which, despite his existence in absolute dependence upon his Maker as a creature, man possesses

a 'relative independence' of God, is lost in both systems of thought. The one fails to find God without finding man as the reality of the 'divine'; the other fails to find man without finding God as the reality of the 'human'. Our essential criticism of Barth, then, follows that of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Christian theology cannot make sense without an ontology which recognises a real distinction between man and God.

In a striking metaphor, Professor Taylor criticises Hegel for a 'theology' according to which God is like a flame which passes from mortal candle to mortal candle, each to go out but the flame to be eternal.³⁹ The implication is that the divine 'flame' is made to depend upon the human 'candles' for its existence; man thereby becomes necessary to the being of God - the order of grace is assimilated to the order of His divine nature. In Barth's theology it is as if human beings represented the flame on a single candle lit eternally by God and sustained by His will. They may flicker wilfully, but they may never become detached to form subordinate lights of their own; the order of man's nature is assimilated to that of God's grace. God and man never endure that separation according to which, in an older metaphor, a spark of light generated from within the divine being breaks apart from it and generates its own fire apart from the original source of its being. Berkouwer is right - Barth cannot concede the power of evil to disentangle itself from God. There is no Lucifer allowed to fall from Heaven - more appropriately for our metaphor, there is no Prometheus permitted to steal fire from the gods.

There is a note of triumphalism in Barth's theology which follows from the theomonism which we have tried to describe, and which may in part explain it.⁴¹ There is a resistance to 'secularisation' which may be usefully grounded in his denial of an 'ontology of man'.⁴² But in this chapter we have emphasised a third aspect of Barth's thought, namely

a response to the problems raised by those on whom he cut his theological teeth, in particular, Kant. We have sought to argue that there corresponds to the lack of an 'ontology of man', outlined in chapter six, an equivalent epistemological vacuum in making sense of man's knowledge of God as knowledge 'had' by man, and to argue that attempts to explain this in terms of analogies drawn with developments in modern physics are not valid. We argue for a fundamental Kantian resistance to a concept of 'revelation' according to which man is enabled by God to 'know beyond himself', and that this resistance is to be located in the distinction between knowledge and what is known that is fundamental to all forms of realism, including that of Kant. The integration of man into God in Barth's thought, may be seen in terms of a loss of being for man in distinction from God, from which it follows that there is nowhere to locate man's knowledge save in God Himself. All that is apparently being said by Barth about man's knowledge of God is in fact being said about God's knowledge of Himself. There is, in fact, no man to hear or receive or respond to God's self-disclosure: only an eternal divine monologue.⁴³ In David Ford's words:

(Barth's magnum opus is) a spiral round and round the self-expression of God in time. (44)

Yet there is more irony in these words than Ford ever realises. For the spiral is round and round the time of God, and the image that of a divine being who concedes nothing of Himself to man,⁴⁵ and who thereby in seeking His creation merely chases the shadow of His own eternal self.

Notes on Chapter Seven

1. 'The Ideal and the Real in the Theology of Karl Barth', in Sykes, S.W. and Holmes, D., eds., *New Studies in Theology* 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
3. See Kant, I., *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. Kemp Smith, Macmillan, 1933, pp. 500-507. Kant refers to 'the attempt to establish the existence of a supreme being by means of the famous ontological argument of Descartes' (my emphasis) as 'therefore merely so much labour and effort lost' (p. 507).
4. See Hick, John and McGill, Arthur, *The Many-Faced Argument : Recent Studies on the Ontological Argument for the Existence of God*.
5. See Hegel, G.W.F., *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, tr. Speirs and Sanderson. The translation includes a work on the proofs of the existence of God in which Hegel also discusses the 'ontological' proof.

Hegel certainly recognises Kant's criticism of the argument (see e.g., Volume III, p.363, and Volume II, p.353), but makes the following point in reply.

Kant's argument is to claim that 'the Being of God cannot be got out of the notion or conception of God, for Being is something different from the Notion; we distinguish between the two, they are mutually opposed, and thus the Notion cannot contain Being, which is something outside of it and beyond it.' (Volume II, p.353).

However, Hegel's claim is that whilst thought and being remain separate realms for us, this is not so for God. In Him thought and being are one:

This antithesis (that between the Notion and Being, between the concept (Begriff) and that to which it applies) which is found in finitude cannot have any place in connection with the Infinite or God. (Vol. III, p.363.)

Thus whilst we may conceive of objects which have no existence in reality, this is not true of God, in whom 'Notion and existence form an identity' (*ibid*).

The distinction between thought and being upon which Kant's thought is grounded, then, pertains only to our finite perception, which is one that constantly annuls itself, being essentially unreal. The distinction of thought and being is one that is constantly negated; thus

... in perception, feeling etc., we have outward objects before us; but we take them up into ourselves, and thus the objects are ideal in us. (III, 365).

Indeed

the idea that Being may be separated from the Notion is a mere fancy. (III, 364).

The distinction which is presupposed in Kant's argument is in Hegel's view being constantly overcome, and is completely overcome in God. The process whereby the distinction between thought and being is resolved in thought is the process of 'eternal self-production' (III, 366), the act of God as Spirit who posits a difference within Himself and overcomes it. This act is revelation; for

it is the very nature of God to reveal Himself, and to reveal is to differentiate. (*Ibid.*)

Thus God in His revelation (that is to say God being God - for 'what is revealed is just that God is the revealed God' (*Ibid.*) is the process by which the distinction upon which Kant's argument is based is denied.

Hegel's argument bears comparison to Barth's. The 'annulment' of man's nature and its 'reintegration' into God is a Hegelian 'synthesis' of an antithesis of God and man. In both Hegel and Barth the distinction between thought and being, upon which the Kantian denial of a direct human knowledge of God is based, is broken through God's revelation. But whereas in Hegel's thought man's ordinary experience of perception and feeling is itself part of the process by which this distinction is resolved, Barth attempts to set the resolution within a revelation which is separate from man's 'natural' experience. Such is his 'dialectic of grace' rather than 'dialectic of nature'.

6. In *God and Rationality*, pp. 165-195.
7. *Ibid.*, p.169.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p.170.
10. *Ibid.*
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 181-2.
12. This point is made by Hans Küng in his work on Justification, *Rechtfertigung*. He writes:

Der glaubende Mensch anerkennt, erkennt, bekennt das bereits Geschehene, nämlich die Rechtfertigung Aber wie ist der Mensch überhaupt zu einen solchen kognitiven Bestätigung des Geschehenen fähig, er, der Sünder? (p.192 - my emphasis.)

Küng's answer is that only through the retention, even as a sinner, of a capacity for revelation may man 'acknowledge, know and confess' his justification by God, and thereby receive revelation from God.

13. There is the hint here of an infinite regression.
14. See chapter six, page 138.
15. The point could be put as follows. On what grounds do we assert the existence of human beings as objects of God's knowledge, who 'receive from' him and 'acknowledge' his gifts, rather than affirm that such 'independent beings' do not exist and commit ourselves to a form of 'divine solipsism' in which human beings are the words of an eternal divine monologue in which they participate simply because they lack objectivity as beings before God, an objectivity which would enable them to turn monologue into dialogue or even to be hearers of the divine monologue? The crucial question, here considered in terms of the epistemology of the knowledge of God, is that of an ontology of man as a being apart from God. See Zahrnt, H., 'Monologue in Heaven', in *The Question of God*, pp. 112-123.

16. *Ibid.*, pp. 159ff.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
18. *Ibid.* Torrance's argument can be compared to that of Barth with respect to the exegetical methods of Bultmann in Bartsch, H. -W., ed., *Kerygma and Myth*, Vol. II, pp. 83-133, 'Rudolf Bultmann: An Attempt to Understand Him'. Barth argues that biblical hermeneutics should not entail any principle of exegesis that functions as an independent conceptual system established in independence of the text to be interpreted (a *Vorverständnis*, or 'principle of understanding' determined before the content itself is examined), but that any such principle should arise out of the content itself. This argument of Barth's is not accurately described as the view that the text 'speaks for itself' and requires no interpretation. In fact Barth's argument is that any hermeneutical principle cannot be determined prior to actual exegesis (a pre-understanding) but only in the exegesis itself, wherein the content will determine a form of interpretation appropriate to itself. This is the proper sense, for Barth, of the Reformation principle of 'scriptura sui ipsius interpres', that scripture interprets itself, which is quite different from saying that it requires no interpretation, or even that one part of scripture may be used to interpret another.
 The problem raised by Barth's argument, is that of how far the capacity of the interpreter to understand the text, and in particular the social and other influences upon his reading it in his own cultural milieu, can be neglected in favour of an interpretation entirely determined 'in' him by the content of the text itself. There is a connection between Barth's hermeneutics which neglects the contribution to understanding of the interpreter's personal bias and social environment, and his epistemology which believes it can overcome the limitations inherent in man's knowledge of God. See also chapter 3.
19. *Ibid.*, p. x.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 184.
21. Kant , *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. Kemp Smith, p.22.
22. Torrance, T.F., *op. cit.*, p. 185.
23. For a 'relational' view of space and time, see *Space, Time and Resurrection*, pp. 186-8, and *Space, Time and Incarnation*, pp. 4ff.
24. See note 23.
25. *Space, Time and Incarnation*, p. 4. Torrance (p. 11) makes the important point that the Christian view of creation, according to which time is in creation rather than creation in time, itself rules out any treatment of time as an 'independent backcloth' to, or 'container' of, matter. The Patristic fathers had already, in many cases, anticipated a 'relational' view of space and time, in Torrance's view!
26. See chapter four.
27. Torrance, T.F., *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. 191.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 192.
29. The title of an article in *Zürcher Woche* by Karl Barth.
30. Torrance, T.F., *op. cit.*, p. 193.
31. See chapter 8 for a separate discussion of Barth's treatment of the resurrection.
32. 'God is known only by God' (*Church Dogmatics*, II, 1, p.179). Again:
 God is knowable to Himself; the Son to the Father, but also the Father to the Son. This is the first and last thing which is to be said about the knowability of God even from the point of view of the readiness of man.
 (II, 1, p.151.)

How, then, does God become knowable to man? Through the fact that 'our viewing and conceiving is adopted and determined to participation in the truth of God by God Himself in grace' (p. 179), an adoption that is grounded in the fact that God is man in Jesus Christ (p. 151).

God, then is knowable only to God, and at this point man 'still seems to stand outside' (*Ibid.*) the divine self-knowledge. But God is also man in Jesus Christ, and therefore through Jesus Christ man is drawn into the divine self-knowledge, 'adopted to participation in the truth of God by God Himself in grace'. (p. 179).

But what sort of a 'participation' in the truth of God does man 'possess' through grace? It is 'participation in God's revelation', and as such can basically consist 'only in the offering of our thanks' (II, 1, 216). Now:

True knowledge of God does not need to be called to order by any critical theory of knowledge to remember the inadequacy of all human views, concepts and words in relationship to this object, because as the work of gratitude it cannot try to be requital and therefore a reply in equal terms to what has been said to man by God.

(II, 1, 217.)

Knowledge of God, then, transcends man's natural capacity for knowledge. Barth suggests here that the limitations of the human understanding do not frustrate man's knowledge of God because, as 'an offering of thanks', this knowledge is merely 'acknowledgment of the revelation of God' (*ibid.*) and does not require that man respond in the same language with which he has been addressed by God. Barth continues this point by comparing a 'work of gratitude' to a transaction, where like is repaid with like and both parties have to obey the economic laws of the market-place. A gift, on the other hand, does not require repayment in kind. Thus man, who 'knows beyond himself' the truth of God, does not have to reply in a language which he could not speak.

Of course, Barth's argument that the knowledge of God transcends any inherent limitations in the understanding of man implies that in principle any creature, even inanimate objects, could be the object of God's revelation and understand Him. But the Christocentrism of Barth's theology rules this out, for in Jesus Christ God is man, not a bull or a stone. Nevertheless, nothing in the nature of bulls and stones would have ruled out the possibility of God's revealing Himself to them. Barth recalls the story of Balaam's ass in order to make precisely this point:

And we must not forget Numbers 22.28, where even the mouth of Balaam's ass is opened (as if incidentally to show that the divine possibility involved does not have a limit, let alone a condition, in humanity.)

(II, 1, 221)

The difficulty which we have with Barth's epistemology may be put in the form of two questions:

Firstly, are no constraints exercised by the inadequacy of human concepts for even the 'receiving of a gift', e.g., man's capacity to ask the usual question which accompanies a gift, 'what is it?'

Secondly, if man is given a capacity to 'acknowledge' a gift from God by God Himself in a manner that transcends his natural understanding, why should he not also thereby acquire the capacity to 'reply' to God?

We suggest that in one sense Barth concedes too much to man, and in another too little. He concedes too much, in that he believes that man may be given the capacity, beyond his understanding, to 'acknowledge' a gift from God and to thank Him in awe, joy and praise (II, 1, 222ff.) for the knowledge of Himself. He concedes too little, however, in that once man has the self-transcending capacity to acknowledge that gift, surely he may receive the self-transcending capacity to 'reply' to it, to converse with God in the language of God. Barth is really faced with two alternatives, to speak of man as unable to know God, or of man as able to know God as God knows Himself. He tries, however, to hold man in a limbo where he exceeds the first without attaining the second.

33. Torrance's criticism of a Kantian view of the mind's 'prescribing' to reality its nature, a view which he sees modern science as having undermined, requires careful consideration.

There would seem to be grounds for the view that in the 'Transcendental Deduction of Categories' in the *Critique of Pure Reason* Kant argues, as Jonathan Bennett remarks in *Kant's Analytic*, that 'there is causal order in our experience because the understanding put it there'. He quotes Kant's comment:

The order and regularity in the appearances, which we entitle nature, we ourselves introduce. We could never find them in appearances, had not we ourselves, or the nature of our mind, originally set them there.

(Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 125: quoted in Bennett, *op. cit.*, p. 156.)

From Kant's commitment to the view that causal order is imposed upon the phenomenal world by the human mind, it would seem to follow that no empirical observations within that world could possibly change his commitment to a causal order. Such a concept, proceeds not from the world which demands such a concept for its being understood, and which might therefore in principle provide such new evidence as would call forth a different concept in the scientist seeking to make sense of it, but from the nature of the human understanding as such, 'the lawgiver of nature', which insists that any reality intelligible to itself must be causally ordered. Since it is a condition of understanding as such that it determine the world to be causally ordered, any other arrangement of the world is impossible, simply because it could not be understood. It is from his commitment to certain basic forms of understanding and of sensibility which necessarily impose themselves upon any reality which we understand, if we are to understand it at all, that Kant sees the justification of 'synthetic a priori propositions', propositions which are universal and necessary and yet which do not merely describe the meaning of words. They describe, rather the

necessary conditions of experience if there is to be experience at all. They 'begin with' experience, in the sense that they are only recognised in it, and yet they do not 'arise out of' it, since they are in fact forms imposed upon it by the mind. Hence Kant's conviction that he has found the confidence in causation which Hume lacked. By trying to find grounds for a concept of causation in the nature of the external world, Hume failed to find a justification for its necessity, and concluded that it was employed merely out of a bad habit of mind which did, however, represent a psychological truth about human nature. Kant argues that the ground for using the concept is not to be sought for in the external world at all, but in the nature of the mind which perceives and understands the world, and which 'imposes' upon it certain characteristics prescribed by its own constitution as the conditions of possible experience. In this sense it is clear to see how Torrance sees in Kant a 'prescriptive' attitude towards reality, an attitude that is independent of any evidence supplied by reality as such to the observer concerning the appropriateness of his interpretative tools. It is also clear that Kant's insistence upon the use of certain concepts derives from the belief that these are the only ones which the understanding may use. There is obviously a question of whether modern science in its impatience with the idea of 'causation' as a necessary concept, or with the conclusions of a Euclidean geometry, is impatient with Kant's assessment of which are the necessary concepts that the understanding must use, or with the notion of such concepts, 'imposed' by the mind upon reality, as such.

In his book *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Sir Karl Popper makes it clear that his own theory of 'falsifiability' as a criterion 'for deciding whether or not a theoretical system belongs to empirical science' is threatened by a Kantian outlook:

According to this conventionalist point of view laws of nature are not falsifiable by observation; for they are needed to determine what an observation and, more especially, what a scientific measurement is.

The 'conventionalist' view sees theoretical natural science as a logical construction rather than a picture of nature; the laws of nature are simple because they are imposed on nature by the mind. We arbitrarily invent these laws, and by this invention determine the properties of an 'artificial world' of our invention. Science speaks of a world of concepts - and thus all 'observation' is irrelevant to what science may determine as 'laws of nature' (see Popper, *op.cit.*, pp. 49-56: 'On the Problem of a Theory of Scientific Method').

Popper sees such 'conventionalism' as an extension of Kantian idealism; but where Kant saw the intellect from its own constitution as such imposing laws upon nature, the 'conventionalist' sees this imposition as a 'conventional' one, a product of chosen human convention, societally influenced. Yet in both cases a contribution of nature as such to the understanding of it appears to be proscribed, and hence also negated is the responsiveness of the scientific mind to 'how things actually are' which the Popperian notion of 'falsifiability' entails. Kant appears, in this sense, to be the precursor of a form of idealism which, on the grounds of an unavoidable tyranny exercised by the mind over nature, effectively eliminates the responsiveness of knowledge to reality.

This is discernible in the influence of Kant upon Hegel. In the Introduction to his *Phenomenology of Mind* (tr. J.B. Baillie), Hegel examines the Kantian view that knowledge is a medium through which we receive the truth not as it is in itself, but 'as it is in and through this medium' (*ibid.*, p. 74). He considers the paradox that

knowledge never yields us reality as it is in itself (unlike 'a bird caught in a limestick'), but that on the other hand without the use of the understanding as a medium through which to know what is, nothing would be known at all - 'if this be removed, the bare direction or the empty place would alone be indicated' (p. 75).

Hegel's solution of the problem is that since the understanding only needs the distinction between the object of consciousness, the 'phenomenon' in Kantian terms, and consciousness itself, then the 'thing-in-itself' may effectively drop out of consideration. We are left with a distinction that constantly resolves itself within consciousness:

For consciousness is, on the one hand, consciousness of the object, on the other, consciousness of itself; consciousness of what to it is true, and consciousness of its knowledge of that truth.

(Ibid., p. 85)

Hence Hegel's *Phenomenology* conceives itself to be a development through a sequence of forms of consciousness until knowledge is 'no longer compelled to go beyond itself', a conception precisely made possible by Kant's 'prescriptive' attitude towards the forms of understanding, which are not to be thought of as responsive to the nature of an external reality. In this sense Kant makes possible the idealism of Hegel, since 'reality' is contained within the concept of 'things-in-themselves' which, because they do not modify the nature of the understanding, are all too easily excluded from consideration by it (see Norman, Richard, *Hegel's Phenomenology: A Philosophical Introduction*, Chapter 1. 'The Dilemma of Epistemology, esp. p.17).

In short, Hegel may subsume reality within man's knowledge of it, because Kant has determined man's knowledge, in the form of its understanding, to be unaffected by reality.

Similarly, it may be because of a recognition that the nature of man's knowledge is unaffected by reality in this sense in Kant's conception, that in Barth's epistemology it is man's knowledge that drops out of consideration, and man is 'assumed into' the reality of God where he is given to 'know beyond himself' the nature of the divine (see note 32).

The difficulty in Kant's thought appears to be, that whilst he maintains the distinction between knowledge and reality, it is a distinction made too absolute for a dialectic of understanding to emerge in which it is the relationship between knowledge on the one hand, and reality on the other, that forms the components of the dialectic. It leads either to an 'idealist' dialectic within knowledge itself, as in Hegel, or a 'realist' dialectic within the reality of God in His revelation, as in Barth.

The problem with Torrance and Barth in their interpretation of Kant, then, is that a distinction between knowledge and reality, which is the essential condition of a realist philosophy, is made too sharply for its own good in Kant's philosophy. But they rather fall victim of the sharpness, than overcome it. They absorb knowledge within reality rather than reality within knowledge, an argument which we attempt to draw out in the main body of the text.

Finally, it is not clear that Kant's thought is as 'prescriptive' as Torrance and Popper insist that it is. Bennett quotes the first *Critique* at the point where Kant insists that reason ... 'must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature's leading strings, (but must itself constrain) nature to give answer to questions of reason's own determining'. Bennett (*Kant's Analytic*, p. 159) points

out that this remark might be understood as much in Popperian terms of testing specific hypotheses in the world, as in terms of the view that causal order is imposed by the understanding, particularly where Kant continues:

Reason, holding in one hand its principles, according to which alone concordant appearances can be admitted as equivalent to laws, and in the other hand the experiment which it has devised in conformity with these principles, must approach nature in order to be taught by it.

(*Critique of Pure Reason*, 2nd ed.,
p. xiii.)

Bennett's conclusion is that there is an ambiguity in Kant. Nevertheless, we would hold to the view that the distinction between knowledge and reality is made so sharp in Kant's philosophy, in the way indicated, that it has subsequently broken apart in the form in which Kant drew it and been redrawn within knowledge (Hegel), or within reality ('the epistemological structure at the heart of being' - Torrance - and the admission of man to the knowledge which God has of Himself within the reality of the divine being - Barth).

34. Arguably idealist philosophies always play upon the ambiguity of this sort of phrase.
35. Reference must be made here to an unpublished Ph.D. thesis by Dr Alan Millar : *Realism and Understanding: Some Problems in the Philosophy of Religion*, (Cambridge, September, 1973). Millar argues that Barth has a genuinely 'realist' attitude to truth, since he refuses to characterise the object of his faith in terms of the way in which it can be known (p. 4). Throughout the *Church Dogmatics*, Millar points out, a distinction is maintained between the object of faith, God, in His revelation, and man's experiential and conceptual response to that object, while Schleiermacher and others appear to be dangerously 'closing the gap' between truth and acceptability by characterising God in terms of the manner of knowing Him. Clearly opposed to this, Barth insists that:

We thus understand the assertion of the hiddenness of God as the confession of the truth and effectiveness of the sentence of judgment which in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is pronounced upon man and therefore also upon his viewing and conceiving, dispossessing him of his own possibility of realising the knowledge of the God who encounters him, and leaving him only the knowledge of faith granted to him and demanded of him by the grace of God and therefore only the viewing and conceiving of faith.

(*Church Dogmatics*, II, 1, 191.)

Millar seeks to designate Barth a 'realist' insofar as he refuses to determine the nature of God according to the possibilities of human conceiving, but does not investigate the alternative 'knowledge of faith' of which Barth speaks in this passage (and which does not in fact form part of Millar's own quotation). It is our contention that this 'knowledge of faith' so absorbs man within the divine being that the distinction between knowledge and reality is denied 'from the other end', that is to say from the point of view of man set apart from God. This reflects the opposite tendency to one which failed to set God apart from man and so absorbed Him into the structures of human existence. The 'knowledge of faith' is an 'idealism grounded on God', which fails to distinguish God's consciousness of Himself from His consciousness of man. This is precisely opposite to the accusation levelled at Schleiermacher and others, that they fail to distinguish between man's consciousness of God and his consciousness of himself.

36. See the introduction by Karl Barth to Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot, pp. x-xxxii.
37. See Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, tr. George Eliot.
38. See Engels, F., *Ludwig Feuerbach and the End of Classical German Philosophy*, and Marx, K., *Theses on Feuerbach*, in Marx and Engels, *On Religion*, pp. 187-235 and 62-65 respectively.
39. Taylor, C., *Hegel*, CUP, 1975, p. 495.
41. What has been argued in the last two chapters might be compared to remarks found in William Temple's *Nature, Man and God*:
- that only by revelation and by his surrender to its spiritual power can man be 'saved', is a profound and irrefragable truth; that even when man's salvation is complete there is still the impassable distinction between Creator and creature, Redeemer and redeemed, Sanctifier and sanctified, is the heart of metaphysical and religious sanity. In so far as God and man are spiritual they are of one kind; in so far as God and man are rational they are of one kind. But in so far as God creates, redeems and sanctifies while man is created, redeemed and sanctified, they are of two kinds. God is not creature; man is not creator. God is not redeemed sinner; man is not redeemer from sin. At this point the Otherness is complete.
- (p. 396.)
42. See chapter five.
43. In *The Question of God*, Heinz Zahrnt reaches similar conclusions to ours in his treatment of Barth (pp. 112-122, 'Monologue in Heaven'). He comments (p. 112) that in Barth's later theology:
- The process of revelation is reduced to a monologue conducted by God with himself as three persons, as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
44. In Sykes, S.W., ed., *Karl Barth : Studies of his Theological Method*, p. 201.
45. See chapter nine, where I explain the sense of God 'conceding nothing of Himself to man' in Barth's thought, in the context of a discussion of Barth's 'Kenotic' Christology.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Resurrection

By discussing Barth's treatment of the Resurrection, we intend to show how the development of his theological method may be applied to the interpretation of a particular doctrine. Our findings may be compared with those of chapter three concerning the development of Barth's view of Scripture, and we shall find certain parallels in his treatment of each.

That Barth's treatment of the resurrection 'changed' during the course of his career is a familiar charge. We find it, for instance, in Dr Peter Selby's *Look for the Living : The Corporate Nature of the Resurrection Faith*. Here we are told that:

In his early writings, Karl Barth took a position similar to that taken more recently by Rudolf Bultman. (1)

Selby believes that in *Der Auferstehung der Toten* (ET The Resurrection of the Dead),² written by Barth in 1924 four years after the second commentary on *Romans*, and which examines the concept of resurrection with special reference to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians,³ Barth:

.... states that the resurrection of Jesus is not a fact open to historical investigation, but rather a divine fact which could only be grasped by revelation. (4)

This approach of the 'early Barth' to the resurrection is associated by Selby with the views of Bultmann. It must be remembered, however, that Bultmann's primary concern is not so much to deny that the resurrection 'happened', as to argue that any attempt to investigate its nature from the perspective of an historian inquiring into its historicity misconceives its nature. Bultmann writes:

.... the historical problem is not of interest to Christian belief in the resurrection (my emphasis). (5)

It would be wrong to raise again the problem of how this preaching arose historically, as though that could vindicate its truth. That would be to tie our faith in the word of God to the results of historical research. (6)

Bultmann does not so much deny that the resurrection was an historical event, as thrust the question aside, seeing it as symptomatic of a failure to understand what the resurrection means. To investigate the historicity of the resurrection is for Bultmann to fall prey to an 'objectifying' approach which fails to recognise the crucial role of faith in the resurrection to an understanding of it.

Barth, like Bultmann, denies that the resurrection is a 'fact open to historical investigation': unlike Bultmann, however, his point is not so much that the resurrection may only be an object of faith rather than historically-mediated knowledge, as that it is, in Selby's words, 'a divine fact which could only be grasped by revelation'. The grace of God in revelation, rather than the nature of historical inquiry, is the methodological source for understanding the resurrection of Christ. In Bultmann, the source of understanding for the resurrection is man's faith rather than man's historical knowledge: in Barth it is God's grace giving understanding rather than man's historical reason or man's faith.

In his later theology, however, Selby sees a change in Barth's thought.⁷ He comes to distance himself more clearly from Bultmann's view, in Selby's opinion, on the ground that Bultmann 'removes the objectivity of the resurrection, making it a purely subjective matter'. This recalls Barth's arguments against Harnack on the question of biblical interpretation (see chapter three). Any substitution of man's faith for man's historical knowledge as a source of understanding will be a recourse to 'subjectivism' in Barth's view; what Barth wished to substitute was God's faith given to man, and guaranteed as 'objective', for man's 'autonomous' powers of understanding. In the third chapter we saw that Barth argues knowledge based on 'objective' historical methods to be in danger of 'subjectivism', and he cites the effective disagreements between historians on the nature of Christ's teaching as an example

of the difficulties experienced by the historical method in being 'objective'. The only 'objective' knowledge, in Barth's view, is knowledge grounded upon God's direct self-disclosure - that is to say, in Selby's words, 'a divine fact which could only be grasped by revelation'. Opposition to Bultmann's 'subjectivism' is the crucial factor in Barth's disagreement with him.

The difference in Barth's later, as opposed to his earlier, thought on the resurrection is usually seen to be that of a strict insistence, in the later writings, upon the resurrection as an event in the physical, historical world, and with this an emphasis upon the resurrection as a physical event. In the Preface to *Space, Time and Resurrection*, Professor Torrance recalls a visit to Barth made a few weeks before the latter's death:

.... Barth leaned over to me and said with considerable force, which I shall never forget, 'Wohlverstanden, leibliche Auferstehung' - 'Mark well, bodily resurrection'. (8)

Barth's view in the later volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*, it is claimed, is that the resurrection was an event in the physical, historical world, although he refuses to accept that it is open to historical verification. An analysis of this 'later' Barthian position is provided by Van A. Harvey in *The Historian and the Believer*.⁹ Van Harvey believes that Barth is seeking to have his cake and eat it in his later writings on the resurrection, in the sense that he wants the advantages of claiming that Jesus's resurrection was an historical event, in terms of its being accorded a definite empirical reality, whilst incurring none of the disadvantages in terms of its being open to critical historical scrutiny:

On the one hand, he insists that the resurrection is a physical and bodily fact while, on the other hand, he claims that the historian can determine nothing about it. (10)

If we examine Barth's view of the resurrection in his early theology, we see that it is not sufficient simply to say that Barth 'denies its

historicity' in his early work. In his second commentary on *Romans* we find Barth saying, indeed, that from one point of view the resurrection is an historical event:

So ist die Auferstehung das Ereignis von den Toren Jerusalem im Jahre 30, sofern sie dort 'eintrat', entdeckt und erkannt wurde.
(11)

As something that entered our world, was discovered and was recognised by us, the resurrection cannot but be event - 'Ereignis'. The desire to retain the fact of encounter between two separate worlds as a real fact of encounter discernible by man, ensures the 'historicity of the resurrection', although only 'from the point of view of' man's discerning. The 'sofern' is all-important. For, at the same time:

Und Sie ist es auch wieder gar nicht, sofern ihre Notwendigkeit, Erscheinung und Offenbarung nicht durch jenes Eintreten, Entdecken und Erkennen bedingt, sondern selbst ihr Bedingendes ist. (12)

In other words the resurrection is not an event in history, and the historicity of the resurrection is denied, insofar as its appearance, revelation and necessity are not and cannot (for God is free) be conditioned by the nature of its entry into, and discovery by, the world of man, in other words in so far as to assent to the 'historicity' of the resurrection might imply a constraining of God through the requirements laid upon Him indirectly through man's limited powers of discovery and recognition.

Barth's argument is that the resurrection of Christ is perceived by man to be within history, but that insofar as God's actions are not constrained by the limitations of human experience we cannot say that the resurrection as an act of God is in itself an historical action. The 'change' in Barth's later theology lies in his perceiving that this denial of innate historicity to the resurrection might open him up to precisely the charge that he was to level against Bultmann, namely that of 'subjectivism' - in other words, to the charge that the resurrection 'seemed' historical when assessed by man but 'in itself', uninfluenced

by the 'subjective' view of man, that it was not an objective, historical event. The need in his later theology, then, was to assent to the objectivity of the resurrection as a real historical event in itself, whilst finding a way to answer the objection that led him to shy away from this point of view in his commentary on *Romans*, namely that such an admission would 'constrain' God to act within the confines of the world as ordered and directed by man.

The most well-known Barthian quotation concerning the resurrection is the familiar analogy of tangent and circle from the commentary on *Romans*:

In die Auferstehung berührt die neue Welt des heiligen Geistes die alte Welt des Fleisches. Aber sie berührt sie wie die Tangente einer Kreis, ohne sie zu berühren, und gerade indem sie sie nicht berührt, berührt sie sie als ihre Begrenzung, als neue Welt. (13)

In the language of paradox which seeks to retain both the encounter of two worlds and their otherness from one another, the mathematical analogy of tangent and circle is brought in. But with an additional point - for in the touch that does not touch lies the true relation of the new world to the old as its 'Begrenzung', its limiter frontier. What discloses the new encloses the old. The tangent meets and draws away from the circle which it encounters: at the same time it defines its outermost point and rules its frontier. It does not open up new possibilities for man, so much as define and declare the limit of his possibilities. This role it possesses as the 'impossible possibility', pronouncing: 'thus far, and no further'. The resurrection declares the restricted scope of the old world and, rather than exalting it to, and carrying it over into, the new, bounds and limits it, establishes it within its finite sphere and, from the point of view of its own eternal declaration, dissolves it. It is not a point of unity between God and man, a point where man is exalted to become divine, or of God willingly giving himself to be human, but an occasion on which their separation is maintained and the enclosure, rather than the permeation, of the temporal

by the eternal declared through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Barth's language leads us to ask the question addressed to his treatment both of Incarnation and Resurrection in chapter two, namely that of whether his 'system' of 'infinite qualitative distinction' can bear any representation of a unity of God and man played out in history, either through the condescension of the divine to become human in the Incarnation or the exaltation of the human to become divine in the resurrection. Barth's presentation is, rather, that both 'enclose' the human within the divine, rather than unite them: rather than being itself an historical event, the resurrection declares the limits of history. As the 'line of intersection' (Schnittlinie) marked by the Incarnation does not result in an extension (Ausdehnung) of the historical plane known to us (der uns bekannten Ebene), so also the resurrection does not 'touch' (berührt) the historical world in any real sense, however much it may be perceived by us to do so.¹⁴ The historicity of the resurrection in this early thought of Barth is a subjective interpretation of man, not constitutive of the objective reality of the event of God's raising his son.

In the 1920s Barth's thought develops from the 'ontological dualism' shown in *Romans* to an 'epistemological dualism' which separates knowledge based on reason acting within faith from knowledge based upon 'natural' reason. We find an anticipation of this shift in *Die Auferstehung der Toten*, written in the form of a commentary upon Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in 1924. In commenting on the famous fifteenth chapter of the epistle, Barth refers to the Pauline claim that the resurrection of Jesus stands or falls with the resurrection of the dead generally. How, in this context, he asks, can the resurrection be an historical fact, when the perception of it is bound up expressly with the perception of a general truth? Barth's point is to say that if the dead are not raised, then Christ is not raised, is to attempt to deduce

an historical fact from a general truth.^{14a}

In what sense, furthermore, Barth asks, are the resurrection appearances historical? History, he declares, will only take us as far as the empty tomb. Beyond that, all ideas as to the way in which He appeared to the disciples are incapable of being completed.¹⁵ Indeed, insofar as to pronounce them 'historical' is to reduce what took place before the disciples and women at that time, it is necessary to argue that the appearances are 'only comprehensible as revelation; otherwise they are incomprehensible'.¹⁶ For 'that revelation is revelation can only be proved from revelation itself'.¹⁷ And when we say that the resurrection was 'according to the Scriptures', we thereby register that we cannot explain how it is true, but only that there is a 'consensus of voices announcing a truth that proves itself'.¹⁸ It is clear that Barth believes the resurrection appearances to constitute a truth that 'proves itself', that provides, as it were, the very means by which it can be understood.

The argument here is not quite the same as in *Romans*. The emphasis is upon how we know the resurrection, rather than the resurrection itself. The claim is that knowledge of the resurrection is based upon revelation, a self-authenticating source of understanding which does not require the natural - including the historical - resources of human reason to determine its truth from their own powers. The stress is not upon the resurrection as itself a divine reality which 'encloses' the human, but upon all ideas as to the way in which 'his appearance was seen' as 'incapable of being completed', and upon the comprehensibility of the resurrection 'as revelation; otherwise it is incomprehensible'. In *Romans* the resurrection was a reality that touched this world 'without touching it': in 'The Resurrection of the Dead' knowledge of the resurrection does not 'touch' the ordinary knowledge of reason acting from its own resources. *The Resurrection of the Dead* thereby shows the influence of an epistemological debate with Harnack in which Barth's hermeneutics sharpened itself.

There is a further respect in which Barth's view shows evidence of change in 1924. In the 1924 work the perception of the resurrection by God's direct activity in man is not made to exclude the historicity of the resurrection. The resurrection, Barth writes, is

a historical divine fact (geschichtliche Gottestatsache), which as such is only to be grasped in the category of revelation and in none other. (19)

Although it is to be grasped in the category of revelation and none other, the resurrection is still a 'historical divine fact'.

The natural powers of human understanding, including the historical reason, which in understanding revelation can only work within a God-given faith, nevertheless work within that faith: they are integrated into it (we discuss this in detail in chapter six and seven) as the 're-baptised' instruments of a self-authenticating revelation. Thus the historicity of the resurrection is not so much denied as 'taken into' the order of God's self-disclosure. It is 'historical', but only within the ambit of 'faith seeking understanding'. In the *Church Dogmatics* we find this 'Aufhebung' of the natural knowledge of God fully catalogued in terms of concepts such as 'Primal History', 'Saga' and 'God's time', in which historical and temporal concepts are re-expressed from 'within' revelation itself, and in which context the objectivity of the resurrection as an historical event (within God's revelation and therefore, as Van Harvey points out, not open to historical investigation) is affirmed.

In the second commentary on *Romans*, the most accurate assessment of Barth's view of the resurrection would be that its historicity was denied, whilst the historical nature of man's perception of it was affirmed. In the commentary on 1 Corinthians, the perception of the resurrection as historical, rather than being a subjective assessment of its nature by man in his merely relative being, becomes an 'objective' insight into its nature based on God's gift of grace in revelation. The historical and temporal structure of human understanding are made to conform to the

'objective' reality of God in his self-manifestation by the action of God himself, and therefore become vehicles of 'objective' statements about him. The *Church Dogmatics*, in its references to the resurrection, continues this approach. We shall concentrate to begin with upon the consideration of the resurrection in III 2.

Barth here provides one of his longest treatments of the subject in the *Church Dogmatics*, in a section entitled 'Jesus, Lord of time'.²⁰ We also find here a discussion by Barth of his differences with Bultmann.

In Barth's understanding of time, our temporal existence can only be understood in terms of our relation to 'God's time' (for God does not live without time, according to Barth, but in the 'uncreated time' in which past, present and future are simultaneous rather than successive). This relation to God can only be understood through Christ, who as Lord of time enables the time of his existence in history to acquire the character of God's time.

This acquisition is specifically related to the 'Easter time', the forty days between resurrection and ascension. Barth calls this a 'further history' of Jesus, following the end of his 'first history'.²¹ It is this period that:

shows us, as nothing else can, according to the New Testament, that even as a man in His time Jesus is the Lord of all time. (22)

It does not, however, 'make' Jesus Lord of time: it reveals a lordship that has existed throughout his life. However, it is difficult to see how these forty days 'reveal' this lordship of time more than the previous thousand of his ministry. According to Barth, 'the man Jesus was manifested among them in the mode of God',²³ during the period between resurrection and ascension, and a deity hitherto veiled was revealed. God, who has a different time than men, 'willed to give man a share in this time of His',²⁴ and the forty days reveal this. Yet they remain, for all that, specifically forty days. Barth's argument is that men experience an 'assumption of their time into His (Christ's)',²⁵ made manifest during the 'Easter history'. This 'assumption' enables man to

participate in the simultaneity of time to God's time, and enables the time of Jesus's life to become 'present' to men of every age in their own times, since all times are present to it (as 'eternal time').

Because men in their own times are assumed into the eternal time for which all times are simultaneous, they participate in this perspective of simultaneity, and therefore the life of Jesus becomes present to them - to the prophets it is present in their prophecy, and to the apostles in their recollection.²⁶

God's action in giving man a share in His 'time', then, is mediated through the participation of the time of Jesus in his 'time', a participation which is revealed through the forty days which display Jesus's Lordship of time.

Barth's treatment of time is, however, ambiguous. His argument makes it clear that Jesus' Lordship of time enables His time to acquire the character of God's time - to which all times are simultaneously present - in a way that ordinary human time cannot hope to do, being itself always successive time. On the other hand, from the perspective of man, the Easter time is forty days, as Jesus's ministry was three years. In this sense man's time cannot become God's. Yet the 'assumption' of human time 'into' God's time through Jesus's Lordship of time implies that the two become one, and that through Christ's simultaneous presence to all times they are lifted into the time of God. The process appears to be one in which Barth constantly seeks to 'admit' human time, through Christ, 'into' the time of God, whilst at the same time ensuring a distinction between the two. From one perspective, then, the forty days are a specific length of 'human' time of limited duration: from another perspective, however, they are the moment of entry of man's time into God's. On the one hand, it appears that Christ's 'taking of time' upon himself brings time and eternity together: as Lord of time, Jesus admits man's successive time to the simultaneity of God's time. On the other hand, the forty days reveal the time of God which is other than that of man.

The difficulties in Barth's treatment of time are brought out in Dr R. H. Roberts's article, 'Barth's Doctrine of Time : Its Nature and Implications':²⁷

Can Jesus' being in time mean what it means for us all? Barth's ambiguity is here quintessentially expressed, for his answer is affirmative, yet immediately qualified by the 'inclusion' of such time by the divine time. (28)

It was Dr Roberts who initially emphasised to us the suggestion of an unsung Hegelianism in the *Church Dogmatics*,²⁹ and the word in inverted commas - inclusion - suggests the process by which, we have argued, Barth 'rebaptises' the constants of the natural world, such as time, within a supervening divine reality.^{29a} Roberts believes that Barth cannot, in the end, escape the charge that his treatment of 'the resurrection time' is docetic, for although Barth agrees that 'only a docetic attitude to Jesus can deny that His being in time also means what being in time means for us all',³⁰ he also affirms that the 'time of revelation as consummated in the resurrection becomes the actual prototypical basis of human time',³¹ a prototype which by its taking up of ordinary human time into itself must necessarily rob it of its natural properties (although Barth would claim that it affirms them). If Roberts nevertheless feels that Barth's treatment is 'docetic', it is because he denies that 'ordinary' time redefined from 'within' its divine prototype remains ordinary time, in other words that such an 'Aufhebung' of ordinary time is anything other than its effective dissolution.

'The dialectic is resolved upwards in every context',³² Roberts comments. The terms of natural human experience - time, history, narrative, and so on, are explained in terms of a 'divine' time, a 'Primal' history (Urgeschichte), and the concept of 'saga',³³ divine realities which originate and 'include' their human equivalents, determining that whatever the real participation of God through Christ in the natural order, that order will always be finally explained in terms of these putative divine originals.

Thus we find in III 1 that the aim of creation is 'history', qualified

as 'salvation-history', which is not 'one history among others', but the history:

.... the true history which encloses all other history and to which in some way all other history belongs to the extent that it reflects and illustrates the history of salvation. (34)

The putative divine original 'explains' the natural history which it 'encloses', despite the fact that, in using the word 'history', salvation-history has itself borrowed from the natural order. 'True' history is not history as it is lived and experienced by man in the natural order, but the history of salvation which encloses that order: similarly it is God's time, revealed in the Lordship of time enjoyed by Christ, which encloses the human time of temporal succession.

Like some cancerous Doppelgänger, theological reality appears to inflate itself, drawing life from the reality it condemns, perfecting in exquisite form what could be seen as the most profound and systematically consistent theological alienation of the natural order ever achieved. (35)

For theological reality 'draws life' from the natural understanding of time, history and narrative in order to give substance to those divine 'prototypes' which enable theology to claim that it deals with 'another order' than they, an order in which that natural understanding is said to be 'enclosed' in order to avoid the charge of docetism - the most obvious form of 'theological alienation'. Such a process of 'enclosing' maintains the ambiguity of a time at once 'natural' and assumed into another order of 'God's time', a history that is 'pre-historical' and yet encloses all other history, recounted in 'saga' which is immune to the canons of ordinary human criticism which, however, it embraces. The 'divine' realities receive their substance in fact from their human equivalents, while effectively anaesthetising them insofar as their critical capacity is concerned: hence the possibility of arguing, as van Harvey points out, that the resurrection is 'historical' whilst free of criticism from the perspective of the investigative historian. The resurrection participates in this ambiguity in the significance which Barth accords to the forty days which, whilst retaining their natural

temporal sense, at the same time represent the disclosure of an assumption of natural time into the time of God.

When we examine Barth's treatment of Bultmann in this section, we find the claim that whilst Bultmann, unlike Cullmann, recognises the centrality of the resurrection, he identifies it with no particular 'event'. Bultmann understands the possible scope of words like 'event' in terms of their 'secular' usage. To this any 'religious' usage must be applicable. If the resurrection was not an historical event, it was not an event, since we only use the word 'event' of what is historical.

Barth rejects this approach entirely. Just as Cullmann made the mistake of understanding the event of Christ within the prevailing understanding of an 'event' (and thereby rejects it as 'event'), Bultmann, like Herrmann, Ritschl and Schleiermacher, thereby forces systematic theology, in Barth's opinion, into an anthropological straitjacket, in which- in the case of Bultmann - an event is historical only if open to verification by the methods of historical scholarship. However, the resurrection, Barth argues, is a 'fact' beyond the scope of historical methods, because unlike other facts. It is an event beyond the reach of the historian, to which fact the disjointed, even incompatible, Easter narratives pay a subtle homage by their apparent inadequacy.³⁶

However, despite the apparent opposition between them, there is in fact a similarity between Barth and Bultmann in their treatments of the resurrection. The latter seeks to bypass the thorny problem of its historicity, and to identify the self-manifestation of the Risen Lord with an act of faith on the part of the disciples (the significance of the cross), for which the question of the historicity of the resurrection is irrelevant - or even a faith-endangering question to ask.^{36a} The former (Barth) also seeks to bypass the question of historicity, and to speak of an 'objective' reality of the resurrection, but one removed

from, and independent of, those features of the external world which require to be analysed by the historian:

Everything had to happen as it actually did according to the Easter Story in its simple, literal sense. There was no other way. (37)

Thus Barth. Yet his emphasis is upon its literal sense (ihrem schlichten, nicht umgedeuteten Wortlaut) which is not to be thought of as equivalent to the literal sense of events reported in the everyday world of historically verifiable events. Otherwise we could not recognise what Barth means when he refers to the empty tomb as a 'sign' in the sense of 'presupposition' and asks:

Is it just a 'legend'? What matter? It still refers to the phenomenon ensuring the resurrection, to the presupposition of the appearance of Jesus ...

Indeed:

It is the sign which obviates all possible misunderstanding. It cannot therefore but demand our assent, even as a legend. (38)

It is almost as if the terms in which the resurrection is expressed have become independent of the question of whether it actually - literally! - happened.

Behind Barth's approach lies a difficulty. He argues that the 'straitjacket' which judges the objectivity of the resurrection according to the criteria by which other events are judged to be objective is to be cast off. Yet his own insistence upon the 'objectivity' of the resurrection is necessarily parasitic upon what is ordinarily conceived of as 'fact' or 'event', capable of being brought within the intellectual grasp of the historian. On the one hand, the commitment to an external reality appreciable by man makes of the resurrection, in Barth's view, very much what the historian might in principle investigate. On the other hand, the emphasis upon a fact beyond historical criticism, something that happened in a 'higher history' and is no ordinary event, makes not only the event of resurrection itself, on which all the evangelists are silent, but the whole forty days and the events that took place within

them, something to which Barth grants 'objectivity' only as a series of events unrelated to others in which the historian is rightfully interested.

Both Barth and Bultmann seek to bypass the problems surrounding historical investigation of the resurrection narratives: but while for Bultmann the emphasis in their interpretation may be placed upon subjective appropriation of the significance of Jesus's death by the believer, Barth's emphasis is upon an objectivity located 'beyond' the range of historical criticism whilst 'enclosing' the historical within itself.

Barth's understanding of the resurrection is to be distinguished from that of Wolfhart Pannenberg. The latter considers understanding of the resurrection to be hindered by the tendency to regard all historical events as possessing the same form.³⁹ He argues that the resurrection must be understood in terms of a concept of history that emphasises the contingency of historical events. Pannenberg's argument, unlike Barth's, affirms the historicity of the resurrection while broadening the conception of what is historical, whereas Barth affirms that the resurrection is only 'historical' from the perspective of a salvation-history which is to be separated from the natural historical order that it 'encloses', however broadly the latter is conceived. Pannenberg emphasises the 'uniqueness' of the resurrection in the sense in which all historical events are unique: Barth emphasises its uniqueness in terms of an event whose explanation is contained 'within' itself.

Berthold Klappert⁴⁰ supports the view that we have taken of the problematical nature of the resurrection as an 'event' in Barth's later writings. Klappert argues that Barth distinguishes between the 'Nicht-Historizität' of the resurrection in terms of its being 'ausserhalb menschlicher Pragmatik und Kausalität', and its 'Historizität' 'im Sinn der Raumzeitlichkeit, Datierbarkeit und Lokalisierbarkeit',⁴¹ but makes

it clear that this distinction is itself problematical. However, Klappert tends to identify Barth's view with Pannenberg's, in that:

Die Auferstehung ist ein die historische Ebene implizierendes zugleich aber transzendierendes Ereignis und insofern ein 'prähistorisches' Geschehen. (42)

Yet for Pannenberg the resurrection transcends the historical plane insofar as that plane is not a 'closed continuum' of predetermined events, in other words insofar as the historical plane transcends itself:⁴³ whereas Barth is concerned with a plane which transcends the 'historical plane' of the natural order altogether. Barth's view of the event of resurrection 'als ein prähistorisches Geschehen mit historischem Implikat' distinguishes the resurrection from the historical plane on which, however, it has an 'implication',⁴⁴ whilst Pannenberg considers the historical plane itself to include the possibility of the resurrection as a contingent event within history.

Klappert discusses at some length Barth's treatment of the resurrection in *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1,⁴⁵ and once again the question of the nature of the 'event' of God's raising His Son is revealed to be ambiguous in his presentation. It is, Barth says, not to be understood as a 'supernatural event' (überweltliches Ereignis). Its character as a real event in history is implied by its character as judgment and revelation and underlines this character, ensuring that the judgment is 'total diesseitig erkennbar'. In Klappert's words:

Der raumzeitliche Geschehenscharakter der Auferweckung als Implikat ihres Urteilscharakters ermöglicht nach Barth die menschliche Erkennbarkeit des im Kreuz unter dem Nein verborgenen Ja. (46)

The resurrection, then, was not a supernatural event, was in space and time, and had the character of an 'occurrence'. Yet, as we have noted, it was a 'prähistorisches' Geschehen. It was not an historical event which could be treated as other events were treated:

.... als 'Historie' kann allenfalls der Tod, als 'Historie' kann aber die Auferstehung nicht erfasst werden. (47)

Although an occurrence in space and time, the resurrection is not 'fassbar' historically. This is the point made by van Harvey, that Barth appears to want the advantages of claiming that the resurrection was an event, without the disadvantages of its thereby being open to critical scrutiny by the historian. A 'raumzeitliche Geschehen' which is, however, not 'fassbar' by the historian, seems to possess precisely the questionable status that van Harvey points out, and this must be borne in mind whenever it is simply claimed that in Barth's later theology he affirmed that the resurrection was an event. As Klappert remarks:

Aber nun erhebt sich die Frage verschärft: Inwiefern kann Barth von einem im Raum und in der Zeit gegenständlichen, nur eben 'historisch' nicht fassbaren, aber wirklichen Geschehen sprechen?
(48)

This is also the question van Harvey wishes to ask. How can Barth continue to protect the resurrection narratives from historical criticism and at the same time insist upon the 'raumzeitliche Geschehenscharakter' of what they record?

Barth's approach to the problem of the character of the resurrection as an 'event' must be understood in the context of the 'system' by which, in his later thought, concepts applicable to the human order are 'rebaptised' within an order of grace or revelation. History is understood in terms of salvation-history, the 'true' history which includes all other history: similarly, man's time is 'enclosed' within 'God's time'. Roberts traces, in his article,^{48a} the development of Barth's treatment of time and eternity in his writings, from their separation in 'Romans' to the 'aufhebung' of man's time within God's time in the *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2. From the 'infinite, qualitative distinction' between time and eternity which forms Barth's system in 'Romans', his thought proceeds to the 'enclosing' of time within eternity - the time of God - made manifest in Jesus's Lordship of time during the forty days of his post-resurrection appearances. The nature of the 'enclosing' of

man's time within God's time is, however, ambiguous. It both appears that man's time retains its natural qualities, and that it participates in the time of God to which all other times are simultaneously present. The same ambiguity characterises the resurrection of Jesus, treated by Barth both as an event in history and - as a 'pre-historical' event - as an occurrence within that 'salvation-history' which, as the true history which 'encloses' all other histories, is nevertheless not open to historical scrutiny, but rather is described in terms of the peculiar literary form of 'saga'.

The process, then, by which Barth attempts, in van Harvey's words, to 'have his cake and eat it', is one by which the participation of God in time and history is only in fact a participation in God's time and salvation-history: but because these are said to be the prototypes of their natural counterparts, Barth refutes the charge of docetism by claiming that he is referring to a 'real' temporal and historical involvement of God when he speaks of 'God's time' and 'salvation-history' or 'pre-history'. Because 'natural' time and history are 'enclosed' within the time of God and the history of salvation, God's participation through Christ in His own time and history is also said to be a participation in our time and history; although, because the participation is in His time and His history, it is not open to investigation by the historians of our time and our history! Roberts is surely right to find in this the ploy of a disguised docetism, and also, in the presentation of human time and history as 'enclosed' within God's as 'true' time and 'true' history, a parallel to the Hegelian dialectic as criticised by Karl Marx. The criticism of Barth that it is in fact our time and our history which are 'true', and the 'divine' counterparts to them mere abstraction derived from their natural usage, rather than vice versa as Barth would have it, bears a relationship to the inversion of the Hegelian dialectic practised by Feuerbach and Marx.⁴⁹

In the light of these remarks, the conclusion that Barth 'changed his view' of the resurrection must be treated very carefully. Initially, under the influence of the 'ontological dualism' of *Romans*, the historicity of the resurrection was a matter of man's subjective perception only in Barth's thought; this view Barth does change, particularly as he comes to criticise the 'subjectivism' of Bultmann's interpretation of the resurrection in terms of the faith of the disciples. Yet Barth's later thought retains a dualism, subtly disguised, between God's time and man's, between the history of salvation in which the 'event' of resurrection takes place and 'ordinary' history which it 'encloses'. It is a dualism in which the divine world 'reproduces' for itself the language of the human, whilst claiming that it is the prototype of the human. The divine world is not an 'unknown other' which forms the invisible boundary of the visible world, (*Romans*), but makes itself known in terms of the visible world whilst claiming to be the origin and foundation of the visible world, the time of God to which all human times are present, the history of salvation which 'encloses' all other histories. This process Roberts describes as 'theological alienation', whereby theological language represents an 'alienated' form of secular language.

In this later thought of Barth, his 'dualism' is not always recognised,⁵⁰ and the supposition is made that he has in fact 'reversed' the outlook of *Romans*. In fact he has made it much more subtle. He has convinced many of his readers that he has become committed to the resurrection as an 'objective', 'historical' 'event', thus discarding the 'radical subjectivism' of his earlier years. The fact that this 'historical event' is unable to be investigated by the historian should make clear, however, that the resurrection as a 'prähistorisches Geschehen' remains an 'event' within the history, and in the time, which are God's and not man's, and which only appear to be man's because Barth has used the concepts of ordinary language in order to 'fill out' the nature of

the divine world which he earlier professed to be unknown, and in order to maintain a certain ambiguity as to whether he is referring to events in 'this' world or not.

Our treatment of the resurrection in this chapter may be compared with our treatment of hermeneutics in chapter three. In the third chapter we noticed a critical ambiguity in Barth's presentation of the 'content' of scripture, as something both separate from, and yet located within, the words themselves (chapter 3, p.69). We argued that the 'content' of the text functioned as a 'pseudo-reality' which, while claiming to be separate from the words themselves, words that might be critically examined and their authenticity questioned, was nevertheless, parasitic upon them for any meaning that it might have as their 'content'. We observe something similar with respect to the resurrection, an event within a time that is God's, and part of a 'pre-history' that is immune to historical investigation, whilst dependent upon the ordinary 'human' sense of time and history for any meaning which it might claim as a real 'Ereignis' - event. The Resurrection, like the Word or content of scripture, is beyond critical, historical assessment in Barth's presentation: and yet both are apparently identified with 'human' realities - a collection of texts and a real event in space and time.- which must surely be open to such criticism. Barth's relentless pursuit of the benefits of identification with the known world, whilst equally concerned to protect for the Bible and the understanding of the resurrection the benefits of identification with what is beyond human criticism, renders his theology ultimately ambiguous, as these two examples have sought to illustrate.

Notes on Chapter Eight

1. p. 46.
2. ET, *The Resurrection of the Dead*.
3. 1 Cor. XV.
4. Selby, *op.cit.*, p. 46.
5. See Bultmann's article 'The New Testament and Mythology', in Bartsch, H. -W., ed., *Kerygam and Myth*, p. 42.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
7. 'But by the time of the *Church Dogmatics* his standpoint appears to have changed' (Selby, *op.cit.*, p. 61-2.).
8. Torrance, T.F., *Space, Time and Resurrection*, p. xi.
9. See pp. 153-159.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
11. Barth, Karl, *Der Römerbrief*, 5th edition, p.6.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p.5.
14. See chapter two, where we discuss Barth's theology in his commentary on *Romans*.
- 14a. See Barth, Karl, *The Resurrection of the Dead*, p. 140.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 142ff. Barth refers (p.142) to the tomb as 'the demonstrable' (das beweisbare) see Karl Barth, *Die Aufenstehung der Toten*, p. 78.
16. Barth, K., *The Resurrection of the Dead*, p. 146.
17. *Ibid.*, p.148.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Barth, K., *Der Auferstehung der Toten*, p. 80: ET pp. 145-6. cf. p. 121 (ET, pp. 211-12) where Barth refers to salvation history as 'a real history' and 'the history' ('die eine wirkliche Geschichte').
20. *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, pp.437-511.
21. *Ibid.*, p.441.
22. *Ibid.*, p.441.
23. *Ibid.*, p.448.
24. *Ibid.*, p.455.
25. *Ibid.*, p.456ff.

26. *Ibid.*
27. Roberts, R.H., 'Barth's Doctrine of Time: Its Nature and Implications', in Sykes, S.W., ed., *Karl Barth: Studies of his Theological Method*, chapter 4, pp. 88-147.
28. *Ibid.*, p.139.
29. See *ibid.*, pp. 86-96, esp. pp. 93-4.
- 29a. See chapter six.
30. Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, p.463.
31. Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 136.
32. *Ibid.*, p.139.
33. 'Saga' is the form of narrative appropriate to recounting 'Primal History' (Urgeschichte), 'an intuitive picture of a pre-historical reality of history' (*Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, p.82). Barth distinguishes it from 'myth', which presents historical realities as a 'cover to see beyond for general truth' (*Ibid.*, p. 86). On this basis Barth claims to distinguish the Babylonian creation 'myths' from the biblical 'saga'.
34. *Church Dogmatics*, III, 1, p.60.
35. Roberts, *op.cit.*, p. 124-5.
36. See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, pp. 451-2.
- 36a. See Marxsen, W., *The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth*.
37. Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, III, 2, p.451 Kirchliche Dogmatik, III, 2, p.541.).
38. *Ibid.*, p. 453.
39. See, e.g., Pannenberg, W., *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol.1, 'Redemptive Event and History'. Pannenberg effectively criticises Barth (pp. 15-16) for allowing the 'theology of redemptive history' to have 'fled into a harbour supposedly safe from the critical-historical flood tide, the harbour of a suprahistorical - or with Barth, of pre-history'. See also pp. 41-2, where in reference to the incarnation Pannenberg insists that God's redemptive deed 'took place within the universal correlative connections of human history, not in a ghetto of redemptive history, or in a primal history belonging to a dimension which is 'oblique' to ordinary history (and intersects it only at that notorious mathematical point which is without extension on the intersected plane)' - a clear reference to the terminology of Barth's *Romans*.
- At the same time Pannenberg is concerned to argue that historical inquiry must not be constricted by the domination of a particular world-view, so that 'instead of pointing out analogies from case to case, one postulates a fundamental homogeneity (Gleichartigkeit) of all reality with the current range of experience and research' (*ibid.*; p.45). The historian must keep his eye on the 'inexchangeable individuality and contingency of an event' (p.46). Pannenberg thus argues for an appropriately broad concept of history, which can include the events of salvation-history, whereas Barth seeks to identify a

particular form of history as a 'protective harbour' within which the details of God's actions in salvation history may be drawn out of the range of critical inquiry.

40. Klappert, B., *Die Auferweckung des Gekreuzigten*.
41. *Ibid.*, p.336.
42. *Ibid.*, p.338.
43. See note 39.
44. An implication which, as Klappert points out, Barth can only elucidate with a 'hartnäckige Weigerung'. See *ibid.*, p. 334f and 341.
45. *Ibid.*, pp. 287ff.
46. Klappert, *op.cit.*, pp. 330-1.
47. *Ibid.*, pp. 335-6.
48. *Ibid.*, p.340.
- 48a. See note 27.
49. Roberts, (*op.cit.*, p. 125) compares the logic of Barth's position to that of Hegel as criticised by Karl Marx in the 'Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy' as a Whole', found in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*.
50. E.g., by W. Künneth, in *The Theology of the Resurrection*, p. 54, n.69:
 In his *Kirchliche Dogmatik III 2* Barth has abandoned his previous supra-historic theories.
 Yet Künneth recognises (p. 76) Barth's 'vacillating terminology', without using this recognition to call in question the nature of the 'change' between *Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics*, which in some respects, as we have tried to show, is more apparent than real.

CHAPTER NINE

Barth and Christology

1. Christ the source of the knowledge of God

In chapters six and seven we argued that Barth's theology 'kicks man upstairs'. It so promotes him to participation in the being of God that his effective 'independence' of God, an 'independence' which we define in the context of man's being an object of grace rather than an object of creation, is removed. We concluded that Barth's 'theological anthropology' was at fault, not for seeking to understand the nature of man from that of God revealed in Christ, but for failing to describe an ontology of man in his humanity apart from Christ. In chapter seven we sought to argue, that corresponding to this lack of an ontology of man is a failure to take into account the epistemological status of man's knowledge in the appropriation of revelation. Barth effectively argues that man's knowledge of God bypasses his natural understanding, which 'acknowledges' the knowledge which man has from beyond himself. Man's knowledge of God exists within God's knowledge of Himself, just as man's humanity exists within the humanity of God revealed in Christ. Man is, in other words, a part of God, not to the detriment of God's absolute independence of man (as in Hegel), but to the detriment of man's relative independence of God.

In the notion that the Incarnation of the Son of God involves a 'self-emptying' or 'Kenosis' in the taking of human form, there may lie implicitly the idea that human and divine stand apart from one another as alien worlds. In IV,1 Barth writes of 'The Way of the Son of God into the far country'¹ and the image is of a distant, inhospitable land to which the Son must venture on a mission to save its inhabitants. He must travel lightly and incognito (He must 'empty Himself'). Indeed it may not be that He does so simply out of a desire to disguise Himself for the sake of achieving a certain moral purpose, as in Kierkegaard's famous image

of the prince and the maiden,² but rather that such a self-emptying is forced upon Him by the constraints of the 'journey' which He must undertake. He cannot be in the 'far country'³ as a prince, not because He would be thereby unable to make His message clear, but because He would not then be among them at all. He must be among them as one who grows to consciousness as a human being, who is ordinary enough to be lost in a crowd, who may lose His temper, His confidence, perhaps even His faith, who may suffer and who may die. Kierkegaard's prince does not require the surroundings of his humbled existence in order to discover his royal persona: he is always the rich man playing at being poor. He does not need the far country in order to discover who he is, but only in order to fulfil a purpose. Whereas the Son of God who went his way did not at a certain point 'descend' from one region to another, from heavenly security to earthly vulnerability, carrying with Him the memory of a past home and the assurance of an identity already established in His pre-existence.

The explorer who travels to an inhospitable far country may suffer acute physical discomfort. The 'alien culture' he encounters may lead him to question his values and even his basic sense of who he is. Yet he will always be able to understand himself, from the moment of his venturing abroad, as the one who 'came from' another land, his selfhood determined in advance of his later experience. What we will consider in this chapter is the aptness of this image for the incarnate Word. We will suggest that Christology must take account of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth had to learn of His 'divinity' through experience which was entirely determined by His human surroundings, from which He had no escape by way of the memory of a former habitation, or the consciousness that He had 'once been elsewhere'.

Barth's treatment of the 'way of the Son of God into the far country' is to be understood in terms of a key presupposition set forth in his

Christological reflections in I 2. This presupposition is that the manhood of Christ is only the 'predicate' of the Godhead,⁴ and therefore that whatever the 'condescension' required of the Son or Logos in his 'journey' into the world, His self-giving will not extend to a failure to recognise His earthly life as a series of experiences which happen to 'Him', their enduring divine subject. The Word is the subject of the incarnate being of Christ.⁵

The unity of God and man in Jesus Christ, Barth insists, is primarily a personal or hypostatic union, and only secondarily a unity of natures.⁶ The Greek tradition of the early church, and Lutheran scholastic tradition after the Reformation, had introduced a dangerous disregard for the primacy of the personal union, in Barth's view, taking an 'independent interest' in the unio naturarum, but Reformed Christology had restored the balance.⁷ To say that this unity is primarily a personal union, is to say that the incarnate Christ is not composed of two separate 'things' or 'substances', but that, although He has two natures, the human nature acquires subsistence only within the being of the Word. Hence Barth's interpretation of the patristic ideas of 'enhypostatic' and 'anhypostatic' union, which to him represent two different ways of formulating the same point: the union is 'enhypostatic', in that the human nature acquires subsistence in the mode of being of the Word, and 'anhypostatic', in that it acquires subsistence only in the mode of being of the Word, and not in and for itself.⁸ Hence also Barth's interpretation of the patristic debate concerning an 'impersonal' humanity in Christ; the notion of Christ's human nature as 'impersonal', Barth argues, makes the point, not that it lacks personality, but that it lacks a separate hypostasis, in other words, it stresses once again that Christ's human nature has existence only through and in the Word.^{8a}

Not only is the Word always subject of the incarnate being of Christ, and the human nature have subsistence only within the Word, but Barth also insists that there is an essential irreversibility in the process

by which the Word became flesh.⁹ It is never the case that, just as humanity only has reality through the Word, so also the Word only has reality through humanity, even in its incarnate existence. This is a 'heresy' which Barth identifies with the idea of 'perichoresis', and with the Lutheran use of the notion of a 'communicatio idiomatum'.¹⁰ The manhood is a 'predicate' of the Godhead, but the Godhead may never become a 'predicate' of the manhood. The process is always irreversible in the sense that it is always the divinity of Christ which sustains and gives to His humanity, and never the humanity which sustains and gives to His divinity.

The irreversibility of the 'exchange of properties' between the two natures in Barth's Christology, and his argument that the human nature is in any case not a separate 'subject' which might receive properties from the divinity as predicates of itself, is in Barth's view a guarantee against the anthropocentric tendency which he regards as characteristic of nineteenth century theology. Thus one finds him return to the attack against Lutheran theologians, who have interpreted the communicatio idiomatum in terms of reciprocity between the humanity and the divinity of Christ, in his treatment of Ludwig Feuerbach in an essay on the history of modern theology.¹¹

Barth argues that the line of thought which had been 'crystallised in the orthodox Lutheran doctrine of the "communication of idioms" according to which the predicates of the divine majesty really belong to the humanity of Jesus as such and in abstracto'¹² found its fulfilment in Feuerbach's reduction of theology to anthropology, a reduction which Barth ventures to describe as 'more theological than that of many theologians'! Denying the principle of the Reformed church, that 'finitum non capax infiniti', the Lutheran theologians had allowed for 'the possibility of an inversion of above and below, of heaven and earth, of God and man - the possibility of forgetting the eschatological limit'.¹³

Feuerbach's argument that the attributes of God were in fact human attributes 'projected' to an infinite degree as part of a process by which man realised his own 'divine' possibilities, represented for Barth a universalising of the Lutheran view that the qualities of Christ's divine nature might be predicated of his human nature.¹⁴ Feuerbach simply extended what was true of Christ's human nature to all humanity. The same influence lay behind Hegel, Barth continues, who had indeed in his early life studied theology with the intention of becoming a Lutheran pastor.

Unless, then, the manner in which God becomes and is man in Christ is an irreversible one, according to which the humanity is sustained in being through the divinity but not vice versa, then the process by which God gives himself to man in the Incarnation will become one in which man seizes control of God and turns Him into an image of himself. Divine condescension will become human possession. The incarnation, Barth insists, must be understood as an assumption of humanity by God, not an assumption of divinity by man. Lutheran notions of a 'communicatio idiomatum' and a 'perichoresis' or exchange of properties between the natures threatened to turn God's Incarnation into man's divinisation. Feuerbach and Hegel, in this respect, represented a German Lutheran tradition extending a false Christology to a false anthropology.

It is, then, only as committed to the view that the Word remains subject of the incarnate being of Christ, and that there is no reciprocity between the natures of Christ in His incarnate life, that Barth sets out, in Volume IV of his *Church Dogmatics*,¹⁵ to give an account of Christ's work of reconciliation.

In journeying to the 'far country', Barth insists, in being a Good Samaritan to man rather than abandon him like the priest and the Levite, God does not, although what he performs is an 'act of extravagance', risk His being:

He does not forfeit anything by doing this. In being neighbour to man, in order to deal with him and act towards him as such, He does not need to fear for His godhead. (16)

Although, then, other gods, in Barth's view, reflect 'the human pride which will not bend', and God alone 'in His high majesty is humble', this humbling of Himself does not extend to a risking of Himself - a 'fearing for His godhead'. Like the prince in Kierkegaard's tale, 'The Lord as Servant' does not forfeit His Lordship but suppresses it. He stoops to conquer.

Yet Barth's language at times approaches a greater sense of 'Kenosis' than this. In talking of a 'self-limitation' and 'self-humiliation' on the part of God, he refers to 'the grace in which God compromises Himself';¹⁷ and later Barth remarks:

He is silent where Job too had to be silent before God. But, again, there takes place here something quite different from what took place there. In Him God has entered in, breaking into that circulus vitiosus of the human plight, making His own not only the guilt of man but also his rejection and condemnation, giving Himself to bear the divinely righteous consequences of human sin He, the electing, eternal God, willed himself to be rejected and therefore perishing man. This is something which never happened in all the dreadful things attested in the Old Testament concerning the wrath of God and the plight of man. In the Old Testament there is always the antithesis between the righteous God and the bitter things which man has to accept from Him without murmuring. In the passion story of the New Testament this antithesis is done away. It is God Himself who takes the place of the former sufferers and allows the bitterness of their suffering to fall upon Himself There is suffering and death in the Old Testament, but it is only in the New that we see what suffering and death really means, as it becomes the work of God Himself, as God gives Himself to this most dreadful of all foreign spheres. (18)

In what sense, however, does God 'compromise Himself' (sich selber kompromittiert)? In what sense does He 'give Himself', in His journey to the far country, 'to this most dreadful of all foreign spheres'?

Barth continues:

But at this point what is meant to be supreme praise of God can in fact become supreme blasphemy. God gives Himself, but He does not give Himself away. He does not give up being God in becoming a creature, in becoming man. He does not cease to be God. He does not come into conflict with Himself. (19) (my emphasis)

Not only does He not cease to be God in becoming man, but He has His human nature only in the being of the Word, the continuing subject of His incarnate being.

Certainly, Barth talks of God denying the immutability of His being for the sake of the redemption of the world, and of His allowing His divine nature to be in discontinuity with Himself - indeed He willed to be 'against Himself', to set Himself in self-contradiction,²⁰ - for

.... In Himself He was still the omnipresent, almighty, eternal and glorious One, the All-Holy and All-Righteous who could not be tempted. (21)

In other words, Barth presents us with a paradoxical antithesis between God's being and essence in Himself, and His activity as the reconciler of the world created by Him.²² The being of God in His work seems to challenge the being of God in Himself. This is the determination of God in His incarnation to be a 'God against God', and the implication is that in becoming man God puts His 'Goodness' at risk and comes into conflict with Himself. At times Barth seems to make the dangerous suggestion that, whilst there is a 'contradiction' between God in Himself, immutable, omnipotent and almighty, and God as He appears to man in Christ, the 'contradiction' is somehow transcended at a 'higher level'. God is Lord of the very contradiction within Himself.²³ This view is bound in the end to lead to a position in which the identification of God in Himself with His being in Christ is ultimately denied. It would be in effect to deny the divinity of Christ. Elsewhere Barth adopts a position comparable to that most notably outlined in Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. This accepts that in the light of the incarnation it must re-examine the concept of God, for it may be that the 'irreconcilable tensions' set up within the being of God by His presence in Christ appear to be irreconcilable only because the theologian is approaching God's presence in Christ with preconceived notions of the nature of God, notions which ought, rather, to be derived from His self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth. One of the most beautiful passages in the *Church Dogmatics*²⁴ very clearly shows this understanding:

What He is and does He is and does in full unity with Himself. It is in full unity with Himself that He is also - and especially and above all - in Christ, that He becomes a creature, man, flesh, that He enters into our being in contradiction, that He takes upon Himself its consequences. If we think that this is impossible it is because our concept of God is too narrow, too arbitrary, too human - far too human. Who God is and what it is to be divine is something we have to learn where God has revealed Himself and His nature, the essence of the divine. And if He has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ as the God Who does this, it is not for us to be wiser than He and to say that it is in contradiction with the divine essence. We have to be ready to be taught by Him that we have been too small and perverted in our thinking about Him within the framework of a false idea of God. It is not for us to speak of a contradiction and rift in the being of God, but to learn to correct our notions of the being of God, to reconstitute them in the light of the fact that He does this. We may believe that God can and must only be absolute in contrast to all that is relative, exalted in contrast to all that is lowly, active in contrast to all suffering, inviolable in contrast to all temptation, transcendent in contrast to all immanence, and therefore divine in contrast to everything human, in short that He can and must be only the 'Wholly Other'. But such beliefs are shown to be quite untenable, and corrupt and pagan, by the fact that God does in fact be and do this in Jesus Christ. We cannot make them the standard by which to measure what God can or cannot do, or the basis of the judgment that in doing this He brings Himself into self-contradiction. By doing this God proves to us that He can do it, that to do it is within His nature. And He shows Himself to be more great and rich and sovereign than we had ever imagined. And our ideas of His nature must be guided by this, and not vice versa. (25) (my emphasis)

It is, we believe, the failing of modern 'radical' critiques of Christology like *The Myth of God Incarnate*,²⁶ that they are profoundly conservative in their idea of God. They believe it impossible for the 'transcendent, exalted, omnipotent God' to have been in Christ, because they have approached the nature of Christ with a store of preconceived ideas concerning the nature of God which they refuse to allow to be criticised by the idea of incarnation itself.^{26a} They do not ask: 'What sort of a God might become incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth?' but 'This notion of God becoming man does not fit our conception of God. It must therefore be wrong'. Such 'radical' Christologies are built upon conservative 'theologies'.

Barth, however, as we have remarked earlier,²⁷ emphasises, in his mature theology, the Christocentrism of theology. His doctrine of God derives from the self-revelation of God in His Word. The Doctrine of the

Word of God thus precedes the Doctrine of God in the *Church Dogmatics*. The supposition that God must be the 'Wholly Other' (and Barth may have been thinking of his own *Romans*), is modified, in this passage we quote, by the recognition that the nature of God is learned from His self-revelation in Christ, and not from preconceived notions of transcendence. We think it impossible, Barth argues, to believe that in unity with Himself, God in Christ becomes man, because our concept of God is 'too narrow' - because it is not derived from the nature of God's self-revelation in His Word. The incarnation challenges us, not to think that God's presence in Christ must somehow be a kind of uncharacteristic deviation from His true being, a rash plunge into humanity, but the action from which His true being may be learned. Thus:

We have to think something after the following fashion. As God was in Christ, far from being against Himself, or at disunity with Himself, He has put into effect the freedom of His divine love, the love in which He is divinely free. (28)

We see Barth carry through his insistence upon the ~~devi~~^{ri}ation of the concept of God from the revelation of His being in Christ, where he treats of the 'Kenotic' theology of the nineteenth century.²⁹ The Lutheran 'Kenotic' theologians of the nineteenth century, Sartorius in his *Lehre von der heiligen Liebe*, W.F. Gess in his *Das Dogma von Christi Person und Werk*, and Thomasius in his *Christi Person und Werk*, thought not in terms of abstention from, or even renunciation of, divine 'attributes' by the incarnate Christ, as the seventeenth century 'Kenotic' controversy between the theologians of Giessen and of Tübingen had, but of an abstention or renunciation on the part of the pre-existent Logos itself. Barth's counter-argument to a 'Kenotic' Christology was to stress that speculation about the nature of the Logos 'before' the incarnation was impossible, and implied the importation of precisely the sort of assumptions concerning the nature of God which we have been criticising. Since the being of God is made known in Christ the incarnate Word, one cannot wonder at what 'must have happened' to the Word in becoming incarnate. The

'Kenotic' theologians are open to the criticism that they, too, have preconceived notions of the nature of God apart from His revelation in Christ, such that He must 'renounce' His former self in order to become incarnate.

We have, however, suggested that Barth is uncomfortable with this aspect of his Christology. What we have to consider, is whether there is anything in Barth's thought which might undermine his own principle of deriving the concept of God from the revelation of His true being in Jesus Christ. Is there anything in Barth's own theological 'system', which might tend to work against his idea that merely to assume that God is 'absolute in contrast to all suffering, inviolable in contrast to all temptation, transcendent in contrast to all immanence, and therefore divine in contrast to everything human' is to indulge in 'corrupt and pagan' beliefs, when God has shown Himself to be otherwise in Jesus Christ? We believe that there is. It lies in the fact that Barth cannot identify the self-recognition of the Word of God as divine subject in the incarnate Christ, with the gradual self-recognition of the man Jesus as a human subject. And this impossibility, whilst expressed in terms of mere preference for a Reformed over a Lutheran Christology and in terms of a particular form of trinitarian theology, as we shall consider in the next two sections of this chapter, derives fundamentally from the outline of a dualism in Barth's thought which remains a pervasive influence even upon the later sections of the *Church Dogmatics*.

This pervasive dualism, originally between the human and the divine as such, is in Barth's Christocentric later thought redefined between the human and the divine natures of Christ. It is a dualism heavily disguised by the 'absorption' of the human nature within the divine, and by the heavily 'Kenotic' flavour (but no more) of Barth's

poetic descriptions of the extent of divine self-giving in the incarnate reality of Jesus Christ. But it remains evident in the enduring Lordship of the controlling divine subject of that incarnate reality. If Barth cannot achieve a true 'Kenosis' in his Christological reflection, it is because he cannot locate the mystery of Christ in a mysterious identity of a human subject and a divine subject, of a man struggling to understand his humanity as a Jew in an occupied land on the one hand, and the divine Word struggling to come to a self-recognition of His nature as a divine subject, of the nature of His omnipotence and His omnipresence, of the very nature of God Himself in the relation of Son to Father, on the other. Barth can bend the divine process to the human, and can receive the human process into the divine. What he cannot do, as we bring out in the final section of this chapter, is identify the two. He can only warn against Christ as 'God in man', and set in opposition to that his own view of Christ as 'man in God'. He is committed to a form of Christocentrism in his theology which continues, as his commentary on *Romans* did, to separate God in Heaven from man on earth.

We shall attempt to draw out these claims in the rest of the chapter. We shall consider initially Barth's Reformed Christology and his trinitarianism, and then the basic form of his Christology.

2. The 'Extra Calvinisticum'

Firstly, we may consider Barth's preference for a Reformed over a Lutheran Christology. Calvinist objection to the idea of the 'inclusion' of the Logos in the man Jesus, as if the Word of God was to be 'confined' and 'trapped' in human form, led to the view dubbed by Lutherans the 'extra calvinisticum', namely that the Logos was at one and the same time in a virgin's womb, or a man hanging upon a cross, and in heaven as the eternal Word. Barth associates Lutheran rejection of this notion with a fear of Nestorianism, and with a belief that since the divine attributes could be

predicated of the humanity of Christ the Logos was not 'confined' within a human form, but rather Christ's humanity received - at least in its glorified state after the resurrection - the divine attribute of omnipotence, a view which enabled Lutherans to affirm belief in the real presence.³¹ But there is also, in the light of what we have said, a very Barthian objection to the idea of the 'extra calvinisticum' - an objection hinted at by Barth himself:

We may concede that there is something unsatisfactory about the theory, in that right up to our own day it has led to fatal speculation about the being and work of the *λογος ἄσαρκος* or a God whom we think we can know elsewhere, and whose divine being we can define from elsewhere than in and from the contemplation of His presence and activity as the Word made flesh. (32)

And yet Barth defends Calvin on the grounds that 'it was his aim in that theory to hold to the fact that the Son of God who is wholly this man (*totus intra carnem* as it was formulated by a later Calvinist) is also wholly God and therefore omnipotent and omnipresent (and to that extent *extra carnem*, not bound or altered by its limitations)'.³³ Now surely this is to assume that there do indeed exist qualities of 'omnipotence' and 'omnipresence' which must be expected to cry out against their confinement in human form. Thus, when Barth continues:

He is the Lord and Creator who because He becomes a creature and exists in that *forma servi* does not cease to be Lord and Creator and therefore to exist in the *forma Dei* (34)

he is presupposing an antithesis between the 'forma servi' and the 'forma Dei', rather than appreciating that the forma Dei is revealed in its true being in the 'forma servi', and that One who is among his disciples as one who serves is not in doing so disguising His true being but perfectly revealing it. Here we may recall the dangerous influence upon Christology of the pervasive Kierkegaardian image of the prince and the maiden, according to which the earthly servitude of the Son of God is interpreted as a mask of His true being rather than a demonstration of it. For Kierkegaard's parable to be considered apt, the condition of poverty from which the prince woos the maiden would be a revelation of what it meant

to be a prince. His rags would not be a device to win a susceptible heart, later to be thrown off when he resumes his wealth, but the manifestation of his true nature. This implication lies in the story in part, in that the prince wishes to be loved 'for himself', and not for his wealth or status; yet the implication of the Incarnation is that in the very weakness and vulnerability of Christ there lies, not a means to make known the true being of God, but that very divine nature itself. The 'forma servi' makes known the 'forma Dei'. If we believe that such weakness and vulnerability cannot characterise God, then perhaps we should follow Karl Barth in considering our idea of God to be too narrow! We should cease to find God's presence in Christ incompatible with our pre-determined idea of God, and derive our idea of God from His presence in Christ. We should, indeed, understand the relation between the Trinity and the Incarnation,³⁵ such that a conservative Christology can only be sustained by a radical 'theology', by a 'theology' which sees in the Christian understanding of the person of Christ the grounds for a distinctive Christian view of God.

3. The 'Inner Being' of God

We have suggested that in Barth's *Church Dogmatics* there is a certain resistance to his own stated principle that God may be understood not prior to, nor as a presupposition for understanding, but from His self-manifestation in the incarnate Son.

Moltmann suggests in *The Crucified God*³⁶ that Barth evinces a desire to protect the 'inner being' of God from His self-giving presence in the incarnate Christ. He submits that, whilst Barth possesses a fully 'theopaschitic' awareness of God's involvement in the cross of Christ, he is unable to express this involvement adequately because of a failure to appreciate the implications of the trinitarian nature of God. In other words, the problem is not that Barth fails to see that God suffers the

death of the Son within Himself, but how He suffers the death of the Son within Himself. According to Moltmann, Barth is driven to have recourse - implicitly - to the Lutheran distinction between the 'Deus revelatus' and the 'Deus absconditus', in order to protect both God's transcendence and His presence in the cross of Christ. Despite his avowed hostility to this Lutheran distinction, Barth has no alternative but to use it if he fails properly to recognise the distinction between the Father and the Son, Moltmann argues. Moltmann argues his point in the light of *Church Dogmatics* II 2, where Barth writes of the 'eternal will of God in the election of Jesus Christ', whereby God, neither belittling nor ignoring sins, 'declares His solidarity with their author, taking his place in respect of their necessary consequence, suffering in Himself what man ought to have suffered'.³⁷

Barth's argument is as follows.³⁸ Man has shown himself to be unworthy as God's covenant partner. God might have willed man's destruction as a consequence, but He does not. 'From all eternity God could have excluded man from His covenant but He did not do so. He elected man as a covenant-partner. In His Son He elected Himself as the covenant partner of man'. Yet this cannot mean that God either overlooks or finds acceptable the evil for which man is responsible. Rather, the 'affront to His majesty' which has been made by human sin must be made good. It is redeemed, however, not by God's avenging Himself on man, but rather by Himself bearing the inevitable wrath and perdition, by 'Himself mediating on behalf of the one who must necessarily be rejected, who had necessarily fallen victim to damnation and death, by allowing His own heart to be wounded by the wrath which, if it had fallen on man, could only have obliterated and destroyed him'.

Now the question is: How can this 'mediation' be conceived? What is this 'heart-wounding' bearing of (presumably God's) wrath by God Himself? 'In God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in

His Son'. But how do we understand God's rejection by God in His Son? Only, Moltmann wants to argue, by appreciating the trinitarian nature of God.

In a passage quoted by Moltmann, Barth writes:

In ordering the overflowing of His glory God also and necessarily ordains that this glory, which in Himself, (in ihm selber) in His inner life (seinem inneren Leben) as Father, Son and Holy Spirit cannot be subjected to attack or disturbance, which in Himself cannot be opposed, should enter into the sphere of contradiction (39)

It is the fact that Barth identifies here only what he calls the 'inner life' (innerem Leben) of God alone as Father, Son and Spirit, which suggests to Moltmann that Barth fails to appreciate how crucial the distinction of persons within the Godhead is for understanding the economy of salvation. The distinction cannot be reserved for the 'inner being' of God. Moltmann implies that by failing to understand how the death of Jesus may be expressed in this way as a death within God, Barth must inevitably introduce a distinction between the God who 'suffers' and the God whose 'inner life' remains unaffected by Jesus's death. Such a separation will smack of the ditheism and lack of commitment to God's presence as God in His revelation, that Barth himself suspects in the Lutheran distinction between a 'Deus absconditus' and a 'Deus revelatus'.

Moltmann's assessment of Barth, then, is that he draws back from identifying the true being of God with the 'one who must necessarily be rejected, who had necessarily fallen victim to damnation and death'. He withdraws to a distinction which allows the 'inner being' of God to transcend the being of God in His revelation. Moltmann further suggests that Barth's inclination towards this distinction is associated with an insufficiently trinitarian conception of God. Barth lacks, in his view, an understanding which would allow the experience of divine self-giving expressed in the life of Jesus to be a reality played out within the trinitarian heart of God.

In *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, Moltmann suggests that Barth's

thought in Volume IV of the *Church Dogmatics* does not, unlike that in Volume II, withdraw to the distinction between God's 'inner being' and His 'being in revelation'. Certainly Barth is aware in the later volumes of the close connection between the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation. In IV 1 he writes :

We can now see the error which is common to the subordinationist and the modalist presentation and solution of the problem. Both suffer from the fact that they try to evade the cross of Jesus Christ, i.e., the truth of the humiliation, the lowliness and the obedience of the one true God Himself as it became an event amongst us in Jesus Christ as the subject of the reconciliation of the world with God. They evade it because they start from the assumption that it cannot be accepted as true. And then they err in their different ways as they try to escape the dilemma which they themselves have created, interpreting the obedient Christ either as some heavenly or earthly being distinct from God, or as a mere mode of appearance of the one true God. Both damage and indeed destroy the nerve of the New Testament knowledge of Christ. Both solve the Christological mystery by juggling it away, and for that reason both show themselves to be quite useless. (40)

Subordinationism separates the Son from the being of God, and thereby 'protects' the divine nature from involvement in the suffering of Christ. Modalism treats the incarnate being of God as a mere 'show', one of a succession of 'appearances' of God in which His true being is not involved. Barth effectively treats modalism as a form of docetism. Only a properly trinitarian theology can do justice, in Barth's view, to the presence of God in the incarnate being of the Son.

However, Moltmann remains critical even of Barth's later thought. He does so out of the conviction that Barth's Trinitarianism is itself a form of modalism. Indeed from examining Moltmann's criticisms we come to see an interesting relationship between our concern with the form of Barth's Trinitarianism, and our concern with the form of his Christology.

Moltmann's fundamental criticism of Barth is that, in valuing the doctrine of the Trinity as an interpretation of the 'self-revelation of God as Lord',⁴² in other words in beginning from the Lordship of God and thence moving on to His 'threefold nature', Barth is inevitably caught up in the idea of God as a single subject existing in three 'modes

of being' (Seinsweise), and thereby produces an essentially modalistic understanding of God. Moltmann suggests, furthermore, that Barth's model reveals another aspect of his dependence upon German Idealism, assessing the divine nature in terms of the image of an absolute subject who, through self-distinction and self-recollection, reveals Himself as Father, Son and Spirit. Moltmann's conclusion is that this model of God as subject no more escapes modalism than the model of God as a single substance in earlier trinitarian theologies. It is notable that Moltmann here echoes the objections of Professor Leonard Hodgson to Barth's trinitarian theology expressed in *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, in which he finds the advocacy of 'modes of being' as an interpretative model for the persons of the Trinity 'surprising' and 'in flat contradiction to the biblical evidence'. Hodgson anticipates the thesis of Moltmann's criticism where he writes:

Instead of allowing the empirical evidence of the biblical revelation to revise his idea of unity, he (Barth) insists on making that evidence conform to the requirements of his a priori conception of unity. (43)

Professor D.M. Baillie similarly finds Karl Barth's views on the Trinity 'the outstanding representative' of a mode of thought 'which in its extreme form might be accused of modalistic heresy'.⁴⁴ Baillie points out that for Barth the modern conception of 'person' as a centre of self-consciousness has ruled the conception of God as three persons out of court, if tritheism is to be avoided. In this respect he is sympathetic to Barth, denies that Barth is aptly described as 'modalist' since his designation of God as three 'modes of being' is intended to point to real distinctions within the Godhead, and emphasises that the term 'modes of being' was itself used originally by a patristic school of thought actually accused of tritheism - the Cappadocian fathers.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the challenge may be made against Barth, that within the scope of an understanding which insists that God is spoken of more aptly as one person than as three, the 'real distinctions' within the Godhead represented by the Father, Son and Spirit cannot amount to a

truly trinitarian theology. Rather than being forced away from the notion of personality in the light of its modern 'psychological' meaning in terms of 'centre of consciousness', Barth is more appropriately described as having embraced that modern meaning and applied it to the unity of God as a free subject, rather than to the distinctions within the Godhead to which the idea of 'person' is traditionally applied.

A correlation between Barth's view of the Trinity and of the Person of Christ, lies in the comparison which may be drawn between, on the one hand, Barth's Christological insistence upon the divine Word as the enduring subject of the incarnate being of Christ, and, on the other hand, his trinitarian starting-point in the Lordship of God. A criticism of Barth's Christology as ultimately 'docetic', in that the qualities of a purely human existence are somehow to be understood as attached to and located within a divine subject, may be connected to a criticism of Barth's Trinitarianism as ultimately 'modalistic', in that the tri-personal being of God is somehow located within the single divine personality, the free subjectivity of the self-distinguishing and self-recollecting God.

In Barth's Christology, the characteristics of the incarnate life of Christ are determined according to the controlling idea of their inherence in a single divine subject. In Barth's doctrine of God, the characteristics of His being are determined according to the controlling idea of His existence, again, as a single divine subject. The essentially Idealist concept of a single divine self within which different modes of activity and experience may be contained, but which remains always the Lord and Subject of those activities, is the dominating image of Barth's theology, characterised by Moltmann as 'Trinitarian Monarchy'.⁴⁶

4. The Form of Barth's Christocentrism

It is appropriate that John Hick, editor of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, should elsewhere have suggested a 'Copernican Revolution' in theology,⁴⁷ in the light of which all religions are to be understood as presenting different ways to 'the one God', rather than being assessed in terms of their specific correspondence to the revelation of God in Christ. For Hick's devaluation of Christology is bound to leave God essentially untouched by the Incarnation, and therefore capable of being approached equally well from the perspective of other religions. On the other hand, a theologian faithful to a Christocentric theology must take into account the fact that God is only to be understood from the perspective of His self-revelation in Christ.

This latter is the view of Karl Barth. In no sense, for Barth, may the nature of God be presumed 'in advance of' or 'apart from' that revelation. At the same time, however, we find evidence in Barth of a certain resistance to his own thoroughly Christocentric approach to the problem of God.

Firstly, in his consistent preference for a Reformed over a Lutheran Christology, Barth is led to emphasise the being of the Logos apart from His 'limiting', 'constraining' presence on earth incarnate.⁴⁸

Secondly, Barth is uncomfortable when using language that implies a self-contradiction within the Godhead, a 'God against God'. We may link this discomfort to Barth's failure to find the appropriate form of Trinitarianism to express that self-diremption which lies at the heart of God's being in Christ.

These considerations must lead us to recognise that there are different forms of Christocentric theology, and that Barth cannot escape criticism merely by pointing to his Christocentrism as such.

Barth has matured, between *Romans* and the *Church Dogmatics*, from an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man which determines

his theology, to a theology based on God's self-revelation in Christ. However, as we have tried to show in the course of this thesis, that self-revelation in Christ which forms the basis of his later theology is itself interpreted according to presuppositions concerning the form of revelation and its relation to natural reason, and the corresponding form of man's new humanity in Christ in relation to his 'natural humanity'. Therefore when Barth claims to derive his theology from a Christocentric core, we have to remember that the presuppositions which were at work in determining his theology in Romans are also at work in determining his Christology in the Church Dogmatics. The 'resistance' of Barth to aspects of his own Christocentrism becomes apparent where he has to protect those presuppositions from being challenged by the very concentration upon Christ which they are designed to interpret. Thus, where Barth treats of the 'extra calvinisticum', we find that he is torn between the affirmation that the Son of God was 'totus intra carnem', and the presupposition that as 'wholly God, and therefore omnipotent and omnipresent' His existence in human form must be a limitation of, if not a threat to, His true being, and that to this extent He must also be 'extra carnem'. Barth is embarrassed precisely because the possibility that the existence of the Logos 'totus intra carnem' was a limitation willed by God for Himself appears to contradict the presupposition of Barth's Christology, namely that the Incarnation must always be understood in terms of a subjecting of man to God rather than a subjecting of God to man. Barth fears the possibility of a divine will to subject Himself to man, a divine will to give itself to the very secular realities of human life from which Barth wished to see God protected. In other words, the possibility opens up that what Barth claims it would be inconsistent with the nature of God as God to do, God has in fact done in Christ. It is this possibility which leads Barth to hesitate before committing himself to the view that our understanding

of God's nature is derived from His self-manifestation in Christ, and which leads him to the suggestion that the 'inner being' of God remains apart from such disclosure.

We have observed that Barth's Christology is determined by the principle that the Word remains subject of the incarnate being of Christ. We wish to examine this claim further in the light of a particular assessment of a Lutheran Christology.

In his lectures on *Christology*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared that the statement 'this man is God', applied to Jesus, 'qualifies the whole man Jesus as God'.⁴⁹ Bonhoeffer follows Barth in criticising the Lutheran interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* in terms of an 'exchange of properties' between the two natures, predicating qualities of the human nature of the divine nature and vice versa,⁵⁰ but his answer to the problem is to recall the theologian away from any treatment of the natures of Christ in isolation as a starting-point for Christology, to the starting-point that 'the man Jesus is the Christ, is God', an 'is' which, he says, 'cannot be deduced'.⁵¹ This position he regards as quintessentially Lutheran, affirming the mystery that the child in the cradle is the whole God (he refers the reader to Luther's hymns)⁵² as the beginning of all Christology, not the consequence of having established the relationship of his two natures in advance. In this context Bonhoeffer rules out the idea of 'enhypostasia' as an attempt to understand the person of Christ in terms of what was conceivable in terms of his natures.⁵³

Arguably, Bonhoeffer is more loyal to a Christology without presupposition in this respect than Karl Barth. He derives his knowledge of God entirely from the paradoxical reality of Christ child in the cradle, weak on the cross and yet the whole God, as presented in the biblical narrative and preserved, without any attempt to rationalise 'how' it might be so, in the writings theological and liturgical of

Martin Luther. The beautiful introduction to Bonhoeffer's lectures,⁵⁴ beginning with the reminder that 'teaching about Christ begins in silence' and going on to distinguish the question 'how?', asked of Christ, from the 'question of faith', the question 'who?', is arguably more Barthian than Barth. For Bonhoeffer does not presuppose in his Christology what Barth presupposes in his, namely that the Word remains the subject of the incarnate being of Christ. Rather, he recognises that such is the mystery of Christ's being as the man Jesus who was God that no assumptions concerning the identity of the Word as subject can be brought to bear as conditions of the person of Christ. It may, indeed, be that from the perspective of the incarnate Logos we must look more closely at Barth's understanding of the Word as subject of the incarnate being of Christ: and the form of Barth's perception here may be linked to Bonhoeffer's implied criticism of Barth in the statement:

Gott ist frei nicht vom Menschen, sondern für den Menschen.⁵⁵

Is it possible that in being free 'for' rather than 'from' man the Word yields up the principle that preserves it from human 'control', the principle that it is always 'subject' and not 'object' before man?

Barth claims that humanity is made perfect in Christ, not by receiving such perfection 'into' itself, as if there existed in Him a human subject, but by being itself received into the Word which remains eternally subject, even in the incarnate being of Christ. Because for Barth there is a divine subject in the incarnate Christ but not a human subject, humanity is perfected by Him through being taken up into the divine Word. 'Finitum capax infiniti', in a certain sense, for Barth, but 'non in se sed in infinitum'; the finite receives the infinite only as it is received by it; the infinite does not perfect the finite through being itself realised in a human subject, but through taking the finite into itself as a divine subject and perfecting it. Yet we are suggesting that the insistence upon a single divine subject of the

incarnate Christ is an assumption which may not easily be maintained in the face of the reality of the incarnate Christ Himself.

The apparent lack of a 'centre' in Christ's person, of an enduring divine subject, for which a Reformed Christology criticises a Lutheran, and which Barth follows, fails to recognise that this crucial ambiguity as to the subject of the incarnate Christ reflects the self-giving of the Incarnation itself. It is necessary to derive a Christology from the reality of Christ, to make the 'how' of His being follow the uniqueness of 'who' He is (Bonhoeffer).

To see the Incarnation in the manner of a Reformed Christology as interpreted by Barth, in terms of a drawing of humanity into an enduring divine subject which embraces human qualities within itself, is crucially to deny one aspect of the Incarnation, and of the form of the Word's self-giving to man. This is crucially different from the 'divinisation of man' which Barth fears in the universalising of a Lutheran Christology. We are not talking of the attributing of 'divine properties' to a human subject. We are talking of the process by which a divine subject learns of its divinity through a human subject. We are talking of a greater 'self-emptying' of the Logos than can be associated with any 'decision of the pre-existent' Logos to shed or make ineffectual any of its 'divine properties', or with the willed disguise of the Kierkegaardian parable. We are talking of the Son of God as man, who does not recognise the 'journey' which He has made into the far country save insofar as he comes to terms with Himself as a human being, Jesus the carpenter's son, the Jew from despised Galilee, of whom the stories were told that He kept bad company and drank too much, who could tell His own stories of escaping the authorities in a crowd, who ended up looking a fool and who was allowed to asphyxiate or bleed to death as one among many, as part of the normal judicial procedures of the day. As all these things, He entered upon life, unconscious that all He did was part of a grand scheme of Kenotic

renunciation or that He was deliberately concealing His true nature for the sake of some romantic ideal, but only conscious of Himself as a man, with the feelings that none of the gospel writers, for all their refusal to be biographers, deny Him.

Is it possible to respond to the reality of the incarnate Christ in the way that Barth does, as if the experiences so described were simply to be seen as a drawing of the qualities of human life into the Word of God which stands - how else can one describe it? - docetically above them as their divine subject. This subject was a man. And this man is the starting-point of any Christology. The Son of God about to embark on a journey is not the starting-point - that is to begin not from God in Christ revealed to man, but God in His 'inner life' preparing to reveal Himself. We start - we must start - with Jesus of Nazareth, as the early Christians started with 'this Jesus whom ye crucified'. We start with the concrete, the particular, with facts.

From this starting-point we may affirm that Jesus of Nazareth came to know Himself as God the Son, but only insofar as He knew Himself as a Galilean. Nothing that He knew of Himself as a divine subject did He know of Himself save insofar as he knew Himself as this man, as this human subject. He did not 'remember' that He was once the eternal Logos who had sacrificed His omnipotent quality as God. Rather, in His consciousness of Himself as a Galilean He became conscious of Himself also as the omnipotent and eternal Logos - and doubtless the experience drove Him out into the wilderness to meditate upon the true nature of His omnipotence so understood. He was not losing sight of who He was as a man born of a woman when He reflected upon the dawning consciousness of Himself as the Son of the Father. This did not come to Him in the form of some 'anamnesis' of a different life in eternity before He engaged upon some dangerous plan to redeem the world. No. It came to

Him precisely insofar as He knew Himself as a human being. This frail human subject, this was the eternal Logos, this was the omnipotent Son - and as this dawned upon Him what drove Him into His mission was the consciousness that eternity and omnipotence must be revealed for what they are, an omnipotence of self-sacrificing love,⁵⁶ as revealed in the fact that the Son recognised and realised Himself in this human being, the divine subject and the human subject as one being in Christ, without confusion of the two.

Our claim is that the incarnate being of Christ has a divine subject only insofar as it becomes conscious of itself as a human subject. We reject any suggestion that this 'divinises' a human subject. We do not claim that the human subject comes to recognise itself as divine, but that as it comes to recognise itself as human, so in that very process a divine subject becomes conscious of its divinity. Christ recognises Himself as a divine subject insofar as He recognises Himself as an individual human subject, without any escape from that humanity into the consciousness of a separate existence as the Son of God to which in its true nature these earthly constraints do not apply.

We would claim that this view is a 'Kenotic' one, but not in the sense of Kierkegaard's Prince who consciously abandons certain divine 'advantages', or even Barth's Son of God who consciously sets out for the far country and remains the one enduring subject of his experiences in that alien land. Our 'Kenoticism' begins with the incarnate being of Christ, where all theology in a Christocentric mould begins, and sees the 'self-emptying' of the Son of God in terms, not of a conscious

divine renunciation of power, but in terms of the discovery made by a human being that in His deepening self-awareness the love which God had for Himself recognised itself. In other words, the 'Kenosis' of renunciation is always ultimately docetic - the humanity is merely the hairshirt of the divinity. But the 'Kenosis' of the divine Logos discovered in the consciousness which a man has of himself as a Nazarene in an occupied country is a true 'Kenosis', for it excludes any self-understanding which the Logos might have of itself, even in its omnipotence and eternity, apart from the knowledge which this man Jesus has of himself.

5. Conclusion

We have seen in chapters six and seven the argument that, where human nature in general is concerned, Barth's insistence upon understanding both human being and human knowledge in terms of a divine 'original' which represents 'true' humanity and 'true' knowledge effectively removes the ontological and epistemological grounds of human existence. But this Barthian treatment of human nature in general is the universalising of his treatment of the humanity of Christ in particular. In his treatment of the humanity of Christ in particular, we have fastened our attack upon the claim that the Word remains subject of the incarnate person of Christ. This may seem unwise, in that Barth's insistence here may be seen as no 'Alexandrian' heresy but as the foundation of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. However, we see a clear connection between Barth's insistence upon the divine Word as the single enduring subject of the incarnate Christ, and his (we have argued) undermining of the ontological and epistemological conditions of human existence.

Barth's Christology is open to criticism for denying to Jesus's humanity a direct revelatory power. This is the point of criticism

aimed at Barth's 'Docetism', criticism which has to be judged very carefully since Barth very clearly does not deny either the humanity of Jesus or the fact that Jesus Christ was an individual man.

Consider the following quotation from Thompson's *Christ in Perspective in the Theology of Karl Barth*:⁵⁷

Barth rejects the 'Jesus of history' movement since it deals with a Jesus who never existed; the only Jesus we know is One not apart from the Word but in and with the Word.

Barth does not deny, as Thompson makes clear, the historical reality of Jesus of Nazareth or his true humanity. What Barth argues is that Jesus's humanity cannot be considered 'in abstraction'. Thus Barth rejects Catholic teaching on the sacred heart of Jesus, for instance, on the grounds that such teaching treats the 'human-ness' of Jesus as something separable from His being as the Word.⁵⁸

Barth's position, summed up by Thompson, is as follows:

Firstly, only the divine can reveal. No attribute of the humanity of Jesus considered 'in abstracto' and apart from its being indwelt by the Word, has the power to reveal.

Secondly, however, the divine reveals through the human. This is Barth's ground for denying that his Christology is either docetic or monophysite. He is not denying the true humanity of Jesus, but rather the idea that the being of Christ's flesh had an existence of its own apart from the Word or Son.

Now it should be clear from this that our difficulty with Barth's Christology is precisely akin to our difficulty with his 'theological anthropology' or what we might call his 'theological epistemology', as we have sought to outline them in chapters six and seven of this thesis. Barth has a similarly problematic 'theological Christology'. The 'Jesus of history', the flesh and blood reality of Jesus of Nazareth, like the flesh and blood reality of human nature as such, may only be understood, according to Barth, on the basis of a 'divine original', the Word of God.

Yet it is the flesh and blood reality of Jesus of Nazareth which allows us to make sense of the idea of the 'Word of God'. The same apparently circular argument arises with respect to Barth's Christology as arises with respect to his anthropology. The Word which is the divine reality in terms of which alone the humanity of Christ makes sense, itself only makes sense through that humanity. Barth again falls open to the charge of 'theological alienation', whereby the human reality which in fact provides the content of a putative divine counterpart, is itself said to be based upon the content of its divine 'original'.

In his book *Theological Science*, Professor Torrance remarks:

In Docetic Christologies we see that we cannot take the way of deduction, beginning with a particular idea of God and then finding that fulfilled or confirmed in Jesus Christ, only then to relegate the actual humanity of Jesus to a place of ultimate unimportance compared to the idea of Christ or God brought to light through him. (59)

Yet such Docetism must surely be the consequence of Barth's presumption that the humanity of Jesus has no direct revelatory power. That is surely already to relegate it 'to a place of ultimate unimportance compared to the idea of Christ or God brought to light through him.' Barth's very insistence upon the fact that it is not the humanity of Christ which determines His divinity, but the divinity which determines His humanity, itself relegates the humanity to unimportance, as a mere channel of the divine self-revelation. The power of the humanity of Christ effectively to challenge the presuppositions of the theologian concerning what constitutes divinity is effectively cut off by Barth, since only through that divinity may the humanity be allowed to speak.

Criticism of Barth's Christology must take a different form to that which challenges his commitment to the humanity of Christ as such. Criticism must focus, rather, on Barth's conception of the relation of humanity to divinity in the incarnate person of Christ. It may seem a point of Christological orthodoxy that the very notion of 'assumption' means that 'God Himself is the subject of a real human being and action'.⁶⁰

Yet does such an interpretation of 'assumption' render the full significance of the divine self-giving in the incarnate Christ?

When Barth comments that 'even in the form which he assumes by revealing himself, God is free to reveal himself or not to reveal himself',⁶¹ is there not detectable a failure to recognise the nature of the divine commitment in Christ? Is the humanity of Jesus merely a channel of revelation which may be maintained or withheld by the divine Word, as Barth suggests when he comments:

.... the power and the continuity in which the man Jesus of Nazareth was in fact the revealed word, consisted here also in the power and continuity of the divine action in this form and not in the continuity of this form as such. (62)

Or is it not, rather, that when the Word chose this form in which to become flesh, it sacrificed a certain power to give or withhold itself at will in human form? In that case, would it not be inaccurate to speak of the humanity as having power 'in and through the Word', just as it would be inaccurate to speak of the Word having power only in and through the humanity? Is it not rather that there is an identity between the power of the Word which is infinite and eternal and the power of a human being which is finite and temporary? To speak of one power as existing 'through' the other, or as free to give itself to, or withhold itself from, the other, is to miss the point of this identity, in which the Christological mystery consists.

From this excursus it will, we hope, be possible to state our conclusion clearly. Our argument is that the search for a Christology must not be seen to drive us into believing that we must choose between a human and a divine subject of the incarnate Christ. We believe that Barth has felt himself compelled to make such a choice, and that the form of Christology which has resulted from his decision possesses weaknesses. Others reach the opposite conclusion, namely that respect for history demands a merely human subject of the incarnate Christ. Our argument is that only the dogmatic evaluation of the man Jesus of

Nazareth as the eternal Son of the Father enables the history which gives concrete expression to that Sonship to be understood. To identify a human subject with a divine subject as the person of Christ is the only Christology which can serve as the Christocentric core of a theology which does justice to the relations of God and man which receive a one-sided presentation in the theology of Karl Barth. Barth does not deny that in the Incarnation the Word became a man:

'The Word became flesh' means primarily and of itself, then, that the Word became participant in human nature and existence. Human essence and existence became His. Now since this cannot be real except in the concrete reality of one man, it must at once be said that He became a man. (63)

But Barth evades the implication of this statement, namely that the subject of the incarnate being of Christ is at one and the same time the eternal Logos and the man Jesus, and that there existed in the condescension of God to man in Christ a process of self-identification in which a man from Galilee came to understand his own human, finite self-consciousness as itself the process of eternal self-realisation of God in the obedience of Son to Father.

Any formulation of a Christology must seek to do justice to the Chalcedonian presentation of the person of Christ as 'of one nature with the Father in respect of his Godhead, and of one nature with ourselves in respect of his manhood the difference in nature being in no way removed as a result of the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and hypostasis'. McKinney, for instance, explicitly rejects the formula of Chalcedon as a presentation of the nature of Christ.⁶⁴ He embraces the 'Christology from below' of Pannenberg, believing that this does not insulate faith from 'the aids of historical scholarship'. He makes the fundamental error of believing that dogmatic theology is somehow justified only as a conclusion of objective historical investigation, rather than being itself a means by which the historian of Christian origins can make sense of his subject-matter. Where Barth is accused in the thesis of

wishing to bypass historical investigation, McKinney himself sees it as a *preparatio fidei*, that which determines what statements concerning the person of Christ may reasonably be made. He fails to see that the dogmatic enterprise is properly to be conceived as a way of making sense of the historical life of Jesus.

McKinney's thesis provides an interesting point of comparison for consideration of Barth's own Christological presuppositions. Barth wants to argue that the person of Christ can only be the divine Word. McKinney wants to argue that the person of Christ can only be Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, both thereby fail to fathom the mystery of Christ's incarnate being which is that the divine Word and Jesus of Nazareth are one and the same person. It is precisely this which makes any historical investigation of Jesus of Nazareth impossible without dogmatic exploration of the nature of God.

McKinney cannot understand Barth's claim that the Incarnation 'precedes' Creation.⁶⁵ He cannot understand how the pre-existence of Christ is related to the 'events' of Bethlehem and Golgotha.⁶⁶ What McKinney fails to see, is that if a man and the divine Word are one and the same person, then the human form of Jesus of Nazareth presented on earth God the Son in His eternal being, not what He had temporarily become but what He eternally is. For Barth the Incarnation 'precedes' Creation in that it is the presentation of the eternal being of the Word in Jesus of Nazareth which, in Barth's view, both explains and determines the Creation. McKinney seems to believe that Barth is making a plainly illogical statement when he remarks that the Incarnation 'precedes' the Creation, as if he were to be saying that May precedes April in the calendar. What Barth is surely recognising is that the eternal Son precedes Creation - indeed Creation was 'through' the Son - and that the Incarnation represents not a new becoming in the Son but a revelation of what He eternally is, and therefore of what He indeed is at the Creation

itself.⁶⁷ The 'precedence' of the Incarnation over the Creation lies in the assertion that in Jesus of Nazareth is disclosed the eternal being of the Son, in the light of which all activity of the Son, including His role in Creation, is to be understood. McKinney is falling victim to the idea of the Incarnation as a 'stage in the history' of the Son, a further development in the saga of God's relation to man. He does not see the point that Jesus of Nazareth, a man, is the eternal Son of the Father, that they are one person. He represents, in this manner, the dangers of an approach to the gospels' central character which intends to arrive at dogmatic conclusions at the end of a road along which it is conducted by apparently undogmatic considerations alone. Like Pannenberg, McKinney will be left at the end of the day with nothing but what the former calls the 'retroactive' power of Jesus' historically attested Resurrection in order to try to construct dogma out of history.⁶⁸ Pannenberg's 'retroactive power' of the Resurrection is a purely mythological expression. It is a μεταβασις εἰς ἄλλο γένος by which he attempts to guide himself from an historical event to dogmatic consequences which it cannot, in fact, yield. The Resurrection becomes an historical fact which at the same time provides the hermeneutical key to open up the mysteries of the Christian faith. It becomes an almost romantic vindication of Jesus's teaching about Himself and allows theology to expand upon His uniqueness. The sense of God's presence in suffering, weakness and helplessness during Christ's life, the self-giving and love of God revealed in the dogmatic equation of the eternal Son with the man of Nazareth which must, in our view, be the precondition of any understanding of the history of Jesus, is lost in the triumphant demonstration of Easter. Now, suddenly, all the studiously avoided dogmatic presuppositions are to be produced like rabbits out of a conjuror's hat. But it was not only in the light of the resurrection that Christ's claims were understood; nor could they merely be established by the resurrection. Without understanding how

God had revealed Himself to the point of self-compromising outreach in the life of Christ, what could be known of the divine love in the light of the Resurrection? 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will pay no heed even if someone should rise from the dead!'⁶⁹

McKinney asks how the pre-existence of Christ is related to the events of Bethlehem and Golgotha. The answer is that the eternal existence of Christ is made known by, is identified with, the man who suffered at Golgotha and was born in Bethlehem. McKinney is correct in criticising Barth, as we have criticised him in this thesis, for identifying the subject of the incarnate Christ with the divine Word alone. McKinney, however, identifies him only as the man Jesus of Nazareth. He rejects the dogmatic infiltration into events which presumes to arrive at the eternal Son before it has finished with the man Jesus. He wishes to follow the 'pure historical' method which he identifies with Pannenberg, and according to which he will first vindicate the latter at the Resurrection, and then will somehow find 'retroactive' power to discover the former, and to clothe in dogmatic shades of grey Jesus's brief moment of triumph on the third day. Does McKinney suppose that he thereby does justice to history? Is it not the dogma of Christ's eternal existence which provides the key to understanding the life of Jesus, as it is the life of Jesus which reveals the eternal existence of Christ? And if he throws away that key, and any insistence that the life of Christ must always be understood in the light of the recognition that the man Jesus and the eternal Son were one and the same person, will not the result be a belittling of the historicity of Christ's life? Will we not be constantly looking beyond the historical Jesus to the triumph of his resurrection? For what is the 'retroactive' force of the Resurrection to 'explain' the truth of Christ, but a systematic purging of that irony, insistence and authority through which Jesus identified himself during his lifetime

as the eternal Son, not only to others but in an agony of self-identification also? We do not, in this approach, find the reinstatement of the historical Jesus. We find only one form of history, which by its recourse to what might appear the one remaining fashionable miracle attempts to provide an acceptable ladder away from history into dogma and, in so doing, directs attention away from the historical events which dogma invests with their true historical significance. To find dogma by way of history may be less historical than to find in dogma the key to history.

McKinney's question concerning the connection between the pre-existent Son and the events of Bethlehem and Golgotha gives the game away. It is the very equation of the tragic event of Golgotha with the eternal life of the Word of God which gives that event its historical significance, which fixes forever the image of a man bleeding on a cross in 30 A.D. by identifying it with the eternal life of God the Son in the self-giving of divine love. Without this event, what would the 'self-giving of divine love' mean? What would it be but an abstraction? What reality could it have as a mere universal without particular expression?⁷⁰ The criticism which McKinney levels at what he considers to be Barth's treatment of the humanity assumed by the Word but not instantiated in a human being applies also to the divinity of Christ, realised in the one person who is both God the Son incarnate and Jesus of Nazareth. The subject of the Incarnate Word is God the Son, who is also Jesus of Nazareth, and it is in this meeting of the temporal and the eternal, this identification of the eternal being of the Son with the course of a temporally realised life, which constitutes that centre of Christianity in terms of which all else is to be understood, and which makes of both Barth and Pannenberg opposite forms of reductionism.

Notes on Chapter Nine

1. Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol.IV, Part 1, pp. 157-211. The title is a translation of 'Der Weg des Sohnes Gottes in die Fremde'.
2. See Kierkegaard, S., *Philosophical Fragments*, tr. D.Swenson, ch.II: The God as Teacher and Saviour: An Essay of the Imagination.
3. The German 'Fremde' has the sense of 'alien' as well as distant.
4. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. 1, Part 2, p. 162.
cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p.178:
Seine Menschheit ist nur Prädikat seiner Gottheit oder also besser, konkret gesagt: sie ist nur das in unbegreifliche Herablassung angenommene Prädikat des an uns handelnden Wortes, das der Herr ist.

The view of the humanity as a 'predicate' of the one divine subject of the incarnate being of Christ governs and determines the form of Barth's 'Kenotic' sense of a divine self-humiliation in Christ, as the German makes clear.
5. *Ibid.*, p.150. (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, I, 2, p.170: 'In ihm (the Son) ist ja Gott selber Subjekt'. cf. *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV, Part 2, p. 102: '.... in itself and as such the humanity of Jesus is a predicate without a subject'.) C.F. Thompson, J., *Christ in Perspective in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 29: '.... God himself is the subject of a real human being and action'.
6. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p.161ff.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 161.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 163ff.
- 8a. *Ibid.*, p. 164ff. See also *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, pp. 47ff., esp. p. 49:
He (the Son) does not exist only ἐν ἑαυτῷ but ἐν ἄλλῳ
in uno certo individuoyet not autonomously, as would be
the case if that with which God unites Himself were a homo
and not humanitas.
9. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p.150.
10. *Ibid.*, p.166.
11. Barth originally wrote the essay at Münster in 1926 (see *Die Theologie und die Kirche*, Vol.II, pp. 212-239). It is translated as an introduction to George Eliot's translation of Feuerbach's *Das Wesen des Christentums*. See *The Essence of Christianity*, pp. x-xxxii. cf. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, pp.82-3.
12. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
13. *Ibid.*

14. cf. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 2, p.83:
 It is far from our purpose to suggest that Luther and Lutheranism ever intended all this. But it can hardly be denied that with their heaven-storming doctrine of the humanity of the Mediator they did actually prepare the way for the distinctive modern transition from theology to a speculative anthropology.
15. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, Parts 1-4.
16. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, p.159.
17. *Ibid.*, p.171. cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 187: '.... die Offenbarung der Gnade, in der Gott sich selber kompromittiert' (my emphasis).
18. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 185. cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 202. The underlined sections in the main text read in German:
 Gott gibt sich hin, aber nicht weg und nicht auf
 Er kommt darin mit sich selbst nicht in Konflikt.
 And yet, God 'sich selber kompromittiert'?
20. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, p.184. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p.201: '.... sich selbst entgegen zu sein, sich mit sich selbst in Widerspruch zu setzen'.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5. The reference to a 'God against God' is on p. 184 (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, p. 181: 'Gott wider Gott').
23. Barth is tempted by this solution, and Moltmann has evidence that in II 2 he unequivocally adopts it (see section 3). See also IV 1 p. 185: 'He acts as Lord over this contradiction even as He subjects Himself to it', which is in danger of falling into the trap of presenting God as 'in Himself' or 'in His inner being' over and above the reality of His incarnate self. See our discussion of the 'extra calvinisticum', in section 2 of this chapter.
24. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, p. 186.
25. The German version of the passage underlined reads as follows (*Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 1, pp. 203-4):
 Es beruht auf einem zu engen, auf einem willkürlichen, menschlich - allzumenschlich geformten Gottesbegriff, wenn man der Meinung ist, dass Solches mit der göttlichen Natur unvereinbar sei.
26. Ed. John Hick.
- 26a. In arguing in this way such 'radical' critique of Christology are 'Docetic' according to Barth's definition. See Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1, p. 461.
27. See chapter 6.

28. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, pp. 186-7. We see how Barth is caught between the view that God in Christ most fully expressed Himself as 'the One who loves in freedom', and the argument, towards which aspects of his own theology drive him, that subjection of Himself to the constraints and limitations of human form must have been an 'ungodlike' experience, such that in his incarnate being He could only be seen as a 'God against God'.
29. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, pp. 180-183.
31. That the body of Christ could be present wherever the eucharist is being celebrated, that is to say in several different places at the same time, requires it to possess the divine attribute of omnipotence. Thus the Lutheran doctrine of a real (bodily) presence is connected to the Christological doctrine of a *communicatio idiomatum*. For further examination of the relationship between Lutheran Christological and eucharistic doctrines, see note 52.
32. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, p.181.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*
35. See the article by D.M. MacKinnon in *Christ, Creation and Culture. Studies in Honour of T. F. Torrance*, ed. R.W.A. McKinney, pp.92-108: 'The Relation of the Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity'. For discussion of Miltmann on Barth's view of the Trinity, see chapter nine, section three.
36. See p.203.
37. *Church Dogmatics*, II, 2, p.167.
38. *Ibid.*, pp.166-9.
39. *Church Dogmatics*, II, 2, p.169: quoted in *The Crucified God*, p.280, n.16.
40. *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, pp.199-200.
41. *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, pp.139ff.
42. *Ibid.*, p.143.
43. Hodgson, L., *The Doctrine of the Trinity*, p.229.
44. Baillie, D.M., *God was in Christ*, pp.134ff.
45. In a review of *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, in *Theology*, of May 1982, Maurice Wiles suggests that Moltmann particularly rejects the Cappadocian fathers.
46. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p.139.
47. Hick, J., *God and the Universe of Faiths*.

48. Barth is led inevitably, therefore, to speculate concerning the 'pre-existent' being of the Logos in a way that he elsewhere, as in dealing with 'Kenotic' theologians, rejects. See, e.g., *Church Dogmatics*, IV, 1, p. 181.
49. Bonhoeffer, D., *Christology*, p. 107.
50. *Ibid.*, pp. 94ff.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 101-2.
52. *Ibid.*, p. 108. Examination of Luther's Christology may also be found in Volume II, Division Second of I.A. Dorner's *History of the Doctrine of the Person of Christ*, pp. 53-266. Dorner expresses his own preference for a Lutheran over a Reformed Christology on pp. 246-8.

Dorner makes the caveat that Luther's view did not remain entirely consistent: in his later life he put a greater emphasis upon the distinction between the divine and human natures in Christ, and he did not always remain true to his own insistence that a real growth, both in its physical and its spiritual aspects, must be allowed the human nature of Christ, which as *Hebrews* remarks 'learned obedience'. There is a suggestion in Dorner of promising trails begun and left unexplored by Luther, either because the way was too dense or too dangerous, and there is more than a suggestion of different paths taken by Luther's successors, particularly Melancthon and the 'Wittenberg' school (Brentz restoring a more authentically 'Lutheran' perspective).

The starting-point for Luther's consideration of Christ is not any abstract conception of a 'person' acting as an 'ego centre' to hold together two disparate 'natures', or of 'natures' whose characteristics must by definition be mutually exclusive, but rather the unique reality of Christ Himself. One proceeds from the reality of Christ to what may be understood of His being, not from what may possibly constitute His Being to the reality of Christ. One must understand Christ in response to His actuality: this actuality does not have to be fitted into preconceptions concerning what is 'acceptable'. Here Dorner expresses the same understanding of Christology as Bonhoeffer.

Luther's unwillingness to dictate the nature of Christ in terms which do not recognise that they must be derived from the unique reality of his incarnate being may be associated with his eucharistic doctrine, which was rationalised by later Calvinist opponents of Lutheranism in terms of the doctrine of 'consubstantiation', but which to Luther himself merely reflected the mystery of Christ's words 'this is my body'. It is interesting that Luther's eucharistic doctrine stands apart from both a Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and Calvin's eucharistic theology, which bear in some ways a closer relation to each other than either of them does to Luther himself. Barth himself mentions 'consubstantiation' in *Church Dogmatics*, IV 2, p. 67, explaining it as the view that the bread does not cease to be bread when conjoined to the body of Christ, but rather both remain substantially present. This may be compared to our argument in this chapter, that in the person of Christ both a human and a divine subject may be spoken of. The desire to rationalise the doctrine of the eucharist in terms of a single divine substance in which the accidents of bread and wine inhere (transubstantiation), may be compared to the Barthian Christology according to which the qualities of the humanity inhere in a divine

subject. Luther's eucharistic doctrine is as 'Chalcedonian' as his Christology, despite Barth's insistence (IV 2, p.67) that it forgets the Chalcedonian qualifications concerning the person of Christ ἀδιαιρετως and ἀχωριστος. The arguments we use in this chapter to support Luther's Christology might also be used to support his eucharistic theology.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 107: 'The protest against the enhypostasia must be maintained'.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 27-40.
55. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein*, München, 1956, *ET Act and Being*, Collins, 1962:

God is not free from man but for man.

I refer to 'implied criticism' of Barth in what Bonhoeffer says. He refers to Barth's insistence that in God's self-revelation He 'remains always the master, always the subject, so that if any man should think that he has God as an object, it is not longer "God" whom he "has", (*Ibid.*, p. 83). The implication is that it may be precisely this insistence upon God's sovereignty expressed through His untouchable subjectivity that keeps God 'from' us: Barth's insistence that God may not be 'possessed' by man sits uneasily with the possibility that in His incarnation He gives Himself to be 'possessed'. This begs many questions, but what we are suggesting is the possibility that Barth's emphasis upon God's sovereignty and independence of man may be seeking to 'protect' God from a 'reduction' that He has in fact willed for Himself in Christ. We might then, in a sense, claim to speak 'less highly' of God than Barth, but in a way that conforms more closely to His will as one who surrenders Himself in Christ.

56. See Weston, Frank, *The One Christ; an enquiry into the manner of the Incarnation*, London, 1907.
57. See pp. 26-7.
58. Thompson, J., *Christ in Perspective in the Theology of Karl Barth*, p. 147.
59. See Thompson, J., *op.cit.*, p. 155.
60. *Ibid.*, p.29.
61. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 1, p. 369.
62. *Ibid.*, p.371.
63. *Church Dogmatics*, I, 2, p.149.
64. In his D.Phil. Dissertation for the University of Oxford, *The Role of the Historical Jesus in the Theology of Karl Barth*.
65. *Ibid.*, pp.251-2.
66. *Ibid.*
67. cf. Berkouwer's description of a 'Step-wise' approach to the history of salvation, which we considered in chapter six.

68. See Pannenberg's *Jesus, God and Man*, p. 135:

However, as confirmation, the resurrection has retroactive force for Jesus' pre-Easter activity, which taken by itself was not yet recognisable as being divinely authorised and its authorisation was also not yet definitively settled.

Certainly Pannenberg rejects the position, which he identifies with Kunneth, that Jesus's divinity was only conferred by His resurrection. Pannenberg is not a delayed adoptionist! Our claim is that he over-states how much in terms of traditional Christology can in fact be established by way of the resurrection, as language so lacking in ontology as to speak of the confirmation by God of His 'authorisation' to Jesus illustrates. Pannenberg claims that:

.... the resurrected Lord's essential unity with God leads to the idea of preexistence through its own intrinsic logic.

(pp. 153-4.)

But it is precisely the nature of this 'logical deduction' in Pannenberg's argument which we fail to see, and which is the ground of our claim concerning Pannenberg's unsuccessful attempt to lead the reader painlessly through history into dogma.

69. Luke 16:31.
70. See the essay by D.M. Mackinnon, "'Substance" in Christology - a Cross-Bench View', in Sykes, S.W., and Clayton, J.P. eds., *Christ, Faith and History*.
71. An unreasonable charge, since Barth quite clearly assents to the proposition that Jesus of Nazareth was an individual human being, and his treatment of the 'anhypostasia' and 'enhypostasia' is in no sense intended to deny this.

CONCLUSION

Our thesis began with an examination of Barth's early theology, which we viewed in the light of his relation to the thought of Kant. Prior to the second commentary on *Romans*, we argued, a Kantian moral theology could be observed in Barth: in the second commentary, however, this is rejected and Kant's crucial significance lies instead in the outline of a dualism which provides the basis for maintaining an 'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man. Transcendental idealism formed the ground of a transcendental eschatology in the interpretation of Paul's epistle.

The second commentary on *Romans* was not a 'theology of revelation'. We have argued that it was a 'negative natural theology', whose 'proof' of God lay in the existential conviction of a fallen world from which the heavenly legions had departed. The poetic appeal of this magnificent work lies in the constantly reiterated theme of a world which God in His displeasure has left with no signs of His presence but with some signs of His absence - hence the crucial role for those Pauline passages which suggest a knowledge of God 'from the things which are made'. Reading *Romans* is like reading the account of a vanished civilisation: be it the poetry of dried-up canals which were once filled with the living streams of eternal life, or the more abstract concept of a 'relative' which in its relativity proclaims a 'vanished absolute', Barth suggests to early twentieth century man, not that all theology is based upon revelation, but that God has condemned the world to live without Him. This was the powerful message that spoke in the aftermath of the first world war. Barth adopts, in his commentary, an almost Stoic tone: God has left the world, which must learn to live in separation from Him and in His disfavour (the ambiguity of 'krisis' as separation and judgment) until an eschatological transformation in which it will cease to be. It must accept, as Jesus encouraged it to accept, the reality of the divine absence. It must not strive to deny this and to build some ersatz

replacement in order to pretend to itself that God has, in fact, returned. Its hope lies only in its perception of its own finitude: so that resignation at its own abandonment by God may be contained within the expectation of reunification with Him through its dissolution. Sorrow at a 'past' that can never be re-lived exists within a recognition of the ultimate unreality of time itself and all that takes place within it: the condition of man is not finally hopeless because not finally real. The final tragedy is lightened by a final irony. The condition of man without God can be broken, however, only by His eschatological 'establishment' of the world through its dissolution, an establishment of which the hope itself is the only present reality, and of which the finitude of the present world-order is the only present sign.

Although Barth's finest work, *Romans* has more of the spirit of Greek tragedy than of Christianity. It has no Christocentric proclamation of good news at the joining of God and man in Christ. It has no theology of revelation binding the world to its Creator. Linked to this failing, is a lack of political and moral seriousness in a theology which, having jettisoned the ethical idealism of Kant, finds nothing in transcendental idealism alone to justify a positive discrimination on behalf of certain values.¹ In some ways the Stoicism of *Romans*, whilst a ground for the rejection of any this-worldly ideology such as that of Nazism, opened up a vacuum which a Nazi ideology might fill, perhaps as precisely the kind of 'Herostatean deed' that Harnack feared in the implications of what he saw as Barth's dismissal of scientific historical-critical study of the Bible (see chapter three).

In later years Barth strove to construct a more orthodox and positive theology based upon the Christocentrism of Christianity. His enduring commitment to the centrality of Christ in any dogmatic formulation of the Christian faith is his greatest achievement in these years, but the form of his commitment produced difficulties.

In chapters three to nine we tried to bring out these difficulties by arguing that Barth remained committed to an essentially dualist theology, despite the dissatisfaction which he later expressed with the views of *Romans*.² His dualism becomes 'epistemological' rather than 'ontological', that is to say it separates the knowledge of God based upon revelation from other forms of knowledge. It is this epistemological dualism that is established, we argued in chapter four, by *Fides Quaerens Intellectum*, the methodological manifesto of the *Church Dogmatics*, a work which despite its overt rejection of Kant's arguments against 'Anselm' (Barth concedes that Kant specifically directed them against Descartes), and its suggestion that Kant's theology is anthropocentric in that it determines knowledge of God according to the constraining limitations of the human understanding, is very happy to continue to espouse a Kantian dualism in terms of the separation between theology and other forms of knowledge. Although it is true that Barth continues to make use of the concept of analogy, and continues to use - as indeed he must - the terms of ordinary discourse 'rebaptised' within the language of faith, he does so in the context of an inherent and inescapable ambiguity concerning the status of those terms, which are both to be understood in their 'ordinary' sense and in a form which, because it is their 'original, divine content' that is being referred to, renders them immune to criticism by the human understanding. Chapters three and eight try to establish this with respect to specific examples, the interpretation of the Bible (the ambiguity of its 'divine' 'content'), and the understanding of the Resurrection (an 'event', but immune to the critical examination brought to events by the historian).

The purpose of this concluding chapter is to attempt to show that our criticisms of Barth in the course of this thesis may be brought together around the issue of Christology. We applaud the Christocentric approach to Christian theology which Barth offers; but we feel that

because of a Christological flaw in Barth's thought, the other aspects of his theology which are determined by his fundamental Christological commitment are similarly flawed. A Christian theology is rightly, in our view, the 'universalising' of a Christology; but what Christology is being 'universalised'? The difficulties which have been brought out in chapters five, six and seven of this thesis are all traceable, we believe, to a defective Christological understanding in terms of which the other aspects of Christian theology are to be understood. We may now list under a number of headings the relationship as we see it:

a. Barth rightly argues, in his criticism of a Lutheran Christology and his examination of the relationship between a Lutheran Christology and nineteenth-century German Idealism, that a Christology may be the foundation of an anthropology. Barth's own Christology, we have argued in chapter nine, is based upon the conviction of a single enduring divine subject of the incarnate being of Christ. The experiences of Christ are known not to a human subject but to the eternal Word. This Christology may be linked to Barth's anthropology as we tried to describe it in chapter six. There we sought to question whether Barth's thought allowed for a real 'ontology of man' in his natural being apart from Christ. In chapter seven we attempted to consider the 'epistemological correlative' of this, namely whether Barth's thought allowed for a real knowledge of God located in man, the bearer of that knowledge. The difficulties which we have outlined in a Barthian theology in chapters six and seven represent, we would claim, the outworking of a Christology which associates human experience in Christ with a 'divine' rather than a 'human' subject, and then extends this to human experience in general. The attempt to 'rebaptise' the elements of a human understanding 'within' the divine may be understood as the extension to

humanity in general of the attempt to give substance to the incarnate existence of a single divine subject without at any point conceding that the experiences of Christ in His earthly life may ^{also} be understood to be experiences of a human subject.

b. Barth attacks a Lutheran 'divinising' of man through the anthropological extension of the attribution of divine qualities to the human nature of Christ. Extended to human nature as such, this becomes in Barth's view a divinising of man. Luther begets Feuerbach. Barth's criticism of movements in theology associated with Schleiermacher and Bultmann is similar, namely that they interpret God according to essentially human criteria and thereby 'reduce' God to man. In fact such a 'divinising' of man is not the only alternative to Barth's Christological formulation. A Christology could be suggested which sees the self-understanding of the human as human in Christ, and the self-recognition of the eternal Logos, as taking place in one being. Extended to an anthropology, this form of Christological argument entails, not that man comes to understand himself as God, but that he understands himself in his relation to God insofar as he understands himself as man. Indeed an anthropological starting-point need not entail anthropocentrism.

We may present the alternative forms of Christology which may be 'universalised' in terms of a 'theological anthropology' as follows:

i. A Christology which posits a single divine subject of the incarnate Christ. We regard this as Barth's Christology. 'Universalised', this leads to the view which we have criticised in chapters six and seven of this thesis. It leads to an anthropology in which the being of man lacks reality as the object of God's revelation, as that to which God's revelation is addressed. In effect, man is absorbed within God, his knowledge of God indistinguishable from the knowledge God has of Himself. The subordination of man to God in the dialogue

between them is developed to an extent that in fact takes the ontological ground from under its feet, producing a divine monologue in which the Creator addresses a phantom. As the ontological ground is taken from under the feet of Christ's humanity in Barth's Christology, ~~As~~ it is taken from under our feet in his 'theological anthropology'. Certainly, for Barth, Christ was truly man and truly a man. But such are the conditions set by Barth to the reality of His humanity, whose qualities may never inhere in a human subject of His incarnate experience, that it can never be more than a phantom humanity. Similarly, Barth nowhere fails to talk of human beings as flesh and blood beings capable of denying their Creator. But he so conflates the order of nature with the order of grace that such 'independence' of God as a human characteristic is finally unreal.

ii. The second form of Christology is that which Barth attacks in terms of a line of thought from Luther through Feuerbach and German Idealism to twentieth-century 'humanism'. The Incarnation is here understood in terms of a single human subject which glorifies itself through the reception of divine qualities into itself. It becomes the divinisation of man rather than the humanisation of God. Through what Barth sees as a Lutheran application of the *communicatio idiomatum*, the way is opened for predicating divine qualities of the human nature in Christ, a process which is then 'universalised' into an anthropology which predicates divine qualities of man as such. There is no 'Calvinist corrective' to ensure that the process by which in Christ God the Son takes to Himself human form is never a process by which human nature receives divine qualities as attributes of itself, and to ensure that the Incarnation is always a receiving of the human into the divine and never a receiving of the divine into the human.

iii. In the third form of Christology which we have put forward, Christ is neither to be conceived of as a single enduring divine subject of human qualities nor as a single enduring human subject of divine qualities. We have, here, neither the absorption of human experience and characteristics into a determining divine subject, nor the progressive divinisation of a human subject through the receiving of divine powers and attributes into itself. The mystery of Christ's being is the mystery of a human subject recognising Himself in His humanity as a man of Nazareth insofar as the eternal Logos understands itself in its eternity as God the Son, as a divine subject. The self-recognition of the man Jesus is precisely identical to, is the very occasion of, the self-recognition of the Logos in its divinity. 'Universalised' this entails, neither that man is absorbed into God nor that man absorbs God into himself, but that man's own self-understanding (examined rightly by Schleiermacher in terms of his sense of dependence, or by Kant in terms of his sense of moral obligation) is the locus of man's understanding of his relationship to God. This Christology identifies the mystery of Christ's being with that of the identification of a human subject in His humanity with a divine subject in His divinity. Does this entail a Nestorian division of the Person of Christ into two subjects? No - because the mystery of Christ lies precisely in the fact that these two subjects are one, that the self-existent human being Jesus of Nazareth is the Word of God in its eternal self-definition. Similarly, in arguing that a 'theological anthropology' must accord man in relation to God a 'relative independence' of his Creator, and give ontological ground to his apartness from God in this respect, we are universalising the demand for a real human subject of the experiences of the incarnate Christ. But we do not in doing so seek to divinise the human. We seek only to humanise the human, to give to the human the real grounds of its humanity. We are saying no more than that it is only in his humanity that man knows and experiences God, as in Christ

it was only in the experience a man had of Himself as a human being that the Word of God eternally recognises itself.

c. We may now consider the argument in chapter five of our thesis, in which we argued that in his lectures on the history of theology Barth's real object of attack was a process by which theological understanding provides the precondition of that understanding of reality which other intellectual disciplines seek. We may recall the point in our sixth chapter concerning an order of nature which cannot be absorbed within an order of grace. As in Christ the self-understanding of a man coalesces with, but does not interrupt, the self-understanding of the Word of God, so the attempt to make sense of the world without theistic presuppositions, the response of man since the Enlightenment to 'coming of age', in Bonhoeffer's phrase,³ does not frustrate, but coalesces with man's attempt to understand himself in relation to God. Corresponding to the completeness of the humanity of Christ, to the completeness of Christ as a man, is the completeness of the world as interpreted scientifically, ethically, politically and indeed religiously. As the eternal Logos in the incarnate being of Christ did not undermine the completeness of the human subject, so the creative power of God does not undermine our attempt to make sense of ourselves and our world without theistic presuppositions. The Christian knows God in the completeness of Jesus Christ as a human being, not in some 'supernatural power or property' of that being; similarly he knows God as the Creator of the world in the effort to make sense of that world in its own terms.

Theology is rightly centred upon Christ, and Christ is rightly presented as a paradox. But Barth crucially loses sight of the paradox, not of God in man nor of man in God, but of God and man.

There is a connection between the two fundamental doctrines of Christianity, those of the Person of Christ and of the Trinity. In

both the theological presentation of a mystery entails a concern that 'the centre cannot hold'. In the view of the person of Christ as at once a human subject and a divine subject, the doubt may be expressed that they may remain identical without being broken apart into separate constituents, whereas in fact what maintains the sense of Christology is their identity. Similarly, the sense of three coinhering persons analogous to three centres of consciousness within the being of God threatens tritheism, although as Professor Hodgson points out⁴ in a most illuminating passage, it is characteristic of higher orders of being to combine unity and increasing inner complexity. Such doctrines attempt to reveal in poor and inadequate metaphors the cost to God of that action through which He remains God even as He reaches to contain within Himself the being of man, not enhypostatically tranquillised into conformity with Himself, but still raging like Prometheus at his fate, and threatening to tear a God of love apart. In section three of chapter nine, we tried to review the relation between the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity in Barth's thought precisely because we believe that this understanding eludes him. He sets out from the view that God in Christ expressed His eternal being as 'the One who loves in freedom', and then he draws back from the implications of this revelation in terms of the freely willed subjection of God to constraints and limitations which must, Barth presupposes, provide Him with an 'ungodlike' experience, and which indeed begin to threaten the form of Barth's own commitment to the sovereignty of God. Instead of acknowledging God's actions in Christ, Barth ties the Christological knot too tightly, and fails to reverence God the more for reverencing the freedom and dignity of man with which God struggles to unite Himself.

In the *Humanity of God*⁵ Barth considered that in his commentary on *Romans* he had omitted the humanity of God and concentrated upon His divinity. Yet it is the divinity of God, in all its frightening and

tragic weakness, that is eternally the broken man of Nazareth. It is the identity of God's eternal selving and a man's suffering that forms, in this respect, the essence of the gospel, and which directs theology, in its search for God, to a study of the nature of man. We believe that the later thought of Karl Barth was less the retraction of earlier claims than the increasingly painful recognition of an ambiguity, as the possibility presented itself that what Barth determined to be the nature of God as Creator and Reconciler of man was a nature that He denied to be His in Christ. Increasingly, the cry which Karl Barth echoed, 'Let God be God!' , appeared unable to match the cry 'God was in Christ'.

For the final question we would ask is this: Is the God Who was in Christ broken and weak upon the Cross equivalent to the God Whose sovereignty and elective will stand out so strongly in the volumes of the *Church Dogmatics*? Is this God, who conceded so much of Himself to man in Christ, the same God who concedes so little to man's dignity as a free and sinful creature, as we have tried to argue in chapter six?

Barth's commentary on *Romans* made much of the insecurity of man, and his search for 'secure' alternatives to God. But is there not a certain 'false security' for man in the awareness of his own belittled impotence before an all-powerful God? Man takes much comfort from the easy assurance that since God can save him, He will. But perhaps the point about an omnipotence of love is that it cannot, rather than will not, save those who reject it. Man's insecurity before God lies in the paradox of an omnipotence of love which must be weak, which freely chooses to withdraw from that power over human destinies which could, at the mere merciful whim of an all-powerful judgement, forgive the oppressor alongside the oppressed. Surely the harsh moral terms of the gospel are grounded in uncomfortable words of divine weakness - 'I never knew you', and the threatening prospect of the 'outer darkness' into which the light quite simply cannot go.

Barth's revealing comment in *The Humanity of God* suggests that in his later thought he did not question his understanding of God's divinity, but rather added to it a separate divine 'humanity' which must only perpetuate the dualism of his thought. The point of a Christocentric theology is surely that the humanity of man is allowed to call into question, and even to determine, the divinity of God, and that the honour paid to God in His transcendence and sovereignty must be determined through this Christocentric perspective. For this reason there is, perhaps particularly in the later work of Barth, a note of hollow triumphalism. Berkouwer in particular⁷ has noted that the 'triumph of grace' there outlined lacks appreciation of the depth and significance of human sin; yet Berkouwer's recognition of this weakness in Barth's thought needs to be grounded in the awareness of a properly Christocentric theology, according to which the harsh and perhaps unremitting consequences of human sin are understood in terms of the willingness of God, not simply to share them but to be determined by them. The source of the weakness in Barth's 'triumph of grace' is his view of the triumph of God, and it is to the form of that triumph as disclosed in Jesus Christ that the theologian must direct his or her thoughts.

Notes on Chapter Ten

1. We would agree with Niebuhr's remark that 'Barth's theology is too transcendent to offer any guidance for the discriminating choices that political responsibility challenges us to'. Quoted in Hebblethwaite, B., *The Adequacy of Christian Ethics*, p. 69.
2. A dissatisfaction which should not be exaggerated. It was regret over a particular emphasis rather than a repudiation of earlier views, as Barth makes clear in *The Humanity of God*. Barth here confesses that in *Romans* he had failed to take the deity of God seriously enough to see that it 'included' His humanity. Yet he does not alter his view of the relation of humanity and divinity, and he reaffirms the Christological position which we outlined in chapter nine, attacking 'the fatal Lutheran doctrine of the two natures and their properties' (p. 50).
3. See his *Letters and Papers from Prison*. The influence of Cassirer's studies of the Enlightenment upon Bonhoeffer are widely noted; see e.g., Jüngel, E., *Gott als Geheimnis der Welt*, p. 21.
4. In *The Doctrine of the Trinity*. The history of evolution yields the observation, he remarks, that the higher the form being observed, the more its unity is combined with a coinhering complexity. Thus a stone has very little inner complexity; a primitive life-form more, for it may breathe and reproduce; a higher form still may have the power of movement, and thereby its complexity of function increase whilst it remains, as an individual of a species, a unity. In the case of man, the power of thought and memory makes the complexity of each individual being, its variety of function and activity all located within a single 'self', even greater. In the case of God, we may suppose an even greater 'inner complexity' within the being of the godhead, and it may be that by speaking of three subjects or even centres of consciousness within God we do greatest justice in imagination to the complex unity of the Deity, and do not suppose that what is a condition of unity in man must necessarily be a condition of unity in God. The complaint that three persons or subjects, even conceived according to 'modern' ideas of 'personality' in terms of self-consciousness, cannot be contained within the unity of the Godhead, may be an anthropomorphic view. The suggestion in some theological works that a 'lonely' God would 'need' a world for 'company' suggests that it is very easy for such anthropomorphism to take hold. While God is supremely personal, He is not a person, and the conditions of unity in the personal being of God cannot be identified with the conditions of unity in the personal being of man.
5. See note 2.
6. An important question to consider is that of whether Barth's doctrine of election and his apparent universalism do justice to this 'dignity' of man. In an article entitled 'Is Karl Barth a universalist?' (*Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1967) Rev Professor J.D. Bettis denies that Barth's theology entails universalism, for God in no way 'has' to save man:
The problem is not that universalism ties God to all men but that it ties God to men at all (p. 429).

However, Bettis's article raises the problem considered in chapter six of this thesis, namely the apparent lack of ontological reality to man's disobedience. Bettis argues that man's disobedience is 'real but ineffective' (p. 430). Man may disobey, but God frustrates the intention of the unfaithful man to act as an independent agent: the disobedient man 'is like a man walking down the up-escalator. His activity continues, but its effectiveness is nullified'. (p. 430). The question clearly arises as to whether Bettis's distinction rescues man's disobedience from ontological unreality: indeed what sense does the distinction make at all?

Bettis does, however, clarify exactly what our objection is to Barth's doctrine of election. It is not denied by us that Barth is no universalist in the sense that he nowhere argues that God 'cannot' withhold salvation from man: rather, it appears that whether or not God has mercy on all, He effectively removes from man the power to frustrate His election. Whether or not God will elect all is a secondary question: our objection is that man's power of acceptance or rejection of God's will appears to play no part in that free divine decision. Indeed it could be argued that the lack of grounds in Barth's theology for discrimination between moral values by man, corresponds to a lack of grounds for discrimination by God, in His election of man, between various human responses to His grace.

7. See *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*.

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