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Karl Barth's Doctrine of Rejection: Rejection as the Shadow-Side of Election, With Special Reference to the Case of Judas Iscariot

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Karl Barth's Doctrine of Rejection:
Rejection as the Shadow-Side of Election,
With Special Reference to the Case of Judas Iscariot

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by

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3

Graduate Program in Theology

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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entitled:

**Karl Barth's Doctrine of Rejection:
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Abstract

Karl Barth defends the Reformed doctrine of rejection because it, as well as election, means that God loves in freedom. Barth's doctrine of election is interpreted as a consistent dialectical application of double predestination in that Jesus Christ, as the subject of God's grace to humanity, because he is both the elected and rejected subject of divine predestination. The doctrine is consistent because Barth unites the doctrine of God with the doctrine of Jesus's election as the fulfillment of the covenant of grace. The argument of the thesis is that Barth's doctrine of rejection is appropriately viewed as an improvement to the Reformed understanding of election and God's singular will of grace. The argument in favour of Barth's doctrine of rejection proceeds in three stages: the dialectical methodology of double predestination, Jesus Christ as the material precedent of double predestination, and Judas Iscariot as a case study of Christocentric rejection.

Keywords: Karl Barth, rejection, Judas Iscariot, election, predestination, reprobation, Reformed theology

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Introduction

This study argues that Karl Barth's doctrine of rejection is developed with formal consistency throughout the period of 1919-1942 in his doctrine of predestination but that it lacked material consistency until *Church Dogmatics* II.2. The doctrine of predestination continually exhibited a dialectical methodology in which reflection on God's aseity informed what the work of God was in predestination. This means that, before *Church Dogmatics* II.2, election was the primary, theocentric interpretation of God's work in revealing who God is. Although Barth's methodology remained formally consistent, he did change the theological material of how God is known in election. The change occurred when Barth replaced theocentrism for Christocentrism in his doctrine of predestination. The argument will present the details of each stage of Barth's reordering of predestination. To complete the argument, Barth's placement of Jesus Christ as the divine and human subject of rejection in §35.4 of *Church Dogmatics* II.2 will be portrayed as a significant achievement of formal and material consistency in the Reformed doctrine of predestination. Yet, it is not only the justification of Barth's doctrine that we seek. With an examination of rejection in the case of Judas Iscariot, the adjudication of Jesus Christ as the rejected demonstrates that Barth's theological procedure can be seen as an improvement to Reformed theology. This affirmation is accurate because, in his doctrine of rejection, Barth interprets in Judas's rejection a union between the gracious will of God and the rejection of sinful humanity.

There are two principal verifications of Barth's doctrine of rejection that allow it to stand out as a positive achievement in the Reformed doctrine of predestination. As a statement of orthodoxy on the Reformed doctrine of rejection, the *Canons of Dordt*

provides these two verifications in its denial that reprobation is a synergism of divine and human volition or that it is symmetrical with election.¹ Barth's doctrine of rejection consistently avoids these two errors because it brings together the doctrine of God and the doctrine of election and rejection in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus, the function of the doctrine of rejection is carefully united with the eternal covenant of grace and becomes the basis for God's justification of his creatures. Barth's achievement is to speak of God's covenantal grace in Jesus Christ as the *telos* of God's will in rejection; it is not a protology that predetermines the independent condition of human fallenness. In other words, humans can and do resist God's grace from their side, but this does not give them power to deter the vindication of God's ways and works in creation by the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. God says yes to the creature and no to himself in rejection. Barth's doctrine of rejection is bold and sweeping in its denial of both synergism and symmetry.

Barth continually chooses to describe predestination in a way which challenges Reformed theology and leads it into greater conformity with its subject matter, the grace of Jesus Christ. Against the formulations of the seventeenth century Reformed scholastics, Barth does not perceive the covenant of grace as proceeding from a *pactum salutis* or a covenant of redemption. Rather, the crucial procedure that shapes his doctrine of predestination in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 is given in the doctrine of God. God

¹ "Moreover, Holy Scripture most especially highlights this eternal and underserved grace of our election and brings it out more clearly for us, in that it further bears witness that not all people have been chosen but that some have not been chosen or have been passed by in God's eternal election—those, that is, concerning whom God, on the basis of his entirely free, most just, irreproachable, and unchangeable good pleasure, made the following decision: to leave them in the common misery into which, by their own fault, they have plunged themselves; not to grant them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but finally to condemn and eternally punish them (having been left in their own ways and under his just judgment), not only for their unbelief but also for all their other sins, in order to display his justice...." First Point, Article 15, *Canons of Dort*, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 125-6.

has covenantally bound himself to Jesus Christ, Barth says; therefore it is the second person of the Trinity who is the subject of election and the object of creation's delivery from sin. For Barth, "the second 'person' of the Trinity is the 'one divine I' a second time, in a different form—a form which is constituted by the anticipation of union with the humanity of Christ."² Humanity is established in God's grace by an original covenantal determination, not by an independent human choice in the Garden of Eden. In this Christocentric form of election, Barth upholds the theological methodology which separated the created from uncreated and correctly applies the material of Reformed predestination, the justification of the sinner. He accomplishes both parts by adjudicating that Jesus Christ is the trustworthy electing God and the faithful elected human. He is this one because he humbles himself and suffers the judgment that belongs to all the rejected, those isolated against God's grace.

The argument that will be presented is formally constructed as a defense of the consistency of Barth's doctrine of election within the material changes that it encounters. Because Barth's methodology remains the same but the material of his subject matter does not, the argument explains the changed status of the doctrine through three stages, which correspond to each chapter. In the end, the advancement that Barth has made in locating the doctrine of rejection in the person of Jesus Christ will be supported by referral to the challenges and affirmations that shape Barth's doctrine.

The first chapter provides a literature review, paying special attention to Bruce McCormack's interpretation of Barth's doctrine of election from the first *Epistle to the Romans* to the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Here we discover the central place that Barth found

² Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 104.

for the theocentric doctrine of election in his dialectical theology. Understanding Barth's doctrine to be consistently dialectical is important because it removes the false presupposition that Barth's theology changed from dialectical to analogical. That predestination is dialectical to Barth in this period means that it is not equivalent to an anthropological distinction between eternal human destinies and that it operates upon a teleological basis in which God's will is oriented to election not rejection. The purpose of the first chapter will be to view the procedure by which Barth establishes the parameters for his doctrine of rejection.

The second chapter is an examination of Barth's contribution to the Reformed doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* II.2. The Reformed historiography of the doctrine is presented as the context for the Christological change that Barth made in the theological material of election. No longer a theocentric doctrine, Barth united the doctrine of God with the election of Jesus Christ such that God's ways *ad extra* had this election as their interpretive precedent. Not only is it incorrect to know God's being without starting with the election of Jesus Christ but it is also true that human predestination is inaccurately known apart from the original predestination of Jesus in the covenant of grace. Barth placed Jesus Christ as the elected and rejected human; he is the subject of election—nothing less than the subject of humanity's election. If Barth's doctrine of rejection is to be adjudicated properly, it will have its precedent in the rejection of Jesus Christ.

The final chapter brings to a close the argument that Barth's doctrine of rejection is consistent and an improvement to the traditional Reformed doctrine. It is profoundly original and innovative because it speaks of God's gracious will to save in the doctrine of

rejection. Barth's doctrine of rejection builds upon his Christocentric treatment of predestination and here results in a case study of Judas's rejection under the two conditions of reprobation given in the *Canons of Dordt*, asymmetry and non-synergism. In §35.4 of *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Barth demonstrated that God's will for the rejected was established only in the light of Jesus Christ's election to be the Judge who is judged in Judas's place. The independence of creation and the possibility of its evil perversion to that which God has not willed are overturned by Jesus's will to bear these features of the rejected. If we are to interpret human rejection aright, Barth shows that it must be in the allegiance that Jesus shared with Judas and the responsibility that God took to forgive all those who stand, in their powerlessness and disobedience, apart from Jesus Christ and the will of God.

The three stages of the argument are positioned such that Barth's doctrine of election is shown to be a coherent argument within Reformed theology; the doctrine is known to be this, furthermore, because of Barth's doctrine of rejection. The doctrine of rejection is an improvement to the traditional view because it properly finds the basis of divine rejection not in independent human decision or sin but in the will of God exhibited in Jesus Christ's death and his vindication of the elect. It concerns the covenantal decision of God to be the rejected human who is punished for disobedience. This decision secures the promise of the gospel and the delivery of humanity from its twisted desires. Of all the materials that could stand for the one rejected by God's decree, whether it be a human, animal, or nation, it was God's will that Jesus Christ be the subject of divine punishment.

Chapter One

Karl Barth's Dialectical Doctrine of Predestination

The purpose of this chapter in the study of Karl Barth's doctrine of rejection is to present the continuity of Barth's thought on the doctrine from the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* (1919) up to his writing of *Church Dogmatics* II.2 (1942). The primary reason for defending such continuity is that it demonstrates how Barth's theocentric dialectic was consistently used as a theological method in grappling with predestination. In Chapter Three, this will allow us to focus on Barth's treatment of the apostle Judas Iscariot (*Church Dogmatics* II.2, §35.4) as representing a new approach to double predestination, understood within the same parameters of dialectical theology. Otherwise we risk venturing onto trails in Reformed theology that have little benefit for our theological intelligence and that lead us further from the theology of Karl Barth.

The tradition of interpretation of Karl Barth's early years (1909-1936) is explored in great detail in Bruce McCormack's *Karl Barth's Critical Realistic Dialectical Theology*.¹ McCormack's work changed the method of investigating the connection between Barth's early work and *Church Dogmatics* II.2. Up until the work of Eberhard Jüngel² and Ingrid Spieckermann³, the development of Barth's theology was mainly understood in the light of Hans Urs von Balthasar's thesis, found in *Karl Barth. Darstellung und Deutung seiner Theologie*.⁴ Balthasar continued the longstanding

¹ Bruce McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development 1909-1936* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

² Eberhard Jüngel, "Von der Dialektik zur Analogie: Die Schule Kierkegaards und der Einspruch Petersons", in *Barth-Studien* (Zurich and Cologne: Benziger Verlag, and Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1982).

³ Ingrid Spieckermann, *Gotteserkenntnis: Ein Beitrag zur Grundfrage der neuen Theologie Karl Barths* (Munich: Kaiser Verlag, 1985).

⁴ English translation: Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by John Drury (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1972). The influence of von Balthasar is seen in major studies of Barth's

tradition of interpreting Barth by paying primary attention to his later theology found in the *Church Dogmatics*. This later material was read back into Barth's predominant thought forms found in his earlier theology. This interpretative tradition, however, obscures the abiding function that Barth's initial *Realdialektik* set in place in his break from liberalism, involving not just a key methodology but a critical material function that remained in place in Barth's later dogmatic work.⁵ Balthasar's work placed Barth's development in the spectrum of two breaks: the first in Barth's break with liberalism and the second in his turn from dialectical theology to the *analogia fidei*. Balthasar demonstrated this division first in the *Epistle to the Romans* (1919, dialectical theology) and second in *Fides quaerens intellectum* (1931, analogy of faith).⁶

McCormack, by contrast, sees evidences of the influence of Barth's early thought throughout his later theological work. "[T]he gains made in of *Romans II* are everywhere presupposed throughout the *Church Dogmatics*; ... the continuity in theological perspective between these two great works so greatly outweighs the discontinuity that those who wish to read the dogmatics without the benefit of the lens provided by *Romans II* will understand everything in the wrong light."⁷ McCormack's insistence on continuity stems from his observation that, for Barth, analogy "only arises as a result of a dialectical

theology like those of Hans Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Thought of Karl Barth, 1909 to 1921", PhD. Dissert. (Yale University, 1956) and T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-31* (London: SCM Press, 1962). Frei outlines his view of Barth's two stage development (*ibid.*, 4-10). He claims that Barth's entrance into dialectical theology is a product of his break with liberal relationalism and that from the writing of *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* on Barth united the noetic and ontic spheres of God's grace in Jesus Christ. This was the advance past dialectics to *analogia*. *Ibid.*, 6,7

⁵ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 17-18.

⁶ von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 76.

⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 244-245.

movement in which God takes up the language in which humans seek to bear witness to him....”⁸

The path to Barth’s doctrine of rejection in the *Church Dogmatics* will be established by illustrating the methodological and material approaches he used in his treatment of election and rejection in three major works: the first and second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* and the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Using this genetic approach, what will become apparent is that, while Barth’s doctrine of rejection uses theological material that is somewhat inconsistent, methodologically, the doctrine of rejection in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 is a continuation of the critical and realistic concept of election.⁹ The terms “critical” and “realistic” are important. McCormack defines them this way:

“Critical” here refers to the fact that Barth used Kant’s critical attempt to establish the limits of human knowing in order to “locate” the being of God beyond the reach of human knowing. “Realism,” then, means that the being of God is something complete, whole, and entire in itself, apart from and prior to all human knowledge of it.¹⁰

The fundamental problem with past scholarship on the development of Barth’s doctrine of election is that, even with the benefit of McCormack’s interpretation, it has failed to pay careful attention to the detailed relationship between election and rejection. The result has been that the critical strength of Barth’s move from a theocentric to a Christocentric doctrine of predestination in theologically validating the Reformed

⁸ Bruce McCormack, “The Unheard Message,” *Word & World* (Winter 1994): 64.

⁹ By the term *genetic* the aim is that we will be able to incorporate three crucial advantages in the study of Barth’s doctrine of reprobation because attention will be given to the development of the relationship between how Barth thinks (method) and what he thinks about (material). As illustrated in McCormack’s introduction (*Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 20-23), these three advantages are: 1. the singularity and continuity of the material development of Barth’s theology beginning in 1915; 2. the changes in Barth’s theology are best understood as stemming from conscientious material decisions; 3. the shift in Barth’s doctrine of election to the christocentrism of *Church Dogmatics* II.2 is not simply a matter of plugging in a new object of election but involves nuances that initiate concentrations in a host of new materials, not least that of the rejected, Judas Iscariot.

¹⁰ Bruce McCormack, “Beyond Nonfoundational and Postmodern Readings of Barth,” *Orthodox and Modern* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 159.

doctrine of justification by grace is weakened by exegetical, historical, and anthropological concerns as to Barth's (neo)orthodoxy or his continuity with the Reformed tradition. The genetic approach, by contrast, is intended to defend Barth's move and to give eyes to see and ears to hear that, unlike many theologians, Karl Barth has given Protestantism a grasp of how a transcendent God relates to the world in its sinful, rejected existence. This approach rejects the Protestant proclivity to see sin as individualized in personal adulteries and crimes — which, among other things, “cannot come to terms with the treachery of Judas.”¹¹

1.1 The First Edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*

The origin of Barth's dialectical methodology appeared in his focus on Scripture as the revelation of an objectively real theological content beyond human subjective or religious understanding. Barth began this critical turn in theology when he separated from the Religious Socialist leader Leonhard Ragaz in 1916. Once a devoted and impassioned member of the Social Democrats, Barth now saw two problems in the liberal theological atmosphere around him: religious idealism and individual pietism.¹² The signs of Barth's change appeared on February 6, 1917 in his lecture entitled, “The Strange New World within the Bible.” Eberhard Busch describes the insights within the lecture as follows:

¹¹ William Stringfellow, *A Public and Private Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 29.

¹² Sean Turchin, “Examining the Primary Influence on Karl Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*” (MARS thesis, Liberty University, B.R. Lankin School of Theology, 2008), 42. To say that Barth quit his membership as a Social Democrat is not say that Barth turned his back to socialist ethics at the same time. Rather, as the important work of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt portrays, (even despite its trumped up political reading of Barth) Barth's political socialism is a piece with his theological endeavours even up to and including his dogmatic theology. See F.W. Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1972) and George Hunsinger, ed., *Karl Barth and Radical Politics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976)

...in it he argued that in the Bible we find something quite unexpected: not history, not morality, not religion but virtually a 'new world': 'not the right human thoughts about God but the right divine thoughts about men', so that the Bible takes us out of the 'old atmosphere of man to the open portals of a new world, the world of God.'¹³

The turn that Barth established was one in which there was a fundamental *diastasis* between two objective realities. The dialectic was ordered such that the life of God was primary and the life of humanity was secondary and dependent. This ordering of reality resulted in two dialectics that only Scripture could reveal. The first was the division between "real history" and "so-called history." The second was the organic reordering of these histories by which humanity's fall from the world's origin (*Ursprung*) in God is counteracted by revelation's restoration to that origin.¹⁴ That any of this could be known by the human subject was, for Barth, completely dependent on divine grace.

1.2 The Objective Dialectic of the First Edition

The first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* is Barth's first extended scriptural presentation of dialectical theology, but it also is the place where Barth links dialectical theology to the critical role of the doctrine of predestination. The first edition has attracted very little attention in regard to its use of the doctrine of predestination, but this is not due to its absence from the commentary when compared with the second edition. Rather, the reason lies in two features of the history of the reception of the volume: the first is Barth's own harsh account of its need for revision in the Preface to the second edition, and the second is the wide reception of the second edition as *the* authentic

¹³ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His life from letters and autobiographical texts*, trans. by John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 101.

¹⁴ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 142.

version of the Romans commentary.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is in the first edition that Barth embarks on the doctrinal ordering of predestination that will undergird his dialectical theology up to its Christological revision. From the outset, the order views predestination as the key to understanding how reconciliation is achieved objectively and subjectively by God through revelation. Revelation, in short, is objective reconciliation because it expresses what must be said of the reality of Jesus Christ in the cross and resurrection. The subjectivity of revelation is, however, also something held in the power of the divine revealer, rather than something arising from the inner dynamic of the believer's own religious experience. God's truth is known subjectively because in revelation human reconciliation is made God's concern, so that the will of God in predestination is made effective in the faith of the believer. Because Barth's dialectical theology at this stage conceived the *diastasis* in terms of that which is revealed by divine determination rather than in terms of what is humanly accomplished, the concept of predestination became a central feature of Barth's early criticism of human religious subjectivity. In what follows, accordingly, the connection between Barth's dialectical methodology and the doctrine of predestination will be presented as a key component of the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*.

¹⁵ Bruce McCormack, "Scholastic of a Higher Order" (Ph.D.diss., Princeton, 1989), 115-116. Barth made the rather harsh self-criticism in the Preface to the second edition that "the original has been so completely rewritten that it may be claimed that no stone remains in its old place." ("Preface to the Second Edition," in *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. by Edwyn C. Hoskyns [London: Oxford University Press, 1953], 2) However successful Barth's attempt to distance his first interpretation of Romans from the second, the dialectical approach is not a feature of their separation but one that presents only a more consistent application of the dialectic in the second edition (as will be seen below). Perhaps, it was this very ironic event that caused Barth to enforce an even stronger distance between the first and second editions: his appointment to the chair of professor of Reformed Theology at Göttingen. He remarked that "I owe my invitation to a chair at Göttingen and hence my elevation to 'proper academic theology' not to the famous second edition of *Romans*, but to the first ... one will hardly find the first edition distinguished by a particular Calvinistic content." Busch, *Karl Barth*, 123.

The dialectic of Barth's first commentary is not characterized, as Hans Frei claims, by the "indiscriminant manner in which idealist and Biblical-realist thought forms are thrown together ... (which) make it hard to know just what Barth has in mind in the eschatology which follows from the unique relation of God's unique righteousness to us men."¹⁶ This view led Frei to believe that Barth only in the second edition establishes "the dialectical and complete tension," which Frei understands to constitute the break from the "relationalism" of Barth's liberal period.¹⁷ Rather, the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* establishes the critical stance of what McCormack calls a "supplemental dialectic." The supplemental form of the dialectic is given when two values are imbalanced such that the "the stronger member takes up the weaker into itself with the result that the weaker member is either canceled out altogether or is perhaps taken up into the other in a higher synthesis."¹⁸ What is important in this description of the dialectic as "supplemental" is that the location of God's divine action is not placed in the background of history, but rather it is known immediately in the midst of history. For Barth, the dialectic is real because it is always a possibility that some people will actually move from unbelief to faith by the power of God's revelation.

At this point, Barth is close to his own theological training as a student of Wilhelm Herrmann at Marburg. Herrmann sought to extend the Ritschlian thesis concerning the historicity of Scripture past the limitations of probabilistic notions of religious belief (e.g. the reality of Jesus's human existence is probable because of the historical support found in the gospels). For Herrmann, the ground of belief must instead

¹⁶ Hans Frei, "The Doctrine of Revelation in the Theology of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1956), 149-150.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁸ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 163.

be “the inner life of Christ, which we experience in faith.... It is in Christ’s inner life that we experience the sure and objective revelation of God.”¹⁹ Herrmann implants the idea of the hiddenness of revelation into the heart of religious objectivity by questioning the basis from which believers know religious truth. What resulted from this questioning was as much an affirmation of the limits of human knowledge as it was the assurance that one could have a secure understanding of faith. Barth received the critical edge of what it means to know God (or, more importantly, what it cannot mean) from Herrmann, but he also certainly went beyond Herrmann’s thought. While Herrmann’s account amounted to a fundamental agnosticism in some respects, in which the possibility of the knowledge of God was saved only by a highly experiential religious idealism, Barth passed beyond Herrmann’s position to an account in which God, who is in heaven, wills to be revealed on earth.²⁰

Although Herrmann could only end his critique of Ritschl with the construction of a further form of the neo-Kantian “god” in Christian experience, Barth was able to establish an objective location for the *Realdialektische* (realistic dialectical) theology that he advanced. He did this through the eschatological material found in the relationship between history and faith. This relationship provided his theology with a non-anthropological and objectively real starting point, a theologically transformative innovation which endured throughout his later development.²¹ For Barth, the Kingdom

¹⁹ Sean Turchin, “Examining the Primary Influence on Karl Barth’s *Epistle to the Romans*,” 23-24.

²⁰ Albert A. Jagnow (“Karl Barth and Wilhelm Herrmann: Pupil and Teacher,” *The Journal of Religion*, vol. 16, num. 3, [July, 1936]: 300-316) supports his own argument that Barth and Herrmann are closest in their demand that religion be understood as God’s self-revelation to the creature by quoting Barth’s own admission that “[a]s I see it, I permitted Herrmann to tell me something fundamental which, pursued to its consequences, afterwards forced me to say almost everything else differently, and finally to interpret those fundamental principles themselves altogether differently than he did. But nevertheless, *he* showed it to me.” *Ibid.*, 300.

of God has made all the difference *in* the world. However, the difference is not of the kind that can be implemented or found in any human experience or knowledge of history, whether it be that of the Christian socialist, that of the Pietist, or that of any student of church history *per se*. Instead, while the relationship does occur within history, it is not of history itself because it is revealed in Jesus Christ. Barth explains:

With the breakthrough: Immanuel! God with us! which has taken place in now-time, in the messianic present, in the decisive turn of the aeons *in heaven*, a life process is also inaugurated *on earth*, on the historical-psychological side of our existence.²²

Another description for how this divine reality becomes related to the world is that it happens as a moment or an event.

Despite this revelation being given as a worldly event, Barth was intentionally clear that this primary history (*Urgeschichte*) could never be a possessed reality because it was an active eschatological reality even while it was present under, with, and in the “so-called history” of the fallen world. Unlike all other events, the moment of God’s revelation in the world was only tangential to human time.²³ For Barth, it is not as if the historian can notice the events which lead up to the revelation of Jesus Christ or the affects that stretch out from his incarnation. At this stage in Barth’s thought, the one decisive moment of God’s objectivity to the world occurred in the event of the cross: the time when God made a complete breakthrough of all possible historical circumstances and made the “turn in heaven” the cosmic arrival of the “new world of God.”²⁴ In the first edition of the Romans commentary, the act of God in achieving what can only be a

²¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 163.

²² Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1919, 167. (translated in McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 146)

²³ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 146.

²⁴ Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists: the young Karl Barth's critique of pietism and its response*, trans. by Daniel W. Bloesch (Downers Grove, Ill.:Intervarsity Press, 2004), 53.

divine possibility is not seen as a static reality within the world; rather it is a devastating judgment of the old world. Barth pictures the judgment this way:

Judaism and Christianity and Idealism are not the New in the old world. Church and mission, personal ethics and morality, pacifism and Social Democracy do not represent the Kingdom of God but rather the old kingdom of humankind in new forms. There are no blessed possessors.²⁵

As in second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, that God can be known in the world is not a reality that passively accompanies human effort and accomplishments as if from some distant sideline. The event of God's making himself known in human history can only mean the death of that which is not of God's doing. Thus the objectivity of the knowledge of God is only possible through the hidden breakthroughs in which "so-called" history is transcended by God's real history in revelation. The knowledge of God is such that it could never be possessed by a human being acting in its own strength.

1.3 The Subjective Dialectic in the First Edition

Barth is clear that the objective reality of the Kingdom of God and the world of the creature are separated by a *Realdialektik* that proceeds from the truth of God's own life, but he also takes away the power of historical and metaphysical knowledge by maintaining that God's reality is the true subject of human life. Because of the separation of God and the human, there could never be a situation in which the human knower has constructively evaluated the knowledge of God as an object that exists "out there." The only possibility for creaturely knowledge of God lies in participation in the subjectivity of God's own self, a participation which is given by grace in the revelation of Jesus Christ. To think of revelation as an object results in judgment, but to live by its

²⁵ Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1919, 42 (translated in McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 154).

subjective work is to know it as grace. The dialectical aspect of the subjectivity of the knowledge of God against its apparent objectivity reveals how Barth viewed predestination and its effectiveness for humanity in the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*. Because Barth's interpretation of predestination emphasized the inability of the individual, it stood against the ideology of individualism.

The standard account of Barth's discovery in this phase is this: "World remains world. But God is God."²⁶ While this was a critical tool that Barth used against the intellectual atmosphere of historical and philosophical modernism, in the immediate context it provided a more powerful argument against the individualism that pervaded the soteriology of liberal Christianity. In Barth's mind, immediate individual redemption in this world meant the triumph of bourgeois religious idealism because it allowed the human imagination to believe that an organized segment of human society possessed close proximity to God. Barth saw in this only a chaotic chorus of independent, pietistic voices each calling for their version of holiness. His response to the radical segregation of humanity in individualism was astonishingly frank: "I would rather be in hell with the world church than in heaven with Pietism, be it of a lower or higher order, of an older or more modern observance. In this case Christ is with us in hell."²⁷ He directed this statement against the individualism that saw salvation only as a means to inner, moral reform. This individualism protected the idea of the independent "self" from the threats of "organic" evil, such as greed and lust, that lurked in the fallen world. Yet, for Barth, the real theological situation was the reverse of what individualistic pietism believed. The believer's relation to the Kingdom of God, not to worldliness, comes from an organic

²⁶ Karl Barth, "Kriegszeit und Gotterreich", lecture delivered at Basle, 15 Nov. 1915 (translated in McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 129).

²⁷ Barth, *Römerbrief I*, 269-270 (translated in Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 43).

growth. In the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, this means that “our fellowship does not present itself as an *aggregate*, a pile of sand; but rather as an *organism*, whose individual parts *are* completed in it.”²⁸ While individual salvation appears to have to do with a progress toward the realization of the Kingdom of God through such matters as morality and purity, in Barth’s criticism it actually “shares in the nature of this dark world by definition because as such this is a falling away from God, it is being distant from God and being unredeemed.”²⁹ In other words, so far as the religious works of an individual coordinate with human intentions, they can only witness to what is *not* given by grace.

1.4 Dialectical Predestination in the First Edition

Although reflection on predestination would be enlarged in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth’s concept of dialectical theology in the first edition established a doctrine of predestination which required a redefinition of reprobation.³⁰ This redefinition is clarified in G.C. Berkouwer’s work *The Triumph of Grace*, one of the earliest proponents of the continuity of Barth’s theology at this point. Berkouwer noticed the place that the objective and subjective dialectic of divine grace had in Barth’s theology, and he spoke of it this way:

The new world of God – the triumph of the Kingdom of God’s grace – which in the first edition of the *Römerbrief* came so prominently to the fore – continues via warning and continuing reflection to dominate in the second, albeit in different form, and in Barth’s further thought this has remained and is increasingly being accentuated as the dominant motif in all his theology.³¹

²⁸ Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1919, 476. (translated in McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 153)

²⁹ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietist*, 43.

³⁰ Mathias Gockel, “One Word and All is Saved: Schleiermacher and Barth on Election,” (Ph.D. diss. Princeton University, 2002), 131.

³¹ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by Harry H. Boer (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), 43. McCormack had a positive view of the

Berkouwer notes that, while Barth's particular direction in dialectical theology separated him from former colleagues such as Emil Brunner and Rudolf Bultmann, this was not due to a reorientation of Barth's doctrine away from the "crisis" of divine grace. Rather, what occurred was a heightening of "sole fide-sola gratia in opposition to every attempt to view justification *analytically* as a conclusion which God, as it were, draws from what – in sanctification – is already present in the believer."³² The direction that is initiated in the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* is a realistic way of knowing humanity, not in the form of the redeemed individual, but in the form of the humanity which is related to God precisely out of the profound godlessness of the world. As such, the relationship Barth depicts is one in which "the human individual stands anew under the "crisis" of the judgment of God with the question of her election (or reprobation) hanging in the balance."³³

In the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth ordered divine subjectivity against human subjectivity. The objective *diastasis* of God's reality against human history meant the dependence of human reality upon the primal relationship (*Ursprung*) of human existence with God. Salvation meant the death of all human idealism in religion. In other words, contrary to Feuerbach's constructivist epistemology, human knowledge of God could not be posited as a projection, or indeed, as any human possession resulting from a purely human viewpoint. Rather, what became central for Barth was the idea that, based upon God's own breakthrough into human godlessness, the

contribution of Berkouwer in the fact that he "forms the exception to the rule in emphasizing elements of continuity over those of discontinuity." (McCormack, "Scholastic of a Higher Order," 117)

³² Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 47.

³³ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 156-157.

believer is one who “is made a participant in God’s knowledge of Himself.”³⁴ The human must be a subject to God in order to be saved from the chaos of individualism, rather than practicing the sin of Adam in objectifying the Creator. That is, a person can only be saved by knowing himself or herself as the one who is raised to life by becoming the subject of God’s reality in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The order of this knowledge does not occur as an endeavour of human consciousness, as if the godless could discover God. Rather, it arises from the unique revelation of Jesus Christ, which enters history from beyond history and is logically prior to any and all human choosing.

Predestination does not stand as the determination of human objective knowledge. Barth “wanted to place faith beyond the reach of psychological investigation. To do so was to safeguard his realistic starting-point in the Self-positing of God who objectively places humankind in relation to Himself.”³⁵ Instead, the explosive “bomb” that dropped on the playground of the theologians was one that redefined what it meant to be godless, to be those blinded to their profession of individual subjectivity. Here Barth presents a cutting, dark irony to the claims of religious objectivity. Those who claimed objective separation from the world and the flesh because of their godliness were actually those cursed by the reality of the Fall, the unrecoverable separation from God “in which thinking is centred in the constructive activity of the human knower, and people and things are regarded as simply objects to be known.”³⁶

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

2.1 The Second Edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*

Previously, we took note of the Preface in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* in which Barth attempts to place the first edition as a theological work that has now been thoroughly corrected.³⁷ While we cannot doubt whatever intentions there were for this displacement in Barth's thought, it is not necessary to see the first edition as simply eclipsed by the second edition in attempting to understand the genetic development of Barth's doctrine of predestination. Even von Balthasar, in evaluating Barth's dialectical theology, recognized that "looking back, we see that the first edition announced the same theme that was hammered home in the second, even though the conceptual framework was different."³⁸ However much Balthasar was aware of the thematic unity of Barth's "dialectical period," the construction of Barth's development as having its meaning at the end point (second edition, *Epistle to the Romans*) is methodologically suspect. In attempting to justify his own construal of Barth's turn from dialectical to analogical theology, Balthasar pictured Barth's development in terms of movements through theological limitations such that "pushing dialectics to its limits, the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* proves that dialectics, presumably the best method, is actually inferior to dogmatics and critical analysis."³⁹ If Barth's theology is evaluated in reverse from end to beginning, it may indeed appear that he had segregated phases of development. However, Barth's development is much more nuanced by the accumulation of successful changes and the delight of critical theology when it is viewed genetically as it worked its way through problems and possibilities.

³⁷ See n. 15.

³⁸ von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth*, 48.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

The second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* contains a critical but continuing relation to the same theological problem of the first edition. McCormack explains the problem as follows:

... how can God make Himself known to human beings without ceasing – at any point in the process of Self-communication – to be the *Subject* of revelation? That the knowledge of God given in revelation was a problem at all was, in Barth's view, because of two factors: the limits of human knowing on the one side, and divine election on the other ... God is only known by human beings living in history where and when He chooses to be known; where and when the resistance of sinful human beings against the knowledge of God is overcome by a sovereign and gracious act of God.⁴⁰

McCormack's statement is set against what Balthasar incorrectly perceived as driving the second edition. Balthasar claimed "that *Romans* was not meant to be a philosophy dressed out as theology, but a theology dressed out as philosophy." Unfortunately, Balthasar's attention to philosophy does not take account of Barth's dialectical improvement through the development of a more consistent eschatology in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*.⁴¹ This occurs because in both commentaries Balthasar has missed what McCormack calls "the fundamental problem," which is more a turning of neo-Kantian philosophy on its head by a divine inversion of the subject-object spilt than it is a simple use of its terminology. On one hand, Balthasar draws attention to Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* as an isolated demonstration of philosophical acumen inspired by Scripture. On the other hand, McCormack is able to connect Barth's dialectical method and the continuing material interest he had in the quintessential Pauline text, Romans. McCormack does this, not by denying that Barth uses the philosophical terminology of the neo-Kantians or of Kierkegaard, but by showing that

⁴⁰ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 207-208.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

Barth finds in Romans the constant refrain that God's eschatological arrival in the world first means universal judgment and not individual salvation.

2.2 The Dialectic of Predestination

The principal dialectic at work in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* is the *Krisis* of the veiling and unveiling of God as it is found in Romans 1:16-17.⁴² This crisis is inaugurated by the power of the gospel revealing in Christ that "God is God and man is man." The central problem is found in the self-revelation of God to the creature. How does the unintuitable become intuitable? This is the "theme" of Romans for Barth and is defined by him in this fundamental negation:

He (God) affirms Himself by denying us as we are and the world as it is. In Christ God offers Himself to be known as God beyond our trespass, beyond time and things and men; to be known as the Redeemer of the prisoners, and consequently, as the meaning of all that is – in fact, as the Creator. He acknowledges Himself to be our God by creating and maintaining the distance by which we are separated from Him; He displays His mercy by inaugurating His *Krisis* and bringing us under judgment ... He justifies us by justifying Himself.⁴³

This transcendence of God beyond human life certainly means the death of individual righteousness, as in the first edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, but it also now means that all people are in solidarity as sinners. In the first edition, the divine possibility of grace was effective as an organic function in the life of believers, but now Barth is adamant, as Eberhard Busch says, that "God must not only say no to 'something' in them but to each of them as individuals, not only to the worst possibilities but to *all* of them,

⁴² Romans 1:16-7, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The one who is righteous will live by faith.'" All Biblical references, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the *New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1993).

⁴³ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 40-41.

even the best.”⁴⁴ Barth depicted election now through a more complete *diastasis* between that which is of heaven and that which is of the earth. Katherine Sonderegger summarizes the crisis this way: “*Romans* is quite clear. To speak of dialectics in the language of *Romans* is to speak of election. The creature does not possess election, does not carry a ‘potency’ that is realized or ‘perfected’ in grace. Rather, the creature stands *within* election; we are ‘inside and not outside the knowledge of God’ ...”⁴⁵

The crisis of the knowledge of God does not break open in the “natural” experience of human death or in the “neutral” fallibility of humanity, but it occurs inside revelation. As Barth could repeat again and again, the problem of the knowledge of God is like that recorded in 2 Corinthians 5:16: “we know Jesus no longer after the flesh.”⁴⁶ In other words, the very nature of human sinfulness is not caused by human error in judgment, but rather it is a universal feature of what it means that the divine incognito has been veiled by his appearance in history. The texture of Luther’s *theologia crucis* is found here, except in the form of a criticism of Christian self-understanding. The history of Jesus’s death on the cross is the judgment of God against all who look for salvation by their own hands. We could even say that those who seek to justify themselves would put Jesus on the cross just to have an object for their salvation. McCormack makes a fine statement of this problem:

The crisis of which Barth speaks is the crisis in which we recognize ourselves as sinners and understand for the first time that we do not know God, that what we have thought of as God (whether as present or absent) is the No-God of this world ... Christ’s death is the *Erkenntnisprinzip* (the criterion of knowledge) of our dying, not vice versa.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Busch, *Karl Barth and the Pietists*, 83.

⁴⁵ Katherine Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was born a Jew: Karl Barth’s Doctrine of Israel* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 260.

This is also why Barth levels the field when he comments on Paul's statement, "For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:22-3). Here he makes the separation between God and the world categorical:

The paradox must be maintained absolutely, in order that the scandal may not be disclosed in its true nature as 'a problem which is itself essentially a riddle, and which sets a question-mark against every human achievement in history' (Overbeck). Nothing must be allowed to disturb this paradox; nothing must be retained of that illusion which permits a supposed religious or moral or intellectual experience to remove the only sure ground of salvation, which is the mercy of God.⁴⁸

2.3 Predestination as the Division of History

Barth studied extensively the work of Franz Overbeck, a close friend of Friedrich Nietzsche. This study provided him a new objective division of history. He now united the concepts of history and being together in the term *Urgeschichte* which meant the unhistorical, unknowable origin of the world, a reality that lay behind even the possibility for history or historical thought.⁴⁹ The sign of this new form of the separation of heaven and earth was first seen in Barth's Aarau student lectures of 1920.⁵⁰ The new division was inspired from his reading of Romans. When speaking about his own wonder over the reality of Scripture, for which "our curiosity is superfluous," Barth says: "To me personally it came first with Paul: this man evidently sees and hears something which is above everything, and which is absolutely beyond the range of my observation and the measure of my thought..."⁵¹ It is this kind of "beyond" that Barth has in mind when he speaks of a crisis that has come upon humanity, not the disorder of an unexpected

⁴⁸ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 100.

⁴⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 228-229.

⁵⁰ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 114.

⁵¹ Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, vol. 1, trans. by Douglas Horton (Chicago: Pilgrims Press, 1928), 62.

incarnation by some superior and unknown God who existed alongside the world but rather by one who remains unintuitable from *within* history while becoming intuitable in that which is not *of* history. The knowledge of God is only an eschatological possibility. The *Urgeschichte* is no one less than Jesus Christ himself, known in his resurrection in history by “reckoning with what is unknown and unobservable in Jesus, the recognition of Him as Paradox (Kierkegaard), as Victor (Blumhardt), as Primal History (Overbeck).”⁵²

In the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, the place at which the objective division of humankind is begun is entirely within the realm of the duality of faith and unbelief in the resurrection of Christ, where eschatological realities are given or not given. As normative as this may sound to Reformed theology, Barth’s meaning is quite far from the normal perception of faith and unbelief as they exist in individual decisions or in pre-temporal eternal destinies. The rift between those who know God as God and those who only know the “no-God” is only realistically understood in the universal judgment against humankind which is known in the revelation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is the beginning and the goal of Barth’s emphasis on justification by grace because it proceeds exclusively from God’s act toward the creature.

2.4 Predestination as the Reality of the Resurrection

Barth views predestination as a theocentric reality. When Barth reads Romans, he finds that “[t]he Gospel of the Resurrection is the – power of God, His *virtus*, the disclosing and apprehending of His meaning, His effective preeminence over all gods.”⁵³

⁵² Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 29-30.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 35.

The resurrection is qualified with this kind of power because it issues a universal “no” to all human endeavour. It is the “impossible possibility” against which there is only the possibility of human judgment. A human may judge, but the judgment cannot prove its worth when evaluating the resurrection of Christ. Against what God has done in the resurrection, human judgment is void and powerless. Barth continues:

The Resurrection, which is the place of exit, also bars us in, for it is both barrier and exit. Nevertheless, the ‘No’ which we encounter is the ‘No’ – of God.... Precisely because the ‘No’ of God is all-embracing it is also His ‘Yes.’ We have therefore, in the power of God a look-out, a door, a hope; and even in this world we have a possibility of following the narrow path and of taking each simple step with a ‘despair which has its own consolation.’ (Luther)⁵⁴

In the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth was able to frame his dialectical methodology in terms of the cross and resurrection, that which is God’s confrontation with and triumph over sin. Barth had set the whole context of predestination in Romans 9-11, not within the problem of religious conversion by faith, but within the reality of God’s freedom in grace. In other words, human knowledge became a problem not only from the side of sinfully objectifying grace but also from being confronted with the revelation that “the predicate, *Deus revelatus*, has as its subject *Deus absconditus*.”⁵⁵ It is godless humankind that is addressed in the revelation which is veiled and unveiled by God in Jesus Christ. This means that “the christocentric understanding of God’s self-revelation underscores that faith in Jesus Christ is a specifically defined eschatological event in which the humanly impossible is achieved by God.”⁵⁶

The resurrection of Jesus Christ signals the particular achievement of justification by God; it is the justification of God’s election of the individual, a concern that relocates

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 422.

⁵⁶ Matthias Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election: A Systematic-Theological Comparison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 113-114.

human faith and knowledge under the mercy of God. The resurrection of Jesus is not only the annihilation of the possibility of “objectivity” (in Barth’s pejorative sense of the term), but it is also, in the very judgment of all humanity that it presupposes and proclaims, precisely the point of God’s blessing of humanity. In the second edition under his comments on Romans 11:32, Barth speaks of the power of God’s mercy in this way:

In its own way, it is the criterion by which every one who reads or hears the Epistle is himself judged; for by it the final meaning of ‘Double Predestination’ seeks to make itself known.... Here it is that we encounter the hidden, unknown, incomprehensible God, to whom nothing is impossible, the Lord, who is as such our Father in Jesus Christ.... Here is the object of faith, which may never be depressed to an ‘object.’ Here is the meaning of Christianity, which defies analysis.⁵⁷

The predestination of individuals in history does not have its final effect in the recognizable decisions of humans. It is not as though God’s action towards humankind occurs in the way of a static, protological determination of the elected and rejected.⁵⁸ Rather, Barth resoundingly declares that divine predestination is founded on God’s unconditioned mercy and God’s will to save godless and fallen humans from their rejection.

2.5 The Changes to Predestination in the Second Edition

There are two advancements to the traditional Reformed doctrine of predestination in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans*. The first is that the appearance of objectivity in the event of predestination has been interpreted around the self-revelation of Jesus Christ as the objective action of God’s grace towards humans. Individual faith is not the historical effect that results from a pre-temporal cause which

⁵⁷ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 421.

⁵⁸ Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election*, 113.

determines the individual effectiveness of revelation. There is indeed a relation between human faith and divine willing, but it is not to be understood in terms of cause and effect as in Augustinian predestination, but rather, in terms of the discontinuous and yet divinely given event of revelation, which is at once the veiling and unveiling of God in time.⁵⁹

The second aspect that changes the Reformed understanding of predestination is the way that Barth binds grace to the will of God in such a way that humanity is universally excluded because of its captivity in objectivity. Human faith is not the basis for thinking about God's foreordaining purpose for humans; rather the work of God's predestining grace is known only when it is hidden from the analytical eyes of humanity. Barth intends to disrupt the assumptions of what it means to be an "Esau" or a "Jacob," as if individuals can identify themselves by either label. In discussing the parable of the potter in Romans 9:21, Barth sets out the universality of predestination. He writes:

Men are related to God as a visible and concrete thing is related to what is invisible and immaterial, as existence is related to non-existence. Whenever it is possible for us to point to the existence of human independence or freedom, we are in fact, simply deferring the problem of primal origin, of the right and freedom of God, the problem of beginning and end, creation and redemption.... God must be apprehended as the God of Jacob and of Esau; otherwise we shall not understand that, whilst He is, in every moment of time, the God of Esau, He is in eternity the God of Jacob.⁶⁰

Because predestination is a concept held within the self-revelation of God, it cannot be a pre-temporal determination of two human destinies. There is only one single and united origin, actor, and will for human redemption, Jesus Christ who is veiled in the cross to sight and unveiled in the resurrection to faith. However, in the world of humankind there

⁵⁹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 269.

⁶⁰ Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 357.

occurs the activity of redemption, where the old world of sin and darkness is turned over into the world that is yet to come. As this turn takes place, it is actually a continual renewal of life raised from death, a victory of grace over judgment, a possibility in time held together by mercy that is eternal. Barth has advanced the Reformed conception of the doctrine of predestination in the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* by clearing room for the elected and the rejected in the righteousness of God by emphasizing the universality of the godlessness of humanity.

3.1 The *Göttingen Dogmatics*

From 1921 to 1924, Karl Barth was Honorary Professor of Reformed Theology at the University of Göttingen.⁶¹ Barth composed lectures for an introductory course in dogmatics, which would later be collectively known as the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, during the final year of his position before being leaving to teach at the University of Münster.⁶² These lectures will be an important part of our genetic view of Barth's doctrine of predestination, even though they have rarely been used to shed light on Barth's

⁶¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 291.

⁶² The proposed and then actual title of the lectures that Barth gave in these three semesters indicates the important role and place that Barth considered these dogmatics ought to have in the university. Hannelotte Reiffen captures the indefatigable spirit of Barth when he relates the story of how the lectures finally arrived at their name "*Unterricht in der christlichen Religion*." Barth was the only Reformed professor (and only 'honorary' at that) in the Lutheran institution. Barth was opposed to the faculty's demand that he lecture on *Reformed* dogmatics. He saw this title as giving up so much of the ecumenical character that Reformed theology incorporated. Barth desired something like the title of his later work *Christliche Dogmatik*, but the matter went to the Minister of Culture in Berlin and was resolved by a compromise in a title that bears close affinity with John Calvin's magisterial *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. But in a last act of defiance, Barth opened the first session to his students under the title "Prolegomena to Dogmatics." (Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion, Volume One*, trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley, ed. Hannelotte Reiffen, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), x,xi.

theological development before their publication.⁶³ The *Göttingen Dogmatics*, however, are an instructive source for the wider systematization of Barth's dialectical theology, and in particular, they demonstrate his teleological organization of the doctrine of predestination. The material concept of predestination that Barth used in these lectures involved a theology of God's ongoing personal determination to elect humans out of their rejected condition.

Two issues stand out as important to the theological formulation of predestination in this period; the first is methodological and the second material. First, we take notice that Barth has begun now to speak in a systematic manner, which is consistent with the sort of theological reflection that was demanded of him as a professor of Reformed theology. While in the *Epistle to the Romans*, predestination arose in the context of revelation in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, now it arises after the ordered consideration of the doctrine of God under three headings: its knowability (§15), essence (§ 16), and attributes (§ 17). In this systematic reflection, Barth is moving in the direction of *Church Dogmatics* II.2 by picturing a theological symmetry between the doctrine of God and divine predestination.

3.2 Systematic Consistency in the Methodology of Predestination

The systematic evaluation of the connection between the doctrine of God and predestination was provided to Barth by the serious attention he paid to the methodology of Reformed scholasticism. Because of his dire need to formulate an introductory course in Reformed theology, Barth was driven to explain his doctrine of predestination at

⁶³ The lectures were long passed over until they were published in German and English in 1985 and 1991, respectively. Karl Barth, '*Unterricht in der christliche Religion*', vol. 1. ed. Hannelotte Reiffen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1985); Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Religion*.

Göttingen with greater methodological consistency. Confronted with the task of lecturing through his own dogmatic tradition, Barth found himself at Göttingen “alone in the open without a teacher.”⁶⁴ He was rescued by scholastic post-Reformation theology (ca. 1640 - ca.1725), which he apprehended mainly through Heinrich Heppe’s *Reformed Dogmatics*. In Heppe’s work, Barth discovered “that Protestant dogmatics was once a careful, orderly business, and I [Barth] conceived the hope that it might perhaps become so again, if it could reacquire its obviously wandered nerves and return to a strict, Churchly and scientific outlook.”⁶⁵ There are two features that play a more important role in Barth’s theology at this stage: on the one hand, the approach was explicitly wedded to an ecclesial tradition, and on the other, it was ordered according to the expectations of formal theological reflection. The *Epistle to the Romans*, which had first been written amidst the crisis of World War I by Karl Barth the pastor, had emphasized the eschatological crisis of knowing the eternal God in the *hic et nunc*. Now, however, Barth had developed a stronger regard for ecclesial theology and its “scientific” form (as understood in the Germanic tradition) in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*.⁶⁶ Not only was Heppe’s work a primary source for the course but it also shaped the order of the theological *loci* found in Barth’s treatment of election, with the important exception that Barth abandons the traditional method of treating “the decrees of God” before handling predestination.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Karl Barth, “Foreword,” in *Reformed Dogmatics: Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. by Ernst Bizer trans. by G.T. Thomson (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, vi.

⁶⁶ We note the past lectures that Barth had conducted at Göttingen and their ecclesial character: 1921-22, Heidelberg Catechism; summer 1922, the theology of John Calvin; 1922-23, the theology of Zwingli; summer of 1923, the theology of the Reformed confessions. (Eberhard Busch, preface to *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, by Karl Barth, trans. and annot. by Darrell L. and Judith J. Guder (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), viii.

⁶⁷ McCormack, “Scholastic of a Higher Order,” 571-572.

At Göttingen, Barth had yet to place the will of God in Jesus Christ at the centre of what was still a theocentric doctrine of predestination, a fundamental change that would not appear until *Church Dogmatics* II.2.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Barth opposed Reformed orthodoxy's (and especially Johann Heidegger's) conception of "fixed groups." He proclaims his criticism in a manner reminiscent of Luther's famous defense at the Diet of Worms, 'This is the rent in the cloak of my orthodoxy for which undoubtedly I would at least have been beaten with rods in old-time Geneva. Yet I can do no other. I regard this "certain people," this idea of two separated groups, as a secular error from which the whole doctrine, difficult enough in itself, suffers needlessly and irrelevantly.'⁶⁹ Barth found in Reformed orthodoxy that God's freedom was restricted in being gracious only to the elect. Orthodoxy established two eternal destinies for humans, but Barth strongly rejected this possibility, not simply because it made human history mere fate, but because it made God the prisoner of his own seemingly arbitrary decision.

Barth attempted to correct the underlying idea of the static eternal decree that lay at the heart of the concept of the two separated groups by defining election in terms of actualism, that is, in terms of God's own power to reveal himself out of concealment in human unbelief. Actualism is here defined according to the perceptive words of George Hunsinger: "Actualism emphasizes the sovereign activity of God in patterns of love and freedom ... this means that we human beings have no ahistorical relationship to God, and that we also have no capacity in and of ourselves to enter into fellowship with God"⁷⁰ Barth never turned from teaching actual double predestination, as if God was in the same,

⁶⁸ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 372.

⁶⁹ Karl Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 453.

⁷⁰ George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: the shape of his theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 30-31.

symmetrical manner active in rejecting and electing. By firmly denying the eternal decree of predestination in favour of an “actualistic” one, he had only become more consistent in his systematic treatment of predestination. Yet, Barth’s innovations at this time were not critical enough, in that he did not allow the will of God in election to consistently match the content of the doctrine. Barth’s reflections on the doctrine were still focused mainly on the question of how election manifests itself in the possibility of human belief. He did not, in short, yet perceive the ontological importance of the triune decree of predestination, which in his later treatment becomes the event of the eternal covenant of God which is realized in Jesus Christ.

3.3 The Will of God as the Material Content of Predestination

The second achievement at Göttingen was the link established between the primary subject matter of predestination and the doctrine of God. The framework of predestination was actualistic and theocentric, but Barth was lead further by these two features to reorder predestination according to the subject of election, the veiling and unveiling of God. The dogmatics that emerges reflects the particular claim that it is God himself who wills to overcome the divine rejection by grace in election. Barth speaks of predestination in this way, maintaining that, “election and rejection are in no sense symmetrical. They do not stand alongside one another as equally true and real.”⁷¹ Rejection and election are not balanced by the achievement of God’s wrath and the fulfillment of grace, as if humans are the direct objects of God’s disclosure. Double predestination, rather, reveals that which is unique to God himself, the teleology of God’s

⁷¹ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 460.

will. Barth explains in terms that are drawn in the first instance from Paul's Epistle to the Romans:

God has shut up all in disobedience in order to have mercy on all (Rom. 11:32), not vice versa. God wants to go forward with us, not backward. Hence I would not say that election and rejection are in a relation of tension, nor that they are polar opposites or opposing centers.... Thus the word "twofold" in the concept of twofold predestination has to be understood from a divine perspective, like all else in dogmatics. The divine to which we orient ourselves in it is the divine Word, without which we could do no dogmatics at all.⁷²

The material content of Barth's doctrine is the dialectical unity of the decree of predestination, according to which even in rejection God's will is done. His understanding of this idea is consistent with the principle of the veiling and unveiling of revelation. As McCormack puts it, what we have here "is a description only of what happens in revelation: the believer hears the Yes of God spoken to her in the No which a revelation *in concealment* constitutes for her... as though one could maintain with certainty that election is the end of all the ways of God."⁷³

The refrain of Barth's theology at Göttingen is one that was heard even as early as the second edition of the *Epistle to the Romans* — election does not have to do with a possibility within the Christian individual. Election is determined by the decision of God. For Barth, "twofold predestination" is not the response of human subjects to what is openly known in the gospel. Rather, the very fact of rejection, the existence of those who do not know God, means that the activity of predestination is the sovereign movement of the hidden God, who is known only to himself. It cannot be that unbelief is a product of intellectual limitation or even human fallibility, since it was never within

⁷² *Ibid.*, 461.

⁷³ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 373. (italics original)

human ability to know God in the first place.⁷⁴ It is necessarily the veiled God who comes to the human in election, solely by virtue of his own choice to do so. Barth claims that “God’s revelation always takes place in concealment. It is in the concealment of a hard, puzzling, by no means *obvious objectivity* that God’s Word always meets us first....”⁷⁵ He thus opposes the way the doctrine was traditionally understood. Revelation does not grant the elect a realization of the impressive objectivity of God, through the doctrine of the decrees, for instance, as if in their faith believers now possessed the knowledge of God. Instead, it is a seemingly more unimpressive event that is important, which signifies that the core meaning of election has to do strictly with the knowledge of God as the hidden one, the one who condemns us for our theological “knowledge” and condemns us within it. The knowledge of election is, then, no longer the achievement of theological insight, but is finally the recognition that we have none. The *Göttingen Dogmatics* thus throws new light on the twofold possibilities of predestination by speaking of a God who is revealed in hiddenness. The elect cannot have a knowledge of God that is apart from the Holy Spirit again and again revealing it to them, and the rejected can never know the divine judgment against them *unless they also know it by grace as well.*⁷⁶ In other words the basis of unbelief is not humanly known or understood; it is known only as the will of God and only as such is rejection known as an act of God.

In this seemingly radical construal of the content of the doctrine of predestination, we see that, in fact, Barth agrees with the asymmetry of predestination established in the

⁷⁴ Gockel, “One Word and All is Saved,” 172.

⁷⁵ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 446. (italics added)

⁷⁶ Gockel, “One Word and All is Saved,” 189.

Canons of Dordt.⁷⁷ There are not two groups who know their eternal place in God's will as either rejected or elected.⁷⁸ If this were so, grace would not be grace and judgment would not be judgment because they would be the expressions of human possibilities. The knowledge of God's will is only this way: "Something special then happens to us, for the darkness in which we find ourselves becomes the judgment of God, but we also participate therewith in the grace of God and the hope of eternal salvation."⁷⁹ Barth means here that it is only the elected who know themselves in grace to have been also the rejected. Still, there is something restive in Barth's approach, and that will evidence itself in his future treatments of the theme. On the one hand, it is important to affirm that Barth has strengthened and made consistent the argument that election is theocentric, but on the other hand, this led him in a way that noticeably limits and weakens the conception of election "in Christ." The latter in particular will prove to be crucial to Barth's subsequent development of the theme in *Church Dogmatics*.

In the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, for its part, Barth defines the revelatory power of predestination this way: "In this teleology of God that is revealed in Christ (we must

⁷⁷ While at Göttingen, Barth expressed approval of the *Canons of Dordt*. In the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth mentions his agreement by affirming its definition of election as a "complete and excellent definition (except for the one point)." *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 459. By the exception, he is referring to his refusal of Johann Heidegger's *numerus clausus* (closed/limited number) of the elect. In the next paragraph, Barth makes clear the nature of the asymmetry in Dordt's predestination. He says, "Regarding this (God's purpose for the elect) we must say especially that we have to be clear that election and rejection are in no sense symmetrical. They do not stand alongside one another as equally true and real. None of the great champions of predestination thought this, though reprobation is also God's will. Predestination means neither fixed will of election and rejection nor vacillation between the two. Its point and goal are always election, not rejection, even in rejection." (*ibid.*, 460.) In Barth's *Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, he comments on the synod as being "as a whole, nothing other than the comprehensive, level-headed, judicious, thorough expression of what had to be said about the majesty of God..." Karl Barth, *The Theology of the Reformed Confessions*, 215.

⁷⁸ From the *Canons of Dordt*, we see this inequality of the elected and rejected in the presence of assurance of election (First Point, Article 12,13). There is no 'assurance of rejection.' Rather, there is either a temporary insecurity of faith or an abandoned mindset that does not reflect on a response to God's grace (First Point, Article 16). *Canons of Dort* (Grand Rapids: CRC Publications, 1988), 125-126.

⁷⁹ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 440.

stress all three words) there is the source of our certainty of election and salvation.”⁸⁰ To be sure then, we cannot say that election “in Christ” is not present in Barth’s *Göttingen Dogmatics*, yet it is true only in a particular sense as to its functional role in revelation. Predestination is ordered by a double decree. Barth follows Reformed orthodoxy in maintaining that Christ is the head of elect humanity, and therefore the incarnation bears the unequivocal meaning that “God sent his Son into the world, not to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:17) Barth agrees with the *Canons of Dordt* when he says that “in the definition of Dort ... the heavy emphasis hits us at once: This [election] is of the most free good pleasure of his will, in sheer grace. Heidegger declares similarly that God alone is the cause of election. This is obviously the core of the whole doctrine....”⁸¹ In other words, the material that Barth saw at the centre of election was the ordered will of divine grace, sovereignly determined in revelation as being for the elect and not for the rejected.⁸² The actualism of election is that it achieves reconciliation in the event of revelation by faith. It is, however, controlled from first to last by its divine object Jesus Christ, who is at once the *Deus absconditus* and the *Deus revelatus*.

3.4 The Material Limits of Rejection at Göttingen

In the doctrine of election in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth rightly secured election against speculation over the status of the decree of predestination by uniting both election and reprobation under the revelation of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, this approach

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 471.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 461

⁸² Suzanne McDonald, "Barth's 'Other' Doctrine of Election in the *Church Dogmatics*," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 9, 2 (2007): 144.

forced the doctrine of rejection beyond the limits of its material subject by its emphasis on revelation. At this point, Barth did not see that the subject matter of election could be treated ontologically, not by way of metaphysical speculation but concretely and theologically in connection with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Though present, in short, the Christological content latent in Barth's treatment is not developed thoroughly. Suzanne McDonald, however, rightly sees an "other" doctrine of predestination anticipated here in Barth. McDonald explains that "in Christ" here means "it is true that both revelation and reconciliation are identical with the person of Christ, in the sense that Christ is God in self-revelation, and the reconciliation in which we are given to share is completely achieved in this person."⁸³

Another weakness of Barth's doctrine of predestination in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* is how it failed to secure any kind of assurance for the elect beyond that of the orthodox account (which in itself is notoriously prone to creating anxiety among many of those who most believe it). Knowledge of election in Christ is seemingly given to a person by the power of the Holy Spirit, in a special action that reveals that person's relationship to Christ. It is imparted to a person not from all eternity, obviously, but from the presence of the eternal within time. Thus election, as regards God's eternal freedom, is not a decided or stable determination, no matter how divinely controlled it might be. Rather, Barth maintains explicitly that "he who now receives us could with the same power reject us, hardening us instead of awakening us to faith and obedience; that the whole certainty and assurance of our acceptance rests in his freedom; that we are in his hands whether for grace or its opposite."⁸⁴ As in Calvin's *speculum electionis*, Barth

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁸⁴ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 452.

views revelation as happening under the covenant head, Jesus Christ. Those who are elect are given reconciliation exclusively by faith. In itself, however, the doctrine of election has little to say about the rejected who are excluded from the blessings of the covenant of grace.

At Göttingen, Barth reordered the teleology of the doctrine of predestination around the united will of God to reject all in order to elect some. At the same time, Barth kept himself from answering the fundamental problem of this theocentric concept, that is, what the will of God is for the rejected. The centre of the problem was that the content of the doctrine of predestination was still the rejected human being left to the divine possibility of election. How could predestination ever be understood if its subject was unknowingly determined in the moment and, perhaps, ultimately indifferent to what the will of God might be? This is the limitation of Barth's doctrine of predestination; it was still shrouded in the question of what positive purpose rejection carried.

This is not to say that there was no important novelty to Barth's doctrine at this stage. The positive benefit he provided is his attention to the will of God in the possibility of the temporal reversal of election, an idea that diverged significantly from the Reformed scholastics. Just as faith is a matter of God's continued giving, Barth sees reprobation too as a subject of the divine possibility of veiling. Yet, Barth stopped here and did not reject the traditional understanding of the asymmetry of election. Although the knowledge of election and rejection are actively given by God, they are opposing objects and, therefore, live respectively the life of faith or unbelief. Barth offers, in fact, what appears to be a traditional definition of rejection:

We may be left to our own devices. This is our rejection by God. The older Reformed dogmatists rightly described this as fundamentally a negative act.

They called it preterition. God as the absolute Lord, as the *autokratōr*, passes us by. He does not give us that which does not belong to us, to which we have no right or claim, for the giving or nongiving of which he owes us no account, which we cannot expect from him and do not in fact expect, namely, seeing and hearing him, knowing him, faith in his Word and obedience to it.⁸⁵

Nothing in this definition would appear to cause alarm, except for the fact that Barth has destabilized the definition by enfolding rejection into the action of the universal, unconditional event of God's grace. After all, the only possibility of defining what it is to be rejected is to speak of it as a reality that is currently unknown and, therefore, not believed by the object of rejection — it is given despite human merit.

The consistent application of the dialectic of the veiling and unveiling of revelation led Barth to fundamental criticism of the Reformed doctrine, and to the conclusion that the asymmetry of double predestination does not require the will of God to be twofold. The asymmetry of predestination in the Reformed tradition is qualified by the reprobate who are excluded or passed over by grace. The passive exclusion of the reprobate means that, unlike the elect, revelation was never intended by God to be for them; the gospel of Jesus Christ was simply a non-factor in their life of unbelief. But, Barth finds this to be a grand irony. The cause for it is that Barth sees the logic pointing the opposite way; rejection is really just the "other" possibility in response to revelation. His reordering comes to full display: rejection is the will of God because it means that God is concretely hidden in his appearance which means that revelation comes out of hiddenness, or out of its "unimpressive objectivity." This does not mean that Barth denies the asymmetry of the Reformed Scholastics or of the Synod of Dordt. Instead, he has given it more consistent expression by placing it at the intersection of the doctrine of God and of God's works *ad extra* in predestination. He makes the bold attempt to unite

⁸⁵ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 456-7.

the material content of predestination, the revelation of the hidden Christ to humans, with the dialectical method of that revelation itself, the revelation in hiddenness (the resurrection hidden in the cross).⁸⁶ In this form, the doctrine of predestination has greater consistency because it speaks of grace, in the sense that God rejects in order to elect, just as his hiddenness is given for the purpose of his revealedness.

Barth's treatment of predestination in the *Göttingen Dogmatics* is a significant attempt to argue that election and rejection are of grace and that they are not the earthly forms of an eternal distinction between two groups of humans. As in the *Epistle to the Romans*, predestination is God's "Yes" that always breaks out over the "No" of God's judgment. In making this his orientation to predestination, according to McCormack, Barth continued his policy of saying a certain kind of "yes" to Kant but only by basing this first policy upon the fact that "Absolute certainty exists in God alone."⁸⁷ In terms of God's way with the creature, this means that double predestination is eternally certain — except that this is to be understood in terms of Barth's concept of the "eternal" as not pre-temporal, but as reality outside of time. For McCormack, it is this form of predestination that typifies Barth's material insight at this stage. The beginning of a fundamental shift in dogmatic reflection on predestination is shown in this description of the *Göttingen* material on election:

Barth was very concerned to eliminate any a priori speculative principles from the realm of dogmatics. But he was also convinced that he had learned to understand revelation as indirect in his sense, that is, as occurring by means of a *Realdialektik* of veiling and unveiling, from an attentive and faithful 'following-after' of

⁸⁶ Gockel, "One Word and All is Saved," 177.

⁸⁷ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 373. This point later causes Barth to reflect on the concept of *Gottheit an sich* ("God in itself"), which connects with the dogmatic establishment of the being of God in the decretal relationship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 (p. 115). See, William Stacy Johnson, *The Mystery of God: Karl Barth and the Postmodern Foundations of Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 60-61.

revelation in its actuality. And – this is the truly decisive point – he used his a posteriori ‘material principle’ not analytically but critically and heuristically....”⁸⁸

A break with classical predestination is tangible here in that Barth is paying attention to how one may be assured of the knowledge of God’s decree. In the critical eyes of Barth, this path will eventually lead to the insight that the double determination made by God that Reformed predestination searched for so ardently was much closer than had yet been realized. It was in 1936 at Debrecen, Hungary that Barth offered lectures on the double decree of predestination in a form that broke new ground.⁸⁹ In these lectures, the content of grace in predestination could not be mistaken or unknown because of the single subject of election and rejection, Jesus Christ.

4. Chapter Summary

The purpose of the chapter has been to demonstrate the manner in which Barth’s dialectical methodology has remained constant. Three highlights stand out that are evidence of the consistency. The first is Barth’s grounding of predestination in human life. A person has or does not have faith because a condition has been given to them in the event of knowing God or not knowing him. There is no metaphysical or anthropological condition that lies “out there” which separates people on earth because God determines them to separate ends in eternity. Second, this means that election has to do with a divine activity not a human capability. Because faith and unbelief are

⁸⁸ Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 85.

⁸⁹ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 278. The background to this change in Barth’s understanding of predestination with its Christological centre is well described in McCormack, *Critical Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 455-458. It is, of course, Pierre Maury who receives the credit for directing Barth’s attention to the Christocentric change in the doctrine. Barth also offers a brief statement of appreciation to Maury in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, (154-5). Nevertheless, it is important to make a caveat to the link between the Christological concept of rejection in Maury and Barth. It was not Maury who proposed that Jesus Christ is the true and only rejected one. See footnote 29, p. 101 Chapter Three.

conditions given by God, Barth takes issue with Reformed scholasticism's arrangement of predestination as a *locus* of providence. Instead, he places it at the apex of the doctrine of God and at the beginning of God's relationship with humanity. As in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Barth in fact already sides with the supralapsarians in uniting the will of God with the act of creation. Lastly, reprobation and election are teleologically related. The latter is an act of grace only because the former is the possibility of not knowing grace in its hiddenness. Along the way, and in all three of these points, Barth effectively alleges the impossibility of establishing theological truth by using the methods of Protestant Liberalism, that is to say, by an affirmation of human religious subjectivity more or less for its own sake, and by the philosophical and methodological exclusion of the very possibility of God's action in the world. In Karl Barth's "critically realistic dialectical theology" (McCormack), a different approach becomes necessary.

Chapter Two

The Election of Jesus Christ: the Sum of the Gospel

Barth's early theology proceeded from the claim that, because God is known in his self-communication, those who are given faith become participants in divine revelation through election. This dialectical methodology endured throughout his early work. Barth was consistent in conceiving of the historical operation of predestination in terms of the continual human choice between faith and unbelief, not in terms of the pre-temporal decision of God concerning the eternal fate of two distinct groups of humans. This is not to say that Barth saw the function of human free choice as the criterion for the meaning of the doctrine. Barth agreed firmly with the Synod of Dordt that the Remonstrant position was wrong in affirming prescient divine knowledge of human belief as the basis for election. Rather, predestination was conceived in a broadly theocentric way, in the sense that it emphasized the teleological idea that God wills the election of humanity out of reprobation, and not reprobation itself.

This chapter is intended to link Barth's consistent use of the dialectical methodology in the doctrine of election from his early theology to the Christocentric double predestination found in *Church Dogmatics* II.2. The task is not simple or straightforward since there is a clear difference between the doctrine of election before *Church Dogmatics* II.2 and after it. Before the change, Barth's doctrine operated loosely and with a sense of arbitrariness because it was tied to the principle of the divine veiling and unveiling in revelation. After the change to Christocentrism, the doctrine achieved an unparalleled level of stability and concreteness. The argument becomes more consistent because of a shift of approach. The difference between the earlier and later

doctrine is based on the changed content that Barth puts to use in his methodology. It is not, in other words, the case that the method of dialectic was given up. The earlier content is concerned with the sphere of the work of the Holy Spirit who actualizes faith in the consciousness of particular people at particular moments. Barth's later doctrine of election, by contrast, finds its material centre in Jesus Christ as the true subject and object of God's eternal decree.

With the person of Jesus Christ filling all reflection on predestination, Barth faced the massive task of organizing his theology around this profound doctrinal change. The traditional Reformed doctrine of election lacked fullness and consistency because it assumed a division between the God of the eternal decree and the work of predestination in the belief or unbelief of individuals. For Barth to bring these two together did not require having to rewrite his doctrine of election so much as to expand and fill up theological intelligence to match the new level and content to which it had been raised. Since Barth had all along pursued election as the dialectical work of grace for humanity, he continued this path in understanding election now as the "sum of gospel." However, in order to achieve this, Barth found that the doctrine of God required massive adaptation, so that the content of election itself in the idea of Jesus Christ as the electing God and the elect man could take proper shape.

This chapter will argue that Barth's conception of the unity between the doctrine of God and predestination is determinative for the knowledge of the electing God. Barth's doctrine of God is filled by Jesus Christ as the "one who loves in freedom" and as the Lord of the covenant. As we shall see, Barth's development of this theme extends also to the claim that Jesus Christ is the rejected human. The argument will begin by

stating the problem that the Reformed tradition post-Schleiermacher had in orienting itself to the question of who the electing God is. In the second part, Barth's critical work in the doctrine of election is shown to proceed from the history of questions and limitations that Reformed approaches to predestination encountered in the nineteenth century. The historical background will be illuminated by a number of recent studies comparing Barth and Alexander Schweizer's treatment of predestination. The final section will argue a case for the originality of Barth's statement of double predestination in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, especially as it finds expression in the idea of rejection. This section will explore the critical and material depth of Barth's treatment of the doctrine of election, which emerges as the product of a consistently Christological account of the subject.

1.1 The Doctrine of God and the Decree of Predestination

Perhaps the clearest way to grasp the unity that Barth sees between the doctrine of God and the decree of election would be to refer to his rejection of universalism. Although Barth saw the movement of election as grace through judgment in rejection, he still held back from affirming the universality of salvation. Barth says it plainly in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*: "The idea of apocatastasis, of the elimination of rejection, cannot derive from knowledge of this God."¹ Nevertheless, the problem that has continually been at the centre of the Reformed doctrine of predestination, the redemptive will of God,

¹ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 476. In this paragraph, Barth holds Schleiermacher accountable for removing the possibility of rejection by divine choice. Barth claims, "It is also illegitimate temerity to do as Schleiermacher did and supplement the election of grace with a doctrine of apocatastasis which maintains that the election of all is the end of the ways of God." (ibid., 475) This is the only instance of a discussion of Schleiermacher's doctrine of predestination in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, and while Barth is correct to point out that Schleiermacher's position dominates his outlook (like Barth's), he was incorrect to hold that the Schleiermacher rejected the operation of reprobation all together. Cf. Gockel, *Schleiermacher and Barth on Election*, 152.

according to which God desires all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4), and the historical differentiation between belief and unbelief, is a problem that still remains unsatisfactorily resolved in the *Göttingen Dogmatics*. Indeed, Barth had the correct methodological criticism of classical predestination. Predestination was unconditional grace because it rested on the will of God actualized in human faith. However, in what follows, the argument will be that he, along with the Reformed tradition, lacked the theological resources necessary to establish the idea that the first and principal location of the work of grace is found precisely in deliverance for the one who is rejected. This deficit continued until Barth identified Jesus Christ as the subject of election and placed him at the centre of the account provided in *Church Dogmatics* II.2. The argument concludes with the doctrine of rejection being securely placed within the covenantal decision of God to be incarnate in Jesus Christ, the rejected Son of God elected in Jewish flesh. It is because the Son of God is the one who is *rejected* that Barth now has a consistent reason for the refusal of universalism. What must be said about God's grace is said in connection with the election of Jesus Christ, and not in connection with an assumed possession of humanity independent of Jesus Christ.

Church Dogmatics II.2 constitutes, in the estimation of many, the epitome of Barth's mature Christocentric theology and also one of the most original theological works of the twentieth century.² It was here that Barth inscribed predestination in a fundamentally new location in modern theology, in nothing less than the doctrine of God. The main advance in theological intelligence that Barth offers in this new approach unites

² Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (New York: Continuum, 2008), 60. Jones makes a nice commendation of the second volume of the *Church Dogmatics*: "In a historical context disfigured by unbridled cruelty, Barth produced a work distinguished by its optimism, depth and unflagging intellectual audacity." (*ibid.*) See also, William Stacy Johnson, "God the Center of Theology: A Reinterpretation of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1992), 174-175.

the concerns of scholastic Reformed theology for the doctrine of predestination with a portrayal of the being of the triune God.³ As Colin Gunton insists in his lectures on *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Barth's handling of election in the being of God means that, in its breadth and importance, it is "this universal side that Barth wants to take up."⁴ The key feature of this universality, though, is that it remains in the predestining will of God.

1.2 Nineteenth Century Predestination and the Doctrine of God

It is not a particularly new thing that the operation of predestination should have been considered to be connected with the doctrine of God, since, after all, this had been established for a long time in certain developments of the ordered *loci* of Reformed theology beginning around 1630.⁵ The title under which this arrangement in traditional theology can be found is "The Decrees of God."⁶ What must then be looked at is the way

³ Gary Badcock, "The God of the Covenant," in *Covenant Theology: Contemporary Approaches*, ed. by Mark J. Cartledge and David Mills (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2001), 74-75. Badcock narrows in on a valuable insight that will prove to be true in the rest of this chapter. He senses that, rather than evading engagement with the Reformed scholastic doctrines of God, Barth has made his critical advances in theology by agreeing with the voluntarism of Reformed scholastics such that God's covenantal being can be known by humans as it is known even by God himself. (*ibid.*, 78)

⁴ Colin Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, transcribed and ed. by P.H. Brazier (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 111. Gunton reasons that this universality has to do with the fundamental importance that Romans 9-11 had in Barth's understanding of election. This is a consideration that we do not have room to explore, but it has credibility for the way the elements of corporate and individual election function together. As we will see in the material on Judas Iscariot, a universal typology of the rejected is raised up in Barth's presentation; but, in Jesus Christ, the universality still remains a subject of Pauline Christology. In addition, there is support for seeing continuity in Barth's doctrine of election between the *Epistle to the Romans* up to *Church Dogmatics* II.2. This is noted in Sonderegger when she says, "the *Epistle to the Romans* comes to life in Judas." (*That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, op. cit., 84-85) The general continuity between the two works is also supported by McCormack, "The Unheard Message of Karl Barth," 63-64.

⁵ Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and predestination in Reformed theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 3-4. In another work, Muller also explains that "Alexander of Hales and Thomas Aquinas, who have never been accused of creating a predestinarian system, noted the logically necessary relationship of the two doctrines (doctrine of God and predestination) by arguing whether predestination ought to be predicated of God.... This question of proper predication, incidentally, accounts for the occasional practice of Reformed scholastics of including the decree among the divine attributes." *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 127.

⁶ This title refers to Heinrich Heppé's arrangement of theological *loci* in *Reformed Dogmatics*, where 'the decrees' are a means of description for two kinds of works of God. Upon establishing the nature of God *ad*

that predestination was being used by Barth in critical dialogue with the formal structures of classical Reformed theology. This attention will require a description of Reformed theology's use of the doctrine in the period after Friedrich Schleiermacher. This is done in order that we will be able to apprehend with greater clarity the sharpness of Barth's doctrine of rejection in the *Church Dogmatics*, especially, as we shall see, within the intriguing doctrinal exegesis of the Judas material in §35.4. The content of Barth's doctrine of election, Jesus Christ the elected and electing God, requires Barth to be more consistent in his handling of the subject matter of Reformed predestination. This consistency is achieved when Barth takes the character of Judas, lifts it up under the light of God's mercy and sees the shadow of Jesus the rejected Jewish Messiah rather than anything proper to or sinful about Judas himself.

Reformed orthodoxy was an important counterpart to Barth's development of the doctrine of election in the *Church Dogmatics*. It provided him a vision of the unity between God's being and the divine will, one that informed his endeavour to consistently rework and also reaffirm double predestination in a manner that was fresh and nothing less than "revolutionary."⁷ Of course, for Barth this was not simply the pursuit of a quixotic literary career spent in revamping theological ideas. Rather, it was because he

intra in chapter VI, "The Holy Trinity," Heppé goes on to answer a primary question after the conclusion of God's being proper: "If this is who God is, why do things happen as they do for that which comes from God?" Heppé's answer, a description of the works of God *ad extra*. First, there are the things that pertain to God himself, chapter VII, "The Decrees of God." Secondly, there are the works that have their purpose outside of God, chapter VIII, "Predestination." While Heppé is criticized for the imposition of his ordering of predestination before creation, which is not necessarily as universal an arrangement as Heppé makes it out to be in his sources (Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 130), for our purposes the order that Barth chose to acknowledge and react against is of primary importance.

⁷ Badcock sees Barth's own theological ability to "turn the tradition on its head" and "consistently def[y] traditional expectations" as taking its impetus from Barth's covenantal theology where "the abstract decree of God as the absolute Lord of all creation becomes instead something known from revelation as a concrete decision of love." ("The God of the Covenant," 79) This is a fine understanding of what makes Barth, in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, so theologically fascinating, and something that will be proven and sustained in the material on Judas in the third chapter.

was committed, and more than that, unapologetic for his theological stance in the Reformed tradition. Barth had modified his approach to the doctrine of election in his earlier years, and by the time he listened to Pierre Maury's lecture on election in Geneva in 1936, he would see the need to do so again.⁸ This final revision of election is seen prominently in *Church Dogmatics* II.2. This Christological revision, at one time, embraced the Reformed doctrine of election in the tradition of Schleiermacher and yet masterfully turned it over by making it materially consistent with the belief that Jesus Christ is the revelation of the divine Word of God.

Because of this revision within the traditional doctrine of election, Barth overcame two problems that his contemporaries had not been able to handle theologically. The first problem developed because nineteenth century Reformed theologians thought of predestination from an already formalized concept of God's existence. In practice, what this meant is that they could not advance past modern idealist notions of religion. They thought that religion was becoming aware of divine being, just as one might become aware of an alien race by hearing some strange language communicated to a satellite dish. Secondly, their inability to understand God's trinitarian being as bound to the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ limited the approach taken to the doctrine of election by making it merely an account of the cause of human faith or the lack thereof. This became especially problematic in the doctrine of rejection because it resulted in an unavoidable symmetry between election and rejection (God as the cause of both). In Barth's view, if this symmetry were correct, it would mean that God could be determined to act by something standing outside of his gracious being – namely, by human sin. Of course, this was never the intended meaning of the traditional view, but

⁸ Busch, *Karl Barth*, 278.

unless corrected by a consistent view of God's being as it is revealed in Jesus Christ, in Barth's judgment, the tradition was liable to speak of something *other than the grace of God* in election.⁹ Our intention in the following material is to set out the orientation to election found in the nineteenth century Reformed tradition and to establish the nature of Barth's unique and brilliant critique and correction of it.

Although we must pay attention to the Reformed tradition in the primary interest of understanding Karl Barth's doctrine, it is important to restrict the discussion so far as possible. Our purpose will be limited to only looking at the Reformed theologians that stood in Barth's own background, and therefore we do not intend to critique the Reformed tradition in general, nor can we intend in a study of this nature to set the nineteenth century interpretation of Reformed orthodoxy straight. The goal is already massive enough, without these diversions — namely, to grasp something of Barth's theological achievement. As is well known, Barth considered his own theology to be, at the very least, an advancement against the theology of Schleiermacher.¹⁰ However, as much as it was an advancement against, it was also a critique constructed from within a tradition that the theology of Schleiermacher had profoundly shaped.¹¹

1.3 Predestination and the Doctrine of God in the Theology of Alexander Schweizer

During his time in Göttingen, Barth considered the theology of Friedrich Schleiermacher to be the apex of a tradition of overly-anthropocentric theology stretching

⁹ Gockel, *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election*, 198-199.

¹⁰ Joseph Mangina, *Karl Barth: Theologian of Christian Witness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 30-31. Mangina wisely notes the positive significance of Barth's opposition to Schleiermacher, as it means both that Ludwig Feuerbach is correct about theology begun from within human subjectivity and that critics of the church, like Overbeck, are in fact correct.

¹¹ McCormack, "Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 19.

back to the post-Reformation period of the seventeenth century, located principally in William Ames and Johannes Cocceius.¹² When introducing the scientific study of dogmatics proper, he claims, “Schleiermacher's Copernican revolution ... was the culmination of an older development rather than the initiation of a new one. He gave classical and even canonical form to a view which from those beginnings had come to increasingly more forceful expression throughout the 18th century, the view that theology in general and dogmatics in particular is the science of religion, the science of statements of pious experience such as is found in the Christian church....”¹³ To what extent Barth's judgment concerning Schleiermacher's place at the culmination of “neo-Protestantism” is correct has been much discussed in recent sources on Barth's relationship to Alexander Schweizer (1808-1888), one of Schleiermacher's prominent students.¹⁴

Schweizer's work *Die Glaubenslehre der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* established much of the framework for how the Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was received and conceptualized as a system in the nineteenth century. For Schweizer, the “material principle” of the Reformation was best understood with “predestination as the focal point of the Reformed systems around which all other doctrines coalesced, thus providing the basis for the later somewhat reductionistic versions of the central dogmatic theory in which predestination alone is called the central dogma of the Reformed.”¹⁵ Schweizer claims that predestination is the material principle of the Reformed faith, but this does not mean that the doctrine is arbitrarily pulled out of

¹² Ryan Glomsrud, “Karl Barth as Historical Theologian: The Recovery of Reformed Theology in Barth's Early Dogmatics,” in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, eds. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 95-96.

¹³ Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics*, 9.

¹⁴ Glomsrud, “Karl Barth as Historical Theologian,” 99.

¹⁵ Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 124.

the whole range of theological concepts to be *the* essential one. Rather, predestination is the “central dogma” of the Reformed tradition because of its ability to correctly portray the character of the whole tradition. Schweizer viewed the Reformed tradition through the lens of predestination as understood in connection with Schleiermacher’s principle of *Abhängigkeitsgefühl* (feeling of absolute dependence).¹⁶

Schweizer’s particular interpretation of the doctrine of predestination was a carryover from Schleiermacher’s approach to doctrine in general. McCormack writes that predestination here “stands under the same reservation to which all doctrine is subjected in a Schleiermacherian framework: it is a thoroughly fallible attempt to articulate the contents of the original apprehension and, as such, stands in constant need of correction.”¹⁷ Predestination, as an expression of *Abhängigkeitsgefühl*, could function neatly as that which shaped the contents and connections between all other Reformed dogmas without having to be arranged in an arbitrary system of doctrine. Instead of defending predestination’s importance by justifying its relationship in the doctrinal *loci* and by its place in Scripture, Schweizer chose a definition of predestination that would fit nineteenth century thought. To him, the doctrine was a systematic “principle,” which he considered indicative of the inner life or emphasis of Reformed piety. Because this was so widely assumed to be an adequate view of what the tradition had all along been attempting to say about religious life, Schweizer’s view did not have to bear the weight of further justification. As a means of theological understanding, the great proof of the

¹⁶ Glomsrud, “Karl Barth as Historical Theologian,” 98.

¹⁷ Bruce McCormack, “The Sum of the Gospel: The Doctrine of Election in the Theologies of Alexander Schweizer and Karl Barth,” in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*, by Bruce McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 44.

claim appeared simply in how predestination was taken to accurately describe the work of grace in the experience of believers.

Because the doctrine was now set free from its historical setting in the doctrinal order of decrees, Schweizer was able to use it as a tool for his primary interest in the *Glaubenslehre*, which was to unite the Reformed and Lutheran traditions. In his mind, the religious attitude of the eighteenth century was dictated by the advent of rationalism, whereas “the nineteenth century, thanks to Schleiermacher, was the age not of apostasy but of revival.”¹⁸ The possible unity of the traditions was conceived, in part, by means of the newly opened understanding of predestination. Now the dominant anthropological concern of the Lutheran church, understood by Schweizer as justification by faith alone, could be wed with the Reformed principle of predestination, which had been reconceived in terms of the feeling of absolute dependence.

The result of this marriage was, as McCormack puts it, a doctrine of election and reprobation radically recast in the light of Schleiermacher under ‘a doctrine of “applicative grace.”’ That is, it provided an answer to the question of how human beings appropriate the redemption actualized in Christ (thereby also answering the question of why some people believe and others do not).¹⁹ At this point, however, Schweizer has obscured the fact that election is unconditional grace, precisely because unconditional grace ought to refer us to a God who has in *himself* chosen to be gracious by turning to the sinner. Schweizer’s idea of “applicative grace” was the inverse of the concern of the Reformed tradition, in that his concern arose from the side of the historical human subject rather than from the side of the eternal, divine subject. The God of whom Schweizer

¹⁸ Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), 122.

¹⁹ McCormack, “The Sum of the Gospel,” 46.

speaks is the one who is unveiled in human seeking and veiled by human sin. This God of the moral conscience is very willing to offer a satisfying confirmation of grace to repentant sinners when they question the status of their belief. As Barth would come to see things, this God is not, however, the God who elects in unconditional grace.

1.4 The “Central Dogma” and the Inconsistency of the Subject of Election

Schweizer began his genealogy of Reformed theology in an attempt to locate a material principle that would support Schleiermacher’s theology as the pinnacle of the Reformed doctrine of grace. Although he wanted to say that God rather than human wisdom is the author of human salvation, Schweizer made a critical mistake in his choice of theological material in the doctrine of election. The error is not one that can be straightforwardly read out of the method of the approach itself; grace is still God’s grace. However, this is also the exact problem, owing to the questionable material relationship between God and the concept of grace in Schweizer. The question is this: Does grace belong to God *in se*, or is it rather a function of the act of God *ad extra*?

The centre of the problem can be found in two locations. First, Schweizer, unlike the Reformed scholastics, does not link predestination to the divine decrees but instead places the decrees under the providence of God.²⁰ Because “applicative grace” relates the historical faith of individuals to the *universal* will of God, predestination is no longer a description of the *particular* work of the Holy Spirit. Rather, it is the natural and neutral

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55. This is not only a problem in Schweizer, but it is also a feature of Heppé’s organization of the *loci* of his Reformed dogmatics. What is essentially true in operation is that the decrees of God are instances of providence written large in the divine counsel. Heppé on the decrees: “This immanent, essential activity of God is the eternal, unalterable counsel (=decision) of His will. ‘The eternal counsel of God is the essential inward work of God, the judgment so to speak of the divine mind and wisdom upon all matters, the doing of which He willed for a good end’ (Polan IV,6).” Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 135.

work of God in the providential events of life that brings individuals to faith. By defining God's will in human history in this way, Schweizer has certainly avoided any objective determinism of human consciousness, but in reality he has replaced it for a "softer," more humane and subjective determinism by means of God's providence, which is exercised predominantly through the natural order of life and apprehended in "feeling." The glory of God that Reformed theology found in the doctrine of predestination has been reduced to a coordinated principle of divine work and human reception. Election as the apex of the mysterious and unconditioned origin of God's redemptive purpose for humankind is nowhere present in this treatment.

The second and more substantial problem is the methodology that Schweizer uses to arrive at the account of predestination offered. What comes to the fore in his doctrine of predestination is that the doctrine of God has been posited apart from reflecting on election as an authentically divine work. After the doctrine of God has been developed (as a separate being supremely elevated above human conditions), it is then used to generate the parameters of predestination. The *principia* of earlier Reformed theology had focused on predestination as *principium cogniscendi* (foundation of knowing) and as *principium essendi* (foundation of being). Despite this, for Schweizer the doctrine of predestination becomes an instrument used to describe religious experience, and specifically how the God who is able to give grace to all people actually causes religious consciousness only in some by election.²¹ The trouble is that Schweizer has attempted to interpret Reformed theology by looking to religious consciousness in time as capable of telling us who God is in eternity (predestination). However, because theological reasoning can only be as great as its material source, Schweizer's doctrine of God is a

²¹ Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 126-127.

disappointment. The problem is that “a theology of religious consciousness will not finally be able to tell us anything about what God is in himself; it will tell us only something about how God relates to human beings.”²²

Schweizer’s intention was to view predestination as a material principle by which all other doctrines can be understood, but the content of predestination failed because it did not in fact speak of a God who is only known by virtue of electing grace. Instead, Schweizer’s approach is shaped by the classical idea of a sovereign God who extrinsically employs predestination as an instrument. In other words, predestination comes in definitively only after what is decisive in the doctrine of God has already been determined. Only then is election understood as the act of grace and justification by God, who is conceived apart from the work of election.

2.1 The Doctrine of God and Predestination after Alexander Schweizer

The influence of Schleiermacher did not end with Schweizer’s particular interpretation of predestination as a “central dogma” of the Reformation. Unfortunately for Schweizer, his doctrine of “applicative grace” was snuffed out by the new tide of historical-critical theology which arose in the wake of the theology of Albrecht Ritschl during the later period of the nineteenth century.²³ In the German universities of the 1890s and following, the Ritschlian school dominated. However, there was a growing rift in the school between the more progressive “history of religions” group, led by Ernst Troeltsch, and a group of those who attempted to return to the theological insights of

²² McCormack, “The Sum of the Gospel,” 55.

²³ *Ibid.*, 46.

Schleiermacher through a more orthodox interpretation of Ritschl. These latter theologians were led by Wilhelm Herrmann.²⁴

While Karl Barth was a student at the University of Marburg, he was a committed follower of Herrmann. Herrmann appealed to the theology of Schleiermacher as a way to protect the necessity of faith in Protestant theology against the purely “scientific” use of history in the study of religion. Barth was not a lifelong devotee of Herrmann, as we have already seen. Nevertheless, he did clearly absorb and sought to further the essential barrier that Herrmann had erected against the history of religions school. For Barth, as for Herrmann, faith is given by God before sight and never the reverse.²⁵

For Barth, it is true, grace is more than a means to an end; it is, rather, the reality of God’s own life. Nevertheless, even while acknowledging the differences between Schweizer and Barth when taking account of their respective views on predestination, we can see them both as interested in establishing and correcting the Reformed doctrine in fidelity to its historical emphasis on *sola gratia*.²⁶ They both identified divinely given grace as the central meaning of predestination, yet at this very point they were mutually opposed to each other, based on their respective starting points — Schweizer in human need and Barth in the doctrine of God.

The argument that will be developed from this point is that the orientation Karl Barth brought to the doctrine of double predestination was a reaction against Schweizer’s

²⁴ McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 52.

²⁵ See McCormack, *Critical Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 54-58 and Richard Burnett, “Karl Barth’s Theological Exegesis: The Hermeneutical Principles of the Römerbrief Prefaces” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2000), 82-87.

²⁶ Gerrish, *Tradition and the Modern World*, 146. Gerrish sees in the two men a united task, although differentiated in method: “In the end, I think, Schweizer may well offer the most serious alternative – at least in kind – to Barthian historiography of the period: he speaks, not of a detour with no exit, which could lead only to a halt or a retreat (a retracing of one’s steps), but of fresh paths in continuity with the old.” (*Ibid.*)

doctrine of God, developed in the spirit of Herrmann's antipathy toward the power of human subjectivity. Barth made the discovery that, if the material content of the doctrine of predestination was understood to be given in Jesus Christ, then the initial question of the doctrine of God could be answered in a manner consistent with it. Formally, Schweizer and Barth begin with the same assumption that "[w]hat God does in time must be grounded in the eternal being of God."²⁷ Yet, the differences between Schweizer and Barth were significant. Schweizer works with an abstract doctrine of God, which leads to an understanding of predestination as an "applicative grace" that can only be external to God. In *Church Dogmatics* II, by contrast, the doctrine of God begins with the triune relationship that is constitutive of God's being (the one who is being-in-act, *Church Dogmatics* II.1, §28.1), under the heading of the central decision of God to be the covenant-keeping God. Barth does not deny that this means something for human life — since, after all, God keeps his covenant with humanity — but this is not the starting place of the knowledge of God in Barth's theology, which is located, rather, exclusively in the event of revelation.²⁸

Barth proceeds further to consider the substance of how God chooses to be Lord in Jesus Christ. This beginning would carry the same abstract, passive formality as do the "decrees" of seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy if not for the important claim of Barth that election is the "the sum of the Gospel" and not merely a principle decided

²⁷ McCormack, "The Sum of the Gospel," 57.

²⁸ Eberhard Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming: The Trinitarian Being of God in the Theology of Karl Barth*, trans. by John Webster (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 175. On the nature of the knowledge of God as trinitarian and therefore secondarily for the human subject see Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.1 §27. Barth outlines the contours of this aspect here: "We are speaking of the knowledge of God whose subject is God the Father and God the Son through the Holy Spirit. But we men are taken up into this event as secondary, subsequent subjects. Therefore we are not speaking only of an event which takes place on high, in the mystery of the divine Trinity... But we are now speaking of the revelation of this event on high and therefore of our participation in it." *Ibid.*, 181.

upon in heaven and subsequently applied on earth.²⁹ Election is more than a premise of justification or a logical principle to which we are necessarily led because of a commitment to the concept of divine sovereignty; these are still abstractions lacking material definition in terms of God's actual revelation in Jesus Christ. The election of God truly is light because it speaks of revealed grace in the objectivity of Jesus Christ, who comes to make God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

2.2 Election as the "Sum of the Gospel"

The phrase, "sum of the Gospel," is part of the initial synopsis of §32, the first paragraph of *Church Dogmatics* II.2. By it Barth intends to separate his use of predestination from the kind of treatment of the theme found in Schweizer's "central dogma." He seeks to understand the claim that, of "all words that can be said or heard" from Holy Scripture, this is the best—that "God is God in His being as the One who loves in freedom."³⁰ For Barth, and here he is radically different from all others before him, the election of God means that God himself chooses to be the electing subject and elected object of predestination in Jesus Christ, the one who makes his covenant with humanity decisive not only for humanity, but for his own reality as God. The "material principle" of Reformed theology from Calvin on, according to Schweizer, had been predestination. The importance of this doctrine for Barth is not that it is a "speculative key" for interpreting God's relationship to the world, or a hermeneutical device by which

²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II,2, trans. by G.W. Bromiley, et al., eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

the believer's religious consciousness can be expressed and communicated, but that it truly is "the sum of the gospel," the content of salvation.³¹

In his historical understanding of the Reformed doctrine of predestination, one central concern for Barth was its importance within the structured *loci* of Reformed doctrine in general. Barth negotiated a position that was between that of his brother, Peter Barth, who argued that Calvin had used predestination to inform his doctrine of God, and that of one of his former students, Wilhelm Niesel, who undermined the central importance of predestination in Calvin by claiming that it had no more importance than many other equally significant doctrines in the structure of Calvin's theology. Barth distinguished a "third way" between the abstract heightening of the doctrine and the minimizing of its importance. His view of the importance of predestination in Calvin is nicely summarized as follows:

What Calvin did appear to find in the doctrine of election was this — a final (and therefore a first) word on the whole reality of the Christian life, the word which tells us that the existence and the continuance and the future of that life are wholly and utterly of the free grace of God... it seems that the total picture presented by that work [*Institutes of the Christian Religion* on election] drives us irresistibly to the conclusion that at this point Calvin did intend to find and to say something particularly and appropriately significant both in its substance and also in its consequences.³²

What Barth sees as definitively positive in Calvin's presentation is that it allows one to grasp the unity between the knowledge of God and the work of God. It was not the *mysterium tremendum* of Calvin's doctrine that attracted Barth, as if its power lay in the awe of its potential realization rather than freely given reconciliation with God. Barth believes that Calvin saw but failed to consistently develop the idea of the knowledge of a God who reveals himself as he truly is, as gracious. If those who follow the Reformed

³¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

³² *Ibid.*, 86.

tradition were able to criticize this failure of Calvin, then they might be able to make a reorientation of election that affirmed not merely a sounder logic but a richer and more scriptural faith in the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

The shape of predestination in Calvin and the Protestant scholastics can be summarized in terms of the opening line of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*: “Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.”³³ In the Reformed tradition, this regulative conception was held to constitute almost a firm ontological and moral order that separated the transcendent, holy, and just God from a sinful, finite, and damned creation. Because of human helplessness, grace had to be given as a monergistic work of God *ad extra* for the reconciliation of fallen creation. So far as this was a dogmatic position that maintained two important stances, the freedom of God’s grace and human dependence on grace, Barth would not object to the tradition.³⁴ However, the trouble was that, even as it asserted the “yes” of God’s grace, the tradition found it also necessary to uphold the idea of a continuing separation of God and humanity by speaking of the “no” of God’s judgment. This made a logical symmetry between election and rejection unavoidable. Barth acknowledges: “Calvin was right. But although his point was right, he could have made it more emphatically and impressively if his understanding of predestination had been less speculative and more in accordance with the biblical testimony; if it had been a strictly evangelical understanding.”³⁵ According to Barth,

³³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.i.1, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles, ed. John T. McNeil (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 35.

³⁴ Barth still makes a qualified praise of the *Canons of Dordt* in the *Church Dogmatics* II.2. He esteems the document for not condemning supralapsarianism outright and for defining predestination in a materially evangelical form. As to this evangelical form, he means that it maintained a separation of salvation and reprobation in election and rejection respectively. *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 17-18.

³⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 18.

indeed, the Reformed tradition would have been much better prepared for the temptations of subjective individualism in the seventeenth century if it had not forgotten that it is God alone who chooses to reconcile the world by his own will. In faith, predestination is known in its power to reveal not a God far off and hidden but one close at hand and alive. The challenge for Barth was how to say, from Scripture and in critical dialogue with the Reformed tradition, that the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is determined to be gracious to all humanity, and is not the God who abstractly separates humanity into two fixed groups, the one elect and the other reprobate.³⁶

2.3 Double Predestination and the Doctrine of God

In *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Barth began to speak this way in the quintessential task of a Reformed dogmatician, the description of *praedestinatio gemina* (double predestination). He set to work within the ecclesiastical heritage of the Reformed scholastics in the attempt to refashion an understanding of Christocentric predestination. The claim that Barth is thoroughly committed to his theological tradition is not meant to over-shadow the calm delight he took in causing that tradition to rethink its own understanding of who God is based on the strong flow of its own current of covenantal thought.³⁷ We sense the movement that Barth is after from Calvin himself. Calvin firmly views predestination as having to do inevitably with who God is in his will when

³⁶ The universal aspect of the application of the doctrine of predestination (that it applies to all inside and outside the church) is where Barth is closest to Schleiermacher and where both are seen to be modern theologians. Here, both theologians take issue with the particularistic understanding of divine predestination, as if what is on earth reflected the reality in heaven. Rather, the singularity of the divine decree means for both that the focus is placed on the predestinating God, not predestined individuals. (Gockel, "One Word and All is Saved," 161.) Nevertheless, the distinction between Schleiermacher and Barth is still clear in the epistemological function that Jesus Christ plays in Barth's doctrine of God.

³⁷ Badcock, "The God of the Covenant," 74-75. In his work on election and the divine covenant, Barth was assured of two things: the depth and sturdiness of the historical material and the Augustinian belief that God is the one who had given himself freely in love to the creature.

he explains the subject as follows: "... since he [God] foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place, they [Calvin's opponents] vainly raise a quarrel over foreknowledge, when it is clear that all things take place rather by his foreknowledge and bidding."³⁸ With Calvin, Barth sees the content of the knowledge of God and humanity as given *a posteriori* in the actual decision of God that he will be named in Jesus Christ. It is this content, the Son of God in the election of Jesus Christ, that makes the orientation to predestination a final word that encircles all other topics in it because it is the first and the best word of grace. Barth captures the stream of Reformed predestination in this narrative of election found in the doctrine of God:

What happened was this, that it became a true fact that under this name God possesses this people [the elect]: possesses it no less than He does Himself; swears towards it the same fidelity as He exercises with Himself; directs upon it a love no less than that with which in the person of the Son He loves Himself; fulfilling His will upon earth as in the eternal decree which precedes everything temporal it is already fulfilled in heaven. What happened was this, that under this name God Himself established and equipped the people which bears the name to be "a light of the Gentiles," the hope, the promise, the invitation and the summoning of all peoples, and at the same time, of course, the question, the demand and the judgment set over the whole of humanity and every individual man.³⁹

This is nothing less than a profound argument for the universal sovereignty of predestination exercised out of the love of God for that which he has claimed by his own work.

The will of God is so near to the created order that Barth must now speak of election in terms of God's *Urentscheidung* (primal decision) rather than simply the *Ursprung* (primal origin), as in the two editions of the *Epistle to the Romans*.⁴⁰ In the

³⁸ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, 954-955.

³⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 53.

⁴⁰ McCormack, "Sum of the Gospel," 59. In terms of how we conceive of God's being, in this primal decision Barth locates the ordering of God's life around this "beginning." Of course this does no injustice

most basic sense, Barth deepens the Reformed concept of predestination by allowing it to be the context by which God's being for humanity in time is related to God's being for himself in eternity. Thus, while predestinarian thought in the nineteenth century followed the traditional locus of the doctrine in questioning how God's sovereignty is active in human freedom and to whom God's love is graciously applied, Barth asks the more fundamental question of who the electing God really is. Although bold, his answer makes a firm rebuke to anyone who, because of supposed piousness, would refrain from speaking of the history of Jesus Christ as the *historia praeveniens* (prevenient history) of God who is already ours in advance.⁴¹ Barth's point, essentially, is that there is no electing God other than the one encountered *here, in this* one: Jesus Christ. In *Church Dogmatics*, Barth claims that Christian speech must be such because "the true God is the One whose freedom and love have nothing to do with abstract absoluteness or naked sovereignty, but who in His love and freedom has determined and limited Himself to be God in particular and not in general...."⁴² The doctrine of God is not filled with content by a human subject investigating what it must be for God to be God based on negative abstractions from the limits of human ability (omnipotence, omniscience, eternity) or even from judgments made from scriptural descriptions.⁴³ Rather, the doctrine of God is

to God's eternal existence; it is to point out the actual and fundamental possibility that human knowledge of God in time can be in contact with the true God himself. This is no violation of Calvin's principle *finitum non capax infinitum*. With the space to only briefly address this, we may say that the principle is not compromised because it is God's life in the triune covenant that allows God's self to be known in the finite. Barth does not mean that God gives his self, in a Hegelian sense, to become real in the finite.

⁴¹ Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 91.

⁴² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 49.

⁴³ So called anthropomorphisms (e.g. Gen. 6:6 - "The Lord was sorry that he had made man and was grieved in his heart") have little value when taken as statements of the Lord's life in himself or as tokens of 'eternal truths' lisped in 'bite-sized' language to humans. We get much closer to the meaning of these features when we compare them to parables in the Gospels as descriptions of divine reality in human form.

essentially filled at the very beginning of reflection with the personal history of the triune God united with us in covenantal love as witnessed to in the prophets and apostles.

2.4 Jesus Christ the Subject of Election

The mysterious and yet transparent reality of God's willingness to be God *for us* has vast implications for reorienting the doctrine of God. Among them, is the need to set out the parameters for what we can say about the electing God who is in Jesus Christ, the subject of election. How is this supremely "the sum of the Gospel" for humanity, and what must now be said of those who are elect in Him? Barth begins to address these issues with the dogmatic position statement: In eternity, God chose to be the God who loves in freedom.⁴⁴ This is the history of the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ, the God who has elected himself.⁴⁵ We are not starting from a far distant constellation when, along with Barth, we point to this description of God because, not only must it be said of God, but it gives intelligence to what also must be said about humanity. The two perfections of God's being, his love and freedom, provide the groundwork of Barth's investigation into what the boundaries are for divine election.

In the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, Barth still remained in the tradition of Reformed theology by maintaining that predestination meant something in regards to the subjective status of human belief or unbelief. Here predestination was gracious in that it could be

⁴⁴ This is a line that connects the reader's thought back to the title of §28 in *Church Dogmatics* II.I.

⁴⁵ Eberhard Jüngel makes three helpful sentences that confirm the nature of the self-determination of God's being in Jesus Christ.

1. As the one who elects, God has *determined himself* to be this electing God in Jesus Christ.
2. As the one who elects, God has determined himself to be the electing God *and* elect humanity in Jesus Christ.
3. As the one who elects in Jesus Christ, God *elects* the man Jesus.

Noticeably, the language is essential and precise in the depiction of the actions and their relationship between the immanent and economic action of God. Jüngel, *God's Being is in Becoming*, 87.

linked back to an objective, two-fold decision that God was actively working out in creaturely time. However, in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, the meaning of God's eternal activity in time takes priority through the divine content of the decision itself.⁴⁶ The election of God is the perfection of divine freedom and sovereignty in that it is also the overflow of God's love for that which is not God. God's election is not an external necessity but an act of free grace in which His own glory "overflows"; this is "where light and darkness are marked off from each other, where what God wills, the good, stands out distinctively from what He does not will, the evil, where by the very existence of good there is conceded to evil and created for it a kind of possibility and reality of existence."⁴⁷ Election is love, furthermore, for it is made out of God's eternal freedom to be decisively for fellowship with Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. As such, it is not arbitrary or capricious. Barth makes this transparent: "It is He Himself, and not an essence of the freedom of choice, or of free choice, who is the divine Subject of the electing which takes place at this point. We must not seek the ground of this election anywhere but in the love of God, in His free love...."⁴⁸ Because God is the subject of the election of grace *in se*, the way he will be for humanity is guaranteed also to be the gracious manifestation of his perfect and faithful love. To say that God is the one who loves in freedom is above all to pronounce that the grace of election corresponds to the covenant by which God chooses to bind himself and to define himself. Therefore, the

⁴⁶ Robert Jenson, *Alpha and Omega: a study in the theology Karl Barth* (New York: Nelson, 1963), 66-68. As one of the earlier expositors of Barth's doctrine of election, Jenson notes well the radical implications for God's decision to be God in Jesus Christ. He comments that "in a particular but very real sense Incarnation *happened* in eternity before all time." (emphasis original) *Ibid.*, 68.

⁴⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 169-170.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 25.

decree of election itself possesses surety and blessing like no other words. From beginning to end, election is good news for all those who hear it.

It is obvious by now that in our concerns about predestination we have left behind the most earnest question of the traditional viewpoint: What is the cause of belief when time and eternity meet in human knowledge of salvation? In Barth's handling of the question, the nature of predestination is elevated far above the issues of Christian self-consciousness and the instrumentality of faith. This is because, unlike in the traditional conception, Jesus Christ is found at the centre of Barth's whole approach. Barth takes issue with the *speculum electionis* of the Reformed tradition, not because it says too much about Jesus Christ but because it says much too little.⁴⁹ If we are to see the good news of election, the *gratuitum beneplacitum*, then we must say, against the traditional view, that "the reference to Christ as the One who executed the *beneplacitum* is only an answer to the question of the *beneplacitum* if the *beneplacitum* as such is understood to be Christ's, if Christ is already thought of not only merely as the executive instrument of the divine dealings with man ordained in the election but as the Subject of the election itself."⁵⁰ Barth charges the traditional Reformed view with not saying of Jesus Christ what ought to be said. To make the Son of God a mere instrument or means for the implementation of a divine rescue plan would be to hold back from declaring with the

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 65-67. Robert Jenson explains that "if God's original decision about us is distinct from what happens in Jesus Christ, if it is only *mirrored* in Jesus Christ, then this decision and not what is decided in Christ will be decisive." (Robert Jenson, *Alpha and Omega*, 144) Jenson is careful to point out that unless the decision itself is grace, such that election in its essence is grace not in its effect, Barth's point that election is the Gospel will be lost in abstraction from what we seek to know about the "deepest reality of all that God does." *Ibid.*, 144.

⁵⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 66-67.

Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ, the God-man, is himself the divine good pleasure, the one in whom God's will is not hidden but made manifest.⁵¹

2.5 Election and Christology

If the traditional understanding was restrained by what it did not want to say about the election of Jesus Christ, why did it hold onto this hesitancy? What are the changes that are forced upon the doctrine of God if Jesus Christ is taken, in all his fullness, to be the electing God? It is at this point that Barth's reorientation of the doctrine of election takes huge leaps forward, no longer just in showing dogmatic inconsistencies but now also in claiming new conceptual ground. That Jesus Christ is the beginning of God's will to be *pro nobis* in time is not merely a critical correction to be made in the light of the evangelical character of predestination; rather, what is at stake is what is confessed about Jesus Christ himself.⁵² The Christology of the creeds of the Christian church is under examination. At the centre of Barth's interest in the doctrine of election as the "sum of the Gospel" is the doctrinal content of Christology itself. In *Church Dogmatics* II.2, the question is not, "How are we saved?" but, more distinctly, "Who is the God who delivers humanity from the dominion of sin?" This is also why the scriptural motif that informs Barth's reorientation is not based so much on exegetical attention paid to the "in Christ" of Ephesians 1:4; rather the passage that bears even more weight for Barth is John 1:1-2,

⁵¹ J. Scott Jackson, "Jesus Christ as the God who Loves in Freedom: Election, Covenant, and the Trinity in the Thought of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2006), 125-126.

⁵² On the relationship between Christology and the doctrine of God, Paul Dafydd Jones comments, "The construal of divine self-determination forwarded in *Church Dogmatics* II/2 binds together the doctrines of God and Christ in striking fashion. Not only does Barth hereby prohibit any easy disaffiliation of the immanent life of the Son (the *logos asarkos*) from his incarnate life as Jesus Christ (the *logos ensarkos*); he also begins to consider how God wills the economy of revelation and reconciliation, as it pertains to the Son's assumption of humanity, how it is drawn into, and ramifies within, the eternal life of God." *The Humanity of Christ*, 66-67.

14.⁵³ These words overflow with doctrinal light: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

Central to the new insight on predestination in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 is the notion of what the status of the *Logos* is in the eternal decree of God. We have just seen above that Barth wants to go beyond the Reformed tradition in seeing the incarnate Son of God not as a mere instrument of divine grace but as the *object* of grace. As an object of election, for Barth, Jesus Christ is still not viewed directly enough as the God-man. To be sure, the Reformed orthodox of the seventeenth century were at complete liberty to claim Jesus Christ as the one in whom election occurs demonstrably. We see this objectivity in a theologian whom Barth finds innovative but inconsistent, Johannes Cocceius. In his *Summa Theologiae*, Cocceius comments on what election “in Christ” reveals in Ephesians 1:3-6:

This election in Christ must now be further elaborated as an election in which Christ is the one who is foreknown. In other words, God has appointed (*constituerti*) Christ as Head and Firstborn of those who belong to him, and he has appointed the latter to be members and brothers of Christ. Consequently, this election in Christ is an election through Christ as the one who elects, that is, as the one who elects as the Sponsor for those who belong to him.⁵⁴

Barth praises Cocceius for the way in which he, unlike his contemporaries, unites “the eternal election of grace and the eternal decree of salvation” according to the covenantal

⁵³ Bruce McCormack, “Grace and Being: the role God’s gracious election in Karl Barth’s theological ontology” in *The Cambridge Champion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 94; also republished in Bruce McCormack, *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵⁴ Willem J. van Asselt, *The Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, trans. by Raymond A. Blacketer (Boston: Brill, 2001), 215.

model.⁵⁵ In Cocceius, the procedure of predestination to grace is as follows: *Pactum – Testamentum – Foedus Gratia*.⁵⁶ However, what is still kept hidden is the nature or condition of the covenant established in eternity. The grace that does finally arrive in Jesus Christ according to the orthodox model is one that is still unrelated in its appearance to what it presupposes, that which is caused by the *Logos asarkos*.⁵⁷ In other words, the inner reality of the divine decision, the will and decision that caused the deliverance of the *testator*, the incarnate Jesus Christ, for human salvation is kept from sight and locked up within the eternal plan of God. Indeed, the *decretum absolutum* stands as something hidden, not merely because of human noetic limitations, but because the Son of God, the object of election, is only determined to be the mediator for the redemption of individuals by a decision which is logically prior to the incarnation itself, and which is therefore not strictly seen in the incarnation itself. This is the statement of the problem that Barth finds in classical Reformed predestination.

This notion of a hidden decree meant for Barth that the mediator of salvation in time, Jesus Christ, could be different from the eternal being of God in himself. But Barth asks: is the *Logos ensarkos* merely a role that the mediator plays, yet one that the *Logos* remains separate from in his eternal being? Also, is Jesus Christ, as the one who determines in his humanity to suffer, die, and rise again, truly the one who decides this out of his own deity and mercy? Over against this approach, Barth maintains that to be faithful to Reformed covenantal Christology's intention to speak of God as gracious

⁵⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 114. Barth goes on to list three advantages that Cocceius introduces to the Reformed tradition: "1. that the decree of election is identical with that of salvation; 2. that the decree of salvation relates primarily to the mission and people of the Son; 3. that, like the Father and the Holy Spirit, the Son participates in the decree as divine Subject, so that he is both *electus* and *eligens*." *Ibid.*, 115.

⁵⁶ van Asselt, *The Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, 226.

⁵⁷ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 94.

means that the answer must be that in his true divinity, Jesus Christ stands as the one in whom all humanity is determined to be elected. The objectivity of election is only known in this man by one eternal determination, which is distinct from his creaturely life yet claims this life for its own in obedience to the covenant of grace. Barth attempts to demonstrate this point when he asks, “For where can Jesus Christ derive authority and power to be Lord and Head of all others... how can they find in His election the assurance of their own, if He is only the object of election and not primarily and supremely the electing Subject, if he is only an elect creature and not primarily and supremely the electing Creator?”⁵⁸ Election for Barth is more than a whisper of comfort from heaven that God the Father has sent his Son to atone for an unknown number of elect. Much less is Jesus Christ a mirror which human faith could peer into to find the comfort that one has been saved from judgment. No, the gospel speaks more assuredly of the triumph of grace *over* judgment. The gospel of Jesus Christ, for Barth, is the good news that this Jew, the Son of David, is the one in whom the eternal love and mercy of God are given for all humanity. In this man is revealed the beginning of all God’s works and ways as the electing God.

3.1 Reformed Christology and Double Predestination

If we follow Barth in affirming that Jesus Christ is the subject of election, we are now able to begin reflecting on the particular material focus of Barth’s doctrine of predestination.⁵⁹ All the objectivity of predestination and all that we are aware of in

⁵⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 116.

⁵⁹ G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, trans. by Hugo Bekker (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1960), 156. Berkouwer says that for Barth Jesus Christ as the subject of election “is the root of Barth’s criticism and protest [against the classical Reformed doctrine].” Berkouwer understands that the

revelation is not simply a role-play of the God-man or instruction in justification by faith given in the form of Schweizer's "applicative grace." Rather, there is a heightening of focus on the content of revelation through the election of Jesus Christ now that we are assured that the covenant of grace revealed to humans in Jesus Christ is the faithful act of God's own determination for us in himself. McCormack speaks of this material verification: "It is an act of Self-determination by means of which God chooses in Jesus Christ love and mercy for the human race and judgment (reprobation) for himself. Choosing reprobation for himself in Jesus Christ means subjecting himself as the incarnate God to the human experience of death – and not just to any death, but to spiritual death in God-abandonment."⁶⁰ We no longer have to search for the answer to the question of where God's election is to be found. In affirming the deity of Christ, Barth has found God to be the true subject of election. Jesus Christ is the self-giving of God's fellowship with humanity, and he is also the true human, choosing obedience to God at the cost of his life. Because it is the eternal purpose of God to reconcile the world to himself in this concrete and dual action in Jesus Christ, "[t]he divine will took on a form and concretion in and with which God was no longer alone with Himself, but this man Jesus Christ was taken up into the will of God and made a new object of the divine decree, distinct from God ... its twofold content is that God wills to lose in order that man may gain. There is a sure and certain salvation for man, and a sure and certain risk

dogmatic ground of Barth's claim rests in support from Holy Scripture. He offers these quotations of Christ as demonstrations: "I know whom I have chosen" (John 13:18); "You did not choose me, but I chose you, and appointed you" (John 15:16); "But I chose you out of the world" (John 15:19). Indeed, Berkouwer warns his readers of the specific danger of a one-sided, objective presentation of Jesus Christ and his election; he cautions the reader not to "fall into the Nestorian heresy by over-emphasizing Christ's role as the Chosen One and underestimate the trinitarian mystery." *Ibid.*, 159.

⁶⁰ McCormack, "Grace and Being," 98.

for God.”⁶¹ Here Jüngel’s statement that “*Praedestinatio gemina is praedestinatio dialectica*” (double predestination is dialectical predestination) is apt.⁶²

Because predestination deals essentially with God’s own righteousness, the foreground of predestination is referenced to the doctrine of justification. For humanity, election is no achievement accomplished by individual faith, nor is it something merely evidenced by a faith that is God-given; it is, rather, a triumph given through God’s own confrontation with the powers of God-forsakenness and the realization of the eternal will of God in the covenant of grace. Because God has determined himself to be for grace to humanity, “[i]n this one man Jesus, God puts at the head and in the place of all other men the One who has the same power as Himself to reject Satan and to maintain and not surrender the goodness of man’s divine creation and destiny.... The rejection which all men incurred, the wrath of God under which all men lie, the death which all men must die, God in his love for men transfers from all eternity to Him in whom He loves and elects for them....”⁶³ Just as predestination in Barth begins with a new notion of God’s covenantal ontology, a new reality of humanity’s justification appears when election is dialectically fulfilled in Jesus’s death and resurrection. Election comes as grace to humanity by exacting a great cost from God. The decree of God in Jesus Christ is that the power of judgment and sin will be taken away from humanity; instead of these things which are willed and chosen by humans, God will give them the positive will of his own overflowing glory.⁶⁴ The justification of humanity occurs only because of the primary decision of God to glorify his Son by making him the sacrifice to end the power of that

⁶¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 162.

⁶² Jüngel, *God’s Being is in Becoming*, 92.

⁶³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 123.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 172.

which is never willed by God to begin with but must be rejected. It is the justification of God's own will to share his glory with his creatures, who are overcome in their weakness by sin and death. This is what moves God in eternity to covenant with himself, to say Yes to humanity in himself (and thereby to say No to evil). In Barth's doctrine of election is found a strong current stemming from the Reformed doctrine of justification.

The fact that election means the justification of God's way with humanity and the blessing of mercy is summarized in the content of what Barth refers to in double predestination. The approach taken is consistent with the supralapsarian covenant of grace, but in a "purified" form.⁶⁵ It is supralapsarian in that the decree precedes the creation, yet the decree itself in Barth's treatment is defined by its Christological content. Against the traditional form, there is no pre-temporal division of humanity into two groups. Rather, God is free to love humanity in grace by making a concrete decree governing the election and rejection of the incarnate Son — and thereby humanity in general. Because humanity is thus embraced in the freedom of God, there is no independent humanity as such that lies hidden before the fall of Adam or ever in the will of God. Double predestination is grace as well because it means that the human is powerless to constitute its existence outside of that which God intends for all people in Jesus Christ. A person can try to deny the election of Jesus Christ, of course, but the

⁶⁵ Jackson, "Jesus Christ as the God who Loves in Freedom," 129. Jackson's emphasis develops around the notion of the perichoresis of the Trinity. The argument is that because of the perichoresis of the modes of being in God the fundamental unity of the Trinity is preserved even though Barth radically pushes the unity to its limits by allowing the economic determination of the Son of God in time to constitute what is known about the immanent Godhead. Jackson explains this Trinitarian unity as follows: "even though election occurs in eternity at the foundation of all God's ways and works with the world, election remains a free self-determination within the inner-trinitarian *perichoresis*, not a constitution of the divine life by its proleptic relationship with the world *ad extra*." (*ibid.*, 136) Note: Jackson keeps room open for a qualified version of the *Logos asarkos* in Barth, which he will introduce in the following chapter (4, "The Eternal Lordship of the Son, In Defense of the *Logos Asarkos*"). This is import for his argument that the notion of God's freedom in reconciliation (*Church Dogmatics* II.1) guides the reading of election in *Church Dogmatics* II.2.

effect is to live the lie of the life that is without God — which is the very thing that Barth's theology at this point precludes as something impossible. Furthermore, the good that God intends for his creation cannot be realized outside of divine grace. This is even so when it comes to the presence of divine rejection in the life of humanity in the form of sin. Double predestination also means that sin can be known for what it truly is: a denial of the truth, a lie.

3.2 Jesus Christ the Rejected

That God in Jesus Christ is the one who chooses to drink the cup of the liar, the rejected, is the gospel of double predestination too. The primary question is not, therefore, whether any particular man or woman, any particular group or even race is “reprobate,” but rather, a much more important and basic question. That question is how any person can actually create the possibility of living the lie, “the perverse belief in what God has not decreed”?⁶⁶ Barth's final and paradoxical answer is that no human can truly live out what has already been put to death by God in the rejection of Jesus Christ. The point is well put in an important discussion of the idea of human participation in Barth's doctrine of election by Adam Nader, where he describes the “ontological impotence of sin” as follows:

It is possible, of course, to deny God and to deny one's being in Christ – that is what sin is – but this denial does not constitute the creation of a new and independent reality for human being apart from Jesus Christ. Human sin does not have the power to recreate human nature. Instead, ontologically speaking, sin is the decision of human beings to exist outside of Jesus Christ and thus to exist outside of themselves, outside of their true being in Him. Sin is inhuman.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 107.

⁶⁷ Adam Nader, “‘A Differentiated Fellowship of Action’ Participation in Christ in Karl Barth's *Church Dogmatics*” (Ph.D. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 2005), 123.

Therefore in approaching the reality of divine predestination we cannot assume that whether or not people actually believe in it draws us closer to a situation that is prescribed by the will of God. What individuals determine about their own human situation before God's will for them is seemingly, in fact, of little consequence.⁶⁸ After all, as the Apostle Paul says, "Let God be true and every man a liar." (Rom. 3:4) The situation is as Berkouwer points out, in Barth's treatment of double predestination, we need to see that "Barth is centrally concerned about *light* and the *certainty* and the *triumph* of grace."⁶⁹ For what else can predestination mean for sinners other than that "God who is the Judge takes the place of the judged, and they are fully acquitted.... And that means their radical sanctification, separation and purification for participation in a true creaturely independence, and more than that, for the divine sonship of the creature which is grace for which from all eternity they are elected in the election of the man Jesus."⁷⁰

3.3 The Will of God Done on Earth as it is in Heaven

After all that we have seen of Barth's tight and dexterous control of the dogmatic idea of election in *Church Dogmatics* II.2, we will make one final point that will allow us to transition into the focus on individual rejection in *Church Dogmatics* §35.4. It is a recollection of the point we had developed in the first chapter, that of the dialectical

⁶⁸ I have attempted to find the appropriate wording. Perhaps, 'of little consequence' is not the most apt. In much more lucid writing, Mangina gets nearer to my meaning when he writes about the concerns of Barth's doctrine of election. Mangina says the real questions are "But *who* is this sovereign God? What sort of God is it who arbitrarily sorts humanity into two piles, the saved and the damned?" After all, if we have no material answer to these questions or "[i]f we can know nothing of God's ways, then perhaps there is no God after all." (Mangina, *Karl Barth*, op. cit., 68.) I mean of 'little consequence' in the sense that what measure or importance can be drawn from the 'pots' objectifying their status before the 'Potter.' See Isaiah 64:8 and Romans 9:21.

⁶⁹ Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth*, 107.

⁷⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 125.

methodology of Barth's theological description. This is noted not because of the bifurcated or complex intention of the material but rather because, even in the hands of Karl Barth, the doctrine of election remains a description of the God "who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light." (1 Timothy 6:16) This God is no less unintuitable and past human discovery than the one described in the *Epistle to the Romans*. Yet, along with Barth, we are faced with the profound singularity and "scandal of particularity" that surrounds the electing God who is revealed in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. This causes an almost visceral reaction when understood as Barth sees it — lying, as it were, plainly in the midst of history. Are we more attracted to this doctrine because Barth has alleviated the trauma of the *decretum absolutum* or the *mysterium tremendum*, and now we see clearly the eternal will of the divine covenant before us in the gospel of this man Jesus Christ?

It cannot be so. In Barth's doctrine of predestination, we have come close to the grace of the God who loves in freedom, yet on closer approach, perhaps we find that it has come too near. For Barth will not deny that it entails the awful truth of double predestination. The will of God is twofold, for there is a dialectic in the covenant of grace. Jesus Christ is both elected *and rejected*. The radical singularity of election in the Son of God turns over in the magnificent dialectical truth that even Satan, evil, and rejection are "given time" because of the justification of grace too. The doctrine of election in Barth's theology is, perhaps, most convincing because of the sheer weight of joy and hope that it conveys. Not just the elected will be grateful for unconditional grace, but the rejected and the godless will be as well, even though (for a time, a time in which God graciously permits them to live) they themselves do not will it to be so. However,

God's mercy in judgment means something more than the impotence of the creature to determine reality for itself. The brutal reality is that the Judge is, in Barth's theology, truly judged in our place; he has removed the possibility of rejection from all others, but in so doing, is himself rejected. By the power of the Holy Spirit on the night he was betrayed, Jesus Christ went into the darkness and offered himself on the frontier of that which is not willed by God, the Chaos, *das Nichtige*.⁷¹ This is the significance of the death of Jesus Christ in Barth's theology. Nevertheless, in the prayer of faith this action of Jesus is "fulfilling His will upon earth as in the eternal decree which precedes everything temporal it is already fulfilled in heaven," and thus it also bears the truth that the electing God is Jesus Christ.⁷²

4. Chapter Summary

In basic form we have moved through two features of Barth's doctrine of predestination in *Church Dogmatics* II.2. First, Barth locates the divine covenant of election in Jesus Christ as central to the material content of the doctrine of God. This, clearly, is to be understood as an attempt at the correction of the Reformed tradition's understanding of the doctrine of predestination. That Jesus Christ is the elect Son of God is acknowledged to be as sure as the divinity of the Son of Man who is crucified in faithfulness to the divine covenant and is resurrected by the Father's act of justification. The second feature is established upon the unity between God and human predestination revealed in Jesus Christ. Because Jesus Christ is the elected divine partner, he is also the electing partner, the subject of election. That is, Jesus Christ does not determine himself

⁷¹ Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 122.

⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 53.

to be just anyone; he is this one. The prophets and apostles are witnesses to God's willingness to be the electing God in the particular story of Jesus, the crucified Messiah of Israel.

On the whole, Barth's reorientation of the doctrine of election thus far can be read as an attempt within Reformed scholasticism to focus afresh on what it means to say that Jesus Christ is himself the electing God. Thus, there has been a constant affirmation that what humans know about the divine activity of judgment and grace is accounted for by God's decision to love the creature in divine freedom in Jesus Christ.⁷³ However, as we have seen, there is another side to Barth's treatment that remains to be more fully drawn out, and that concerns what God rejects. We shall turn to this question in the next chapter.

⁷³ Barth has often been criticized for leaving no space or time where God has not come with a definite intention of making human decision relative to God's determination. But this is to deny the account of freedom that Barth has presented in predestination. Abstract freedom is not a background or pre-condition to God's decision to love the creature; freedom is not to be against the control of another or to act out of unlimited possibility. Under Barth's dogmatic presentation, freedom and love are the self-interpretations of God's life for the fallen creature in the person of Jesus Christ. Theology ought to acknowledge that humans are not free to theorize about their own autonomous freedom because God has preemptively given a description of who the free human is in Jesus Christ. For Barth, this freedom is not against human freedom but is patiently for its sustenance and reality. A freedom which demands that humans decide for themselves to be for or against grace does not exist because it is the hollow shadow of what God has not chosen. Election means that human freedom is real because that freedom is situated under the will of God to turn to the creature in grace and not in judgment. Barth does not allow the situation of grace to stand in an unspecified, abstract form. That humans remain free is a gift given by the differentiation of God's will. The will of God is that the Son be elected to die for the freedom of creation. In his election to be rejected, Jesus Christ gives himself over to that which is not the will of God. Rejection is a false necessity fulfilled by Christ. Creaturely freedom is all that remains. Cf. Walter Mark Ralls, "The Problem of Sin and the Possibility of Freedom," in "Karl Barth and the Subject of Modernity: The Theological *Aufhebung* of the Modern Self," (Ph.D. diss. Princeton Theological Seminary, 1999), 161-178.

Chapter Three

Judas Iscariot and the Rejection of Jesus Christ

This chapter argues that Barth's doctrine of rejection, an extended account of which is found in §35.4 of *Church Dogmatics* II.2, is to be interpreted as an essential feature in the election of Jesus Christ. In this section, Barth presents the story of Judas Iscariot as a case study showing how, in rejection, the sin of human freedom is overturned by divine grace. As an example of Barth's reorientation of individual rejection, the account of Judas brings to focus Barth's more theologically precise definition for the event of human rejection. Barth's position highlights the presence of grace rather than its absence. Barth shows how his Christological interpretation of election is an improvement upon the traditional Reformed view of rejection, in that it is able to speak more assuredly of the lordship of God over sin and evil.

Barth's doctrine of predestination is an improvement because it incorporates two significant achievements. These achievements have been portrayed in Chapter 1, as a consistent dialectical methodology, and in Chapter 2, as the appropriate Christological subject matter of predestination. Formally, we can resolve that these two achievements form an inference that affirms Barth's order of predestination. The inference is as follows:

Barth's doctrine of predestination is methodologically consistent in his theology. The methodology achieves its appropriate content in the change from theocentric to Christocentric predestination. Therefore, Barth's doctrine of predestination in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 can be trusted as being internally consistent and correct.

The success of Barth's reorientation is justified in that the election of God is united with the doctrine of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Two features of the thesis, however, remain unresolved. First, is Barth's doctrine of predestination part of a Reformed understanding, or is it merely a "Barthian" one? Second, Barth claims that God wills to be gracious to the creature in the election and rejection of Jesus Christ, but is this singular will truly revealed in the case of individual reprobation? In both these questions there lurks the worry that we have yet to see how Barth's doctrine matches both the scriptural presentation of the rejected and the purpose of the rejected in history.

This chapter will attempt to answer these two remaining questions by arguing that Barth's doctrine of election is properly Reformed and that it is singularly gracious because Barth sees in Judas Iscariot the glory of God's love in election concealed beneath Judas's rejection. The argument will be based on his excursus on Judas in *Church Dogmatics* §35.4. There are two steps that show Barth's doctrine of rejection to be consistently Reformed and gracious. The first step is to argue that Barth's dialectical methodology shows Judas's rejection to be asymmetrical to election. In the second step, the Christological content of predestination reveals that Judas's rejection is not synergistic with his human will of disobedience and sin. Both steps incorporate the two conditions given in the *Canons of Dordt* (I, Article 15) that rejection ought to have a different foundation than election and that it must be grounded in the determination of God and not the will of the creature. In arguing that Barth's doctrine of rejection fulfills the two conditions of *Dordt*, the prior discussion of the methodology and material of predestination will be the subjects that uphold the positive contribution of Barth's excursus on Judas.

A proper understanding of the terminology involved in our argument is required before we begin the study of Judas's rejection. This is due to the confusion that is possible in Barth's multilayered account of predestination in Judas, where Judas's rejection is also considered his election. The three terms that require definition are predestination, election, and rejection. Under the traditional conception, predestination refers to the action "by which from the entire human race to be created and destined to fall God foreordains some to life eternal, others to death eternal."¹ In Barth, the temporal human object of this definition is replaced with Jesus Christ such that we understand that all humanity is foreordained in Jesus Christ's eternal decision to be the elected and rejected human. Because of the Christological account of predestination, Barth does not refer to the dark mystery of God's unknown choice of the eternal destinies of humans. Predestination is wholly gracious because it refers to the election and rejection of Jesus Christ as the foundation of human life.

Inherent to predestination, then, is the dialectical notion that Jesus Christ is the electing God and the rejected human. As it constitutes a divine movement of grace toward creation, predestination is grounded upon the reality of God's living and loving act in which he gives himself to the creature by electing to bear the divine judgment on the fallen creature. Barth claims that this order is important because "[t]he history of the dogma [predestination] is shot through with a great struggle for the affirmation of the fact that in the mystery of election we have to do with light and not darkness, that the electing God and the elected man are known quantities and not unknown."² In this sense, predestination is equivalent to election. To be predestined in Christ is to be eternally

¹ Hepp, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 154.

² Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 146.

elected and never rejected. Predestination means that humans are pre-determined (or elected) by their relationship to the election and rejection of Jesus Christ.

After the definition of what it means that humans are predestined, we then can understand what Barth means by the election or rejection of individual humans. We find the meaning of individual election and rejection to be the calling of human life to witness to the truth of predestination. Barth distinguishes election from rejection in this way:

This, then, is how the elect and others differ from one another: the former by witnessing in their lives to the truth, the latter by lying against the same truth.... If the former testify by their truthful witness to what God wills, the latter no less expressively testify by their lying witness to what God does not will. Thus both serve the revelation of the divine will and decree which by nature are wholly light, but which cannot be revealed or recognized except as light and shade.³

An individual's election or rejection is not relative to that person's primary acknowledgment of their predestination in Jesus Christ. A person may live and possess all the characteristics of one who is rejected. This person may be disobedient and unbelieving, even denying that election is a reality. Nevertheless, this "rejected" person "can no more raise himself than Satan can to the dignity of the being created and sustained by God, to a positive and independent existence of his own. It is only improperly and incidentally (by the wisdom and patience of God) that he can be, as and because the elect genuinely *is* on the basis of the election of Jesus Christ as the beginning of all God's ways and works."⁴ The definition of election and rejection is first grounded in their solidarity in Jesus Christ, and only secondarily do they "reflect" what their separate predestination (as elected or rejected) is as it is found in the original and final election and rejection of Jesus Christ.

³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 346-347.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 451.

Predestination, election, and rejection are defined by Barth in a teleological order that begins and is centred on Jesus Christ. Barth does not fill their meaning with scriptural proof-texts or with a logic that defines them according to the economic role of the atonement as in *Dordt*. In other words, because the elected are delivered from the judgment of their sins does not mean that the rejected must be those who are not delivered from the judgment of their sins. This traditional method of defining God's predestinating action has a distinct "inside versus outside" form for what election or rejection means for individuals. Barth requires that these terms refer back to their original pattern and calling in Jesus Christ. These terms must reveal the truth about the trustworthy and unconditioned grace of God that Jesus Christ is the eternally predestined Saviour of the rejected. In turn, this means that "rejection is manifested indirectly ... as the limit beyond which there can take place either nothing at all or the purpose of the Gospel."⁵

1.1 The Asymmetry of Rejection

Humans are predestined in the election and rejection of Jesus Christ. To this extent, humans are determined by the dialectical reality of a decision that has already taken place, yet it is a decision that is defined in the present, what Barth calls, the time of the creature. This defining action is still grounded in the person of Jesus Christ, and so it challenges and over turns the powers and decisions of creaturely time. Humanity is constantly brought again and again against the boundary of God's eternal covenant love in predestination. Because of the gospel of God's forgiveness of sinners, there are times when humans do face up to what they already "are" by their inclusion as the elect on

⁵ *Ibid.*, 458.

account of grace. In this work of the gospel, it is the dialectical methodology of Barth's doctrine of election that presents a clear vision of election by showing its asymmetry to rejection. In this section, we will argue that, because Barth understands Jesus Christ to be the man punished by rejection, Judas's rejection does not mean that he is outside the gracious will of God. Rather, the rejection of Judas is his faithful witness to the godlessness and ruin of the person not willed by God. This is first affirmed by seeing that Judas's place as the "head" of the rejected is given to him by his opposition to God's covenant of grace. Under this feature, the dialectical methodology of Christocentric election affirms that the rejection of Judas has a completely different basis than does his election. As it regards his willful separation from the elected, Judas's rejection is completely negative.

1.2 Rejection and the Covenant of Grace

In the argument for the asymmetry of Judas's rejection, we inquire into the origin of Judas's rejection. The origin, of course, is not to be found in the static decree of God, but it arises within the shadow of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. For Barth, the only existence that the rejected can offer is that of the false choice of the human isolated against God. Barth separates the origin of the rejected from that of the elected by reflecting first on what the will of God is for the elect in the primal event of the covenant of grace.

In *Church Dogmatics* II.2, Barth examines the doctrine of God and the will of God in predestination together in a single account. It is predestination that is the beginning of all God's ways and works. This means that a covenant is established

between God the Father and the human creature in the election of Jesus Christ. In Barth's account, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is about more than the free condescension of a higher being to the limited existence of a human life *per se*, for the condescension is itself revelatory of the being of the one who condescends. Election is truly the overflowing of the glory that properly belongs to the Lord. That is, the lordship of God is found in Jesus Christ's electing will to be "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Colossians 1:15)

The election of Jesus Christ is the foundation of the blessing of the creature because it is God's will for humans to be found inside the election of God. However, for humanity to be included in God's covenant comes at a great cost to God. In Reformed orthodoxy, of course, this cost was the price of redemption paid by the Son of God for the elect who had been condemned with the rest of humanity under the federal headship of Adam, the first sinner. Election is here the reason that believers are brought out from judgment and death under Adam into justification and life, by virtue of the atonement paid for by Jesus Christ. In this way, there is an equivalency between the election of the sinner from judgment and the election of Christ into his atoning death; believers are elected for grace just as Jesus is elected for death.

Barth is opposed to this form of the doctrine of predestination because it assumes that it is possible to speak of predestination as if it was constituted in order to establish the covenant of redemption. Jesus Christ is not merely one elected by the Father to suffer for the sake of creatures; he is rather the electing God who gives himself for the sake of that which is positively willed for creation. In Barth's theology, Jesus Christ is the first human standing as the head of creation, not Adam. Only in this form is election the event

of a divine self-giving to that which exists outside of God. The strength of the approach lies in the separation of the uncreated and created, God and humanity. These two are covenantally related in the overflowing of God's freedom and grace in which they become partners. The blessing of humanity in election comes because God has made himself responsible for his creation.⁶ Humanity was never created in a neutral or abstract condition in which there was freedom to take responsibility for itself. The Word of God says that "all things have been created through him [Jesus Christ] and for him", and that, "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (Colossians 1:16 and John 1:3) To Barth this means that the order of creation is determined by the election of Jesus Christ — creation is no merely natural condition open to human interpretation.⁷ At the heart of Barth's doctrine of election we find that God's will is decisively for a covenant of grace between two unequal partners, God and humanity.

The covenant of grace is not merely wished by God; it is concretely willed by him in election. The difference between these two verbs is of utmost importance to Barth.⁸ The first suggests that there is a limitation or unrealized possibility in God's creation, whereas the second verb assumes that nothing can be opposed to the grace of election. As the eternal will of God, election is the single act in which God binds himself to be steadfast to the creature, and in which the creature is established in faithful obedience to the Lord.⁹ But this is only the will of God for that human who stands in the light of the

⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 124.

⁷ Here we see the depth of Barth's rejection of natural theology (*Church Dogmatics* II.1 §26) rooted in the doctrine of election.

⁸ Note as well that the difference is important in Barth's rejection of *apocatastasis*. This theory rests upon the coming of a future possibility in which there is only grace, which is then read back into the history of creation. In itself, it does not speak about creation as beginning in the electing will of God.

⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 125.

eternal election of Jesus Christ. The creature stands in the will of God by acknowledging that election is the ground of creaturely honour.

Creaturely honour is given by God not because humans deserve or merit it but because God wills it for them in order that they cannot receive that which God does not will. In Barth's Christocentric doctrine of predestination, God and his will are not divided by being subjected to the freedom of the creature, because the election of the man Jesus Christ is the true, predestining will of God. In Jesus Christ, God takes responsibility for the erring and perishing creation, precisely by triumphing over the one threat that stands against his will: that of a created being who turns away from God in sin by rejecting God's will, so becoming the creature who is "not-willed."

The lordship of Jesus Christ, in this sense and for this reason, is seen by Barth to be established through the event of Christ's own predestination to be rejected. Christocentric predestination is grace because its goal is rescue from the threat of the "shadow-side" of election, which is the human who is not willed by God, who rejects God's will. This is the chaos and threat from which God must rescue his creation. God does so by the election of Jesus Christ. In Jesus Christ, the evil possibility not willed by God is judged and passed over; it is rejected by being punished and defeated in the death of the Son of God.¹⁰

¹⁰ The rejection of independence and evil found here resembles Barth's later, much more fully developed account of evil as *das Nichtige* or nothingness in *Church Dogmatics* III.3, §50. While a thorough comparison between Barth's idea of nothingness and his understanding of rejection cannot be provided here, the idea of nothingness is the inner material basis for why it is that Barth sees the decree concerning Christ's rejection as a universal blessing. Jesus's suffering and death "means no more and no less than that in becoming man God makes himself responsible for man who became his enemy, and that He takes upon Himself all the consequences of man's action—his rejection and his death." (Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 124) The dialectical nature of predestination has its basis in the election of Jesus Christ, and means that grace is real for humanity because God has made evil his own concern. It is God's will that he be rejected. On the other hand, Jesus Christ makes the negation of what Barth calls the shadow-world the only reason why the power of evil still exists. Evil is the "*Nichtige*" or the "Nihil" that exists only by virtue of its

For Barth, the doctrine of rejection is not the description of God's justice carried out on the reprobate, nor is rejection based on some separation of humanity from forgiveness according to God's will in heaven. Rather, Barth's surprising reversal is that rejection is distinct from election because it is the wrath of God which comes upon Jesus Christ himself. Jesus Christ becomes the rejected one, precisely as the Lord of the shadow-side of election. The possibility that God could will the rejection of the sinful creature is, in Christ's rejection, seen to be a falsehood. Rejection means, instead, grace for humanity because the handing of Jesus over to judgment makes the possibility of the rejection of all others void, one made hollow because the rejected cannot give to himself or herself a positive or independent existence. Barth defines the shadow-side of Christ's election in this way:

The rejection of mankind is the rejection borne eternally and therefore for all time by Jesus Christ in the power of divine self-giving. It is, therefore, the rejection which is 'rejected.' Because this is so, the rejected man is from the very outset and in all circumstances quite other than the elect. He is the man who is *not* willed by the almighty, holy and compassionate God. Because God is wise and patient in His non-willing also, he still exists and is not simply annihilated.¹¹

The doctrine of election is grace for the creature because it involves the dialectical truth that Jesus Christ is elected and rejected. God's will acts in truth by dividing light from darkness, creation from chaos, and loved from unloved. Those elected in Christ receive what God has ordered and separated — judgment for unwilled freedom received by God and undeserved mercy given to the guilty creature. In Barth's eyes, this is the

negation. (Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 100) By this negation, Barth means not that evil does not any longer exist, but that it exists only in a limited and mastered fashion. God knows that his creatures are guilty in their freedom because of their disobedience, but he knows first that he also has seen their powerlessness and has elected them in Jesus Christ.

¹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 450.

manner in which God enacts the justification of his creatures, calling them to see in the steadfastness of Jesus Christ their rejection passed over and their election secured.

1.3 Israel, Chosen to be Rejected

Unlike the Reformed scholastics whom Barth read with great attention, Barth's account of predestination comes before the theatre of his massive treatment of creation in *Church Dogmatics* III opens. What is foundational in God's work *ad extra* is the *covenant* between God and humanity, not the creation of a world in general. For Barth, the free self-determination of God to be in covenant with humankind is the beginning of all God's ways and works, and stands at the centre of all that can be seen in creation and history. Before the will of the first man, Adam, existed, there was the will of God in Jesus Christ to be the steadfast God in becoming the faithful human, elected to be rejected. In language reminiscent of John 1:1, Barth explains this primal relationship between Creator and creature:

In the beginning it was the choice of the Father Himself to establish this covenant with man by giving up His Son for him, that He Himself might become man in the fulfilment of His grace. In the beginning, it was the choice of the Son to be obedient to grace, and therefore to offer up Himself and to become man in order that this covenant might be made a reality.¹²

The beginning of God's ways and works *ad extra* is the delivery of Jesus Christ to suffering for the judgement of human sinfulness, so that in everything, even in the rejection of creaturely evil, God might share his glory with another.

As gracious as this picture appears, for Barth, it is still at a distance from speaking of the actual blessing of God to his creatures because it has no concrete form. While the God of Jesus Christ is the Lord of mercy, rescuing his creation from Satan and evil, we

¹² *Ibid.*, 101.

have yet to deal with Jesus Christ in the flesh, as the historical individual and the Jewish Messiah. Barth interprets the doctrine of rejection, however, from the material perspective of the subject of election, Jesus Christ. He finds in the story of the electing God's concrete work in Jesus Christ in Scripture the answer to the question how God enacts rejection. Jesus Christ himself thus gives shape to the interpretation of rejection as it is found in Scripture.

The theological context for Barth's Christological account of rejection is Israel's calling as an elect people. In Scripture, the people of Israel are called out in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to bear witness to the blessing of God's gracious judgment against sin.¹³ Barth characterizes the role of Israel as follows: "This is the disobedient, idolatrous Israel of every age: its false prophets and godless kings; the scribes and Pharisees; the high-priest Caiaphas at the time of Jesus; Judas Iscariot among the Apostles. This is the whole of Israel on the left hand, sanctified only by God's wrath."¹⁴ It is the covenant love of God alone that keeps them until the day when God himself delivers Jesus Christ up for their idolatrous affairs. Similarly, on this account, it is the Son's obedience to the divine covenant that reveals why he comes as a Jewish man, elected to be rejected. The history of Israel is thus tied to the mystery of God's will to bring mercy upon those who resist him. Because Israel again and again witnesses to human sinfulness in its handling of God's promises, its history does not belong to itself alone, for Israel bears witness to the will of God in the divine rejection of sinful humanity. Barth interprets Israel's election as

¹³ Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 53.

¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 287.

a function of the doctrine of God, but crucially, he sees the election of Jesus Christ the Jew as the fulfilment and *telos* of Israel's entire history.¹⁵

1.4 Judas, The Head of the Rejected

If the context for Barth's Christological reinterpretation of rejection is the history of Israel as the chosen people, then at its centre is the story of Jesus, and in particular, the story of the passion. In his account of the passion narrative, Barth's unique approach to the doctrine of election reaches its most powerful expression. It is a compressed story, in which the wickedness of human judgment issues in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. For Barth, the narrative itself becomes the quintessential expression of election because in it,

¹⁵ This fact reveals a largely unacknowledged and unexplored feature within Reformed predestination. Barth's Christocentric election provides the Reformed tradition a strong argument against the supersession of Israel by the church. For Barth, Israel's unity with Jesus Christ is a service that endures, one that cannot be nullified by Israel or taken over by the church. Barth's positive reflection on the service of Israel of the Old Testament but no less the Jews of the present is confidently affirmed because it is truly a service of undeserved mercy. It is a case of mercy because Israel, according to God's will, has actually done the service of the rejected and because that service is the delivery of the gospel to the undeserving Gentiles. This service is certainly not a bright and joyful one, and sometimes Barth's emphasis on the importance of Israel is rather pale and minimal. This is the case especially when he bases Jewish-Christian solidarity on the Jewish flesh of Jesus ("Whoever has Jesus Christ in faith cannot wish not to have the Jews. He must have them along with Jesus Christ as His ancestors and kinsmen. Otherwise he cannot have even the Jew Jesus." Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 289). Yet, as Barth's account of predestination pronounces, whatever the rejection that the people of Israel face and all the suffering that it entails, "they do not have to suffer that which Jesus Christ suffered, but Jesus Christ has suffered for them that which they are spared by His suffering, that which God has therefore spared them by not sparing His own Son." (*ibid.*, 495). Indeed, in this sense, even Israel is delivered and continues to live by mercy. See Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 77-84 for a succinct presentation of the election of Israel in theology of the Jewish theologian Michael Wyschogrod compared to that of Barth; and Sonderegger, "The Church Dogmatics: Barth's Doctrine of the Election of Israel," in *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 81-133 for an extensive portrayal of the rejection of Judas as Barth's example of the election of Israel. Also, see Mark R. Lindsay, "The Function of 'Israel' in the 'Doctrine of Reconciliation,'" in *Barth, Israel, and Jesus: Karl Barth's Theology of Israel* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 87-105 where Lindsay presents Barth's doctrine of election as the presupposition by which Barth's doctrine of reconciliation is able to reach out so positively toward Israel's enduring covenantal relationship with God. Lindsay says, "In affirming the ongoing validity of Israel's covenant with God, Barth is reiterating the message of *CD* II/2. However, just as his affirmation of the continuing Jewish election was the necessary interpretive frame in which (and only in which) it was possible for him to employ Judas as a cipher of disobedience and rejection in §35.4, so too the affirmation of Israel here [in reconciliation] is the necessary context for interpreting his excursus on God's journey into the 'far country' — that is, the realm of sin, death and decay, into which, of course, the Son of God came as (perishing) Jewish flesh." *Ibid.*, 92.

divine grace is delivered by sinful human hands. A paradox or dialectic shapes the event because in it, the covenant of predestination comes to pass in a way that must turn over sinful human willing into divinely determined rejection. That is, Israel's election to be the people who reject their Lord in disobedience must be overturned by the revelation of God's sovereign mercy. As those called in election, Israel witnesses to the faithfulness of God's election, which implies that even in their rebellion and waywardness, Israel cannot but be in concert with God's blessing of all nations through Israel. Israel is elect in this way not because of its aims, objectives or achievements, but because it is from first to last elected by God, so standing in relationship with Jesus Christ.¹⁶

The event of Israel's highest rebellion against the will of God, however, occurs precisely in its rejection of Jesus the Messiah. Barth finds in this dreadful event not just the exposure of Israel's aspirations of piety and faithfulness as infected by sin, but rather, the crowning moment of Israel's "joyless and inglorious" witness to God's covenantal purpose in history. When the gracious Lord is finally born of Jewish flesh, his own people can only turn away from the light. Israel will keep company with Jesus only up to the point at which he exposes their sin and faithlessness. Then they will grab hold of the man in whom their own election is determined and take away his freedom, giving him over to the Gentiles to be put to death.

The ambitions of Israel, its judgment and its rejection, come to precise representation for Barth in the figure of the Apostle, one of the Twelve, Judas Iscariot. In the refusal of their Messiah, Israel finds its head and representative in Judas, the one who

¹⁶ Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 91.

carries out the will of Israel.¹⁷ In the nighttime betrayal of Judas, Israel's secret sins are uncovered in all their pettiness and weakness. However, the darkness and frailty of Israel's sins are seen only if they are brought before their controlled and conquered existence in the election of Jesus Christ. Judas's work as the rejected disciple and head of Israel is his refusal to acknowledge the election of Jesus. Judas must isolate himself in judgment against his Lord. It is precisely then, however, Barth can also interpret Judas's rejection as mercy. According to Barth's Christocentric doctrine, the shadow of rejection can only be seen properly when cast against the image of God in human form, the steadfast God and man Jesus Christ.

The approach to the doctrine of rejection developed in *Church Dogmatics* II.2 §35.4 is massively preoccupied with the story of the Apostle Judas Iscariot. Barth sees Judas as a problematic case, where evidence and precedents must be presented in order to justify the peculiar role of this elected disciple, whose sin is seen to be in league with Satan, and yet whose actions end in the grace of redemption. Throughout the excursus, however, Barth's attention is not only focused on Judas, the religious idealist who suffers and dies as the representative "head" of Jewish rejection, but also on Jesus Christ, the other "head" who in fact takes the place of the rejected, even of Judas himself. Katherine Sonderegger pictures in dramatic fashion the nighttime betrayal of Judas, Jesus's foil:

Caught in the smoky glare of torches, the light of a nighttime arrest, Judas confronts Christ alone. Face to face, Judas meets the Elected One who is rejected; in betrayal, Christ meets the rejected apostle, still elected. They are doublets, Barth writes; they belong together. When all the disciples scatter, when the faithful deny their master, when the forces of Jew and Gentile have had their way, when 'all has been accomplished,' Judas and Jesus are left to their solitary deaths. They alone are the true elect of Israel. They alone embody the elect, each to his own task and his own painful end.¹⁸

¹⁷ Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 83.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

This scene rightly captures the inner truth that the rejection of Judas is theologically limited by the gracious will of God seen in *Jesus's* rejection. Judas's rejection testifies not merely to the futility of this or that human attempt at the service of God, but to the gospel's promise that the curse which threatens humanity has been turned into blessedness, in part, indeed, by Judas's own paradoxical service to the fulfilment of the covenant. Though Judas considers himself equal to his Lord, he cannot escape his calling as the "head" of those whose rejection is passed over in mercy. Barth's interpretation of rejection thus follows the divine order in which God says Yes to the creature and No to the one who is not willed from the beginning.¹⁹

The excursus on Judas is, of course, troubling for many who nevertheless appreciate Barth's paragraphs on Jesus, the elected and electing God.²⁰ It is perhaps the stark realism of Barth's reading that causes these readers to hesitate in seeing Judas as

¹⁹ The distinction between the realities of election and rejection through Barth's Christocentric doctrine is at the centre of concern over whether Barth argues for a renewal of the *apocatastasis*. The current debate is lifted from two features of Barth's election: 1. that rejection is real only for Jesus Christ and 2. Barth denies the reality of the *apocatastasis* (*Church Dogmatics* II.2, 417-419). See Michael O'Neil, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election" *Evangelical Quarterly*, 76:4 (2004): 316-318. This article is the second of an ongoing debate between Oliver Crisp and O'Neil on the inner consistency Barth's doctrine of election, particularly, whether it is universal or not. Crisp has argued that Barth's doctrine is inconsistent with itself, that Barth says all are elect in Christ but not guaranteed to be elect. (Oliver Crisp, "On Barth's Denial of Universalism," *Themelios*, 29:1 [2003]: 18-29.) O'Neil counters in favour of Barth's concrete election and carefully defends Barth's rejection of the *apocatastasis*. (Michael O'Neil, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election," op. cit., 311-26.) Crisp responded to this by appealing to the 'spirit' of Barth's doctrine instead of the 'letter.' In this response, Crisp modifies his definition of Barth's inconsistency by portraying the possibility of reading the 'spirit' of Barth's election as being non-universalist and therefore consistent. (Oliver Crisp, "The Letter and Spirit of Barth's Doctrine of Election: a Response to Michael O'Neil," *Evangelical Quarterly*, 79:1 [2007]: 53-67.) A component that is missing from this debate and one that might offer at least clarification, if not resolution, is that of the nature of the rejected in the concrete form of Judas Iscariot. O'Neil finds Barth's theological exegesis of Judas as one of his 'strained interpretations of Scripture,' and Crisp does even take account of what rejection concretely means for Barth's doctrine. However modest our contribution, we hope to add greater context to this debate by bringing the material on rejection in Barth's theology into clearer focus by this examination of Judas.

²⁰ Those who find an unbalanced strain coming from Barth's interpretation of Judas are as follows: Michael O'Neil, "Karl Barth's Doctrine of Election," 325; Bromiley, *Introduction to the Theology of Karl Barth*, 97; David Ford, *Barth and God's Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981), 84-91; William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 182-191; Anthony Cane, *The Place of Judas in Christology* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), 60-70.

representative of what it is to be “rejected.” Judas is devout, taking care to follow God’s will. He lives as though he is the master of his own sin, able to keep himself in God’s favour as the elect. In his private and objective judgment, Judas sets himself against God’s chosen Saviour, and therefore, he serves as a true witness to the opposition between the elected and the rejected. No less in Judas than in the *Epistle to the Romans* does Barth understand that the religious thought of humans on earth is set against God who gives himself in Jesus Christ. Even though Judas attempts to conceal his disobedience under its good ethical judgment, in the final act of his service as the rejected he is the betrayer of Jesus. Of all the disciples, Judas, the rejected, is in the closest proximity to the elected, Jesus. It is in this proximity that Barth finds Judas to be “*the great sinner of the New Testament.*”²¹

For Barth to load the character of Judas with all the weight of his sin as the rejected, at an initial moment, fits with the traditional Reformed account of the doctrine of rejection. It appears as though Barth would agree with Heppé when, in the *Reformed Dogmatics*, he flatly concludes that “[i]f some are reprobate, then there is reprobation. *Illud est, ergo et hoc.* The assumption is proved by the examples of Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Judas Iscariot.”²² However, to assume that Barth agrees with the traditional doctrine at this point is not to take Barth’s methodology seriously. Barth disagrees with the traditional Reformed basis for rejection because it assumes that the asymmetry between election and rejection is negative because of that which the rejected lack, the forgiveness of their sins. The reverse, however, is true in Barth’s case of the rejection of Judas.

²¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 461.

²² Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 180.

1.5 Reformulated Asymmetry in Rejection

The argument for the asymmetry of Barth's doctrine of rejection will be concluded by showing that Judas's rejection has a positive and a negative function, which is the reverse of the traditional doctrine. Barth's Christocentric account of predestination means that, in its work in Judas, rejection serves as a mirror to what is true about the rejection of Jesus Christ. This being the case, the separation of the rejected from the elect is an objective fulfilment of what it means to be isolated against the wrath of God. This side is the positive role of Judas's rejection. Barth does not miss the importance of Judas's hatred for Mary's extravagant footwashing.²³ Judas takes her devotion to Jesus, the Messiah, as the cause for his criticism of the elect; it is his desire to be different from the elect. On the other hand, what Judas is not given is the ability to define himself apart from the elected. In the case of Mary's footwashing of Jesus and of Jesus's footwashing of the disciples, Judas is not given the possibility to objectively define himself apart from the elect.²⁴ Contrary to the traditional view, Judas shows that the rejected are not "caused" by the denial of grace, but rather, they are denied the possibility of being excluded from the grace given to the elect.

In Barth's eyes, both footwashings are signs that the supreme devotion that has initiated the whole work of God's predestination in Jesus Christ is manifest in the mutual dialectic of the elected and the rejected. For the rejected Judas, this means his cause is lost because he is, in Barth's definition, a "walking contradiction." The positive, self-

²³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 461-463.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 471-475.

willed separation and the negative, aggravating connection of the rejected to God's election is radically self-destructive. Barth describes Judas's destruction in this way:

“...Judas perished within himself... His creaturely being could no longer endure the monstrosity of the contradiction in which he had enmeshed himself, and so it had to explode like a released hand-grenade... The man who kills Jesus also kills himself, even though he may not technically be a suicide.”²⁵

Because the goal of Judas's determination is his betrayal of Jesus Christ, he lives out the witness, not of one who was denied the grace given to the elect, but of one who lived in service to the elect in the shadow of the rejection of Jesus Christ. In Barth's picture of rejection, the grace of God does not come to Judas in his objective alignment with God. Instead, the elected man, Jesus, comes to him in grace on the night of his betrayal.

2.1 The Non-Synergism of Rejection

The second part of the case study of the rejection of Judas argues that in Barth's doctrine of rejection the will of God's grace is placed over the will of the rejected. The doctrine of rejection incorporates non-synergism primarily due to the Christocentric content that provides its foundation, which unites the elected with the rejected. Since Jesus Christ is the subject of rejection in the covenant of grace, Judas's intention to be the one who stands apart from God's chosen one, no matter how unwavering his intention may be, cannot stand against the truth of his inclusion in the purpose of election. In the overturning of Judas's rejection by his inclusion in the primal decision of God to give his Son for the redemption of the creature, Judas can only reveal through his election that grace is the beginning and end of God's ways and works.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 470-471.

The purpose of the argument that Barth's doctrine of rejection is non-synergistic is to support the thesis that his reorientation of predestination is a concrete and valid advancement of the Reformed understanding of predestination. This section attempts to prove this by arguing first that Judas's rejection is the subject of God's will, and is understood correctly when united to the rejection of Jesus Christ. The second argument is that the betrayal or delivery of Jesus to his final humiliation and death by Judas is the positive cleansing of the gospel by the "traditioning" of its apostolic delivery. Here Barth pays remarkable attention to Judas's predestination as a cipher for the apostolic witness, and he finds that the act of betrayal, properly understood, is the earthly calling of God's gracious will.

2.2 Jesus and Judas United in Rejection

In the first section of this chapter, Judas was portrayed in great contrast to the elected. His sin, although not the basis of his rejection, was the substance of his witness to rejection. Now, the argument seeks to turn Judas's opposition against the elected to his service in the gospel for the elected. As positive as the case for Judas's service may seem in Barth's portrayal, it actually continues the disruptive role of Barth's doctrine of election. The disruption is caused, of course, by the Christological material of the doctrine. Our argument here is that Judas's rejection can only be beneficial for the elect if it is completely dissolved (*aufgehoben*) under the light of Jesus's rejection.²⁶ In Barth's understanding, this means that Judas's rejection, in all its banal sin and wasted discretion, accomplishes its purpose not by itself but by its part in the overpowering authenticity of Jesus's rejection.

²⁶ Mangina, *Karl Barth*, 81.

Barth finds greater theological significance in the character of Judas than that of a depraved man receiving the just reward for his foolish sin. Judas becomes, for Barth, the representative or the “type” of dialectical predestination in the form of the rejected.²⁷

Stephen Holmes makes a point that ought to be stressed as we peer into the layers of what rejection means for Judas. He says that, rather than election *per se*, “one of his [Barth’s] most original moves was to offer a Christologically determined doctrine of reprobation.”²⁸ Barth finds the central problem with the doctrine of predestination in the

²⁷ By the use of the word “type” we intend a more theologically substantial and actual representation than its specifically literary or hermeneutical function with regard to Barth’s excursus on Judas. The fact that Barth places his excursus in §35.4 as a “Judas interpretation” within the doctrine of God signals that he is not dealing with Judas in a merely literary, interpretative way, as a type. We have intentionally overlooked works on Barth’s “Judas interpretation” by those who explicate it as an example of his hermeneutical methodology, i.e. typology, analogy, or even anagogy (mystical interpretation). Instead, our treatment of this excursus is set in the frame of Barth’s theological defense of Christocentric double predestination — which is where Barth himself locates the account. In the excursus, Barth sees Judas as a problem for the doctrine of rejection, and so he treats it as a theological case needing adjudication through evidence, argument, and precedent. For those who read the excursus as a demonstration of Barth’s hermeneutics see, David Ford, *Barth and God’s Story: Biblical Narrative and the Theological Method of Karl Barth in the Church Dogmatics* (Frankfurt: Verlag Peter Lang, 1981), 84-93; and Paul McGlasson, *Jesus and Judas: Biblical Exegesis in Barth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 135-147.

²⁸ Stephen Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 265. While Holmes is criticizing the theology of Jonathan Edwards, at this point he is directing a ground level critique at Calvinist predestination, upon which the theology of Edwards is broadly based. Holmes argues that Barth corrects the insufficiency of the Calvinist tradition by not retreating into the *sylogismus practicus* of Calvin but by uniting the person of Christ with the existence of the reprobate. Oliver Crisp takes Holmes to task on both claims that Edwards’s doctrine of reprobation is insufficient and that Barth’s is consistent. (“Karl Barth and Jonathan Edwards on Reprobation [and Hell]” in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, eds. David Gibson and Daniel Strange [Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2008], 301.) Crisp both outlines the position of Holmes and refutes it. (*ibid.*, 316, 300-322) However, our preference on this point is with Holmes. This is because the argument of the chapter finds the Reformed tradition in danger of affirming that predestination is enacted in *eodem modo* (“in the same manner”) for both election and rejection. Therefore, the tradition encounters a difficulty in providing a substantial argument against the symmetry of election and rejection. The consensus on this difficulty is succinctly recorded in G.C. Berkouwer (“Election and Rejection,” in *Divine Election*, 172-217). Berkouwer acknowledges that the problem relates to the desire to affirm the non-causal nature of predestination principally found in the *Canons of Dordt*: the asymmetry of election and rejection is not found in two types of human actions, faith and sin. (*Canons of Dordt*, First Point, “Divine Election and Reprobation,” Article V, 123: “The cause or blame for this unbelief, as well as for all other sins, is not at all in God, but in man. Faith in Jesus Christ, however, and salvation through him is a free gift of God.”) Therefore, he affirms that in Calvin and the Reformed confessions, preaching and commentaries, “the election of God is repeatedly discussed, while rejection is not mentioned.” (*Divine Election*, 194) As a

Reformed tradition from Calvin onwards to be located in a “Christless” doctrine of reprobation.²⁹ With an important question, Barth advances the fundamental problem in this form of the doctrine. If Jesus Christ is the electing God, how could it ever be that he chooses the Apostle who will betray him and yet that this disciple must remain apart from him and in this sense nonessential?³⁰

The attention that Barth pays to Judas as a type of the rejected is far from an arbitrary decision to manipulate Scripture theologically. It arises instead from the theological power of the object of revelation, Jesus Christ. Judas as a type of the rejected is not understood in separation from the real time event of that man’s life and choices. The story of his life as the rejected is in one sense a question of history, yet the story of Judas is clearly treated as something of more than historical interest in Barth’s theology. As Oliver O’Donovan observes, “when history is made the categorical matrix for all meaning and value, it cannot be taken seriously *as history*. A story has to be a story about something; but when everything is story there is nothing for the story to be about.”³¹ That Barth’s teleological ordering of election is determined on the basis of the being of God, rather than solely in relation to historical events, has a profound influence on the how the story of Judas is to be judged and understood. Because God has

final comment on rejection, Berkouwer, echoing Herman Bavinck, prefers to leave room for the place of the inscrutability of divine mercy. *Ibid.*, 206-7.

²⁹ Gockel, “One Word and All is Saved,” 202, n. 28. Gockel explains that Barth’s position that Jesus Christ is elected for reprobation is an idea that was not presented in Pierre Maury’s 1936 Geneva lectures. Therefore, in all respects, Barth’s presentation of Christ as the object of a double predestination (elected and rejected) is wholly original to Barth. Gockel points this out, claiming that ‘The concept of an “election for reprobation” and of Jesus Christ as the electing God who chooses reprobation for himself, is Barth’s own invention.’ *Barth and Schleiermacher on the Doctrine of Election*, 162, n. 14.

³⁰ Colin Gunton, *The Barth Lectures*, 113. Gunton sees how Barth’s dogmatic positioning of Jesus as the electing God causes the material issue of the rejected to appear in Judas. He observes that, “it leaves Barth with an interesting problem in that Jesus elected Judas Iscariot. So is Judas one of the elect?”

³¹ Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order: An outline for evangelical ethics* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 60.

determined to be gracious to humanity in giving his Son for the forgiveness of sin, and because divine election has its origin outside of history, what here happens in history is of eschatological significance, and is not simply a movement imminent in time toward some tragic human destiny.³² As Barth sees things, it is the closeness of Judas to Jesus rather than any difference between the two that must be emphasized in order to affirm consistently that the cross and resurrection are acts of God's judgment and grace for the sake of humanity, and that they are at work even to this day. This is the key orientation that Barth provides for any kind of interest in the doctrine of rejection; the doctrine of rejection can only be a knowledge that God is for the rejected in eternity by being against him in history.³³

It is no secret, of course, what the implications of Barth's doctrine of election are for the blessing of Judas. That Jesus Christ is both the rejected and the elected has been the constant foundation of this volume of the *Church Dogmatics*. This means that Judas can only be "rejected" in the sense that Judas is the one who shows the lie about himself, and sets himself against that which is true about him by virtue of God's will in Jesus Christ. That Judas lives as a liar in this contingent sense is explained by Barth as follows:

³² O'Donovan, *Resurrection and the Moral Order*, 64.

³³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 458. Barth identifies three dogmatic points prior to the excursus on Judas which are set in corresponding opposition to the elect as the purpose of the rejected. Therefore, God's being 'against' the rejected in history is not absolute but dependent on his being for them in eternity. First, the rejected are known only in their service to the elected. "In the reality of the existence peculiar to him, it is the determination of the rejected to manifest the recipients of the Gospel whose proclamation is the determination of the elect." (455) Second, the rejected are objectively known in their defeated status. "The rejected is the man whose only witness – and most powerfully in his false picture of God – is to himself and his false choice as the man isolated over against God, the man who at the deepest level and in the deepest sense has nothing at all to say." (456) Third, the rejected are subjectively known in their service to the Gospel. It is God who turns to humanity by giving his Word, which is "addressed to the man who in and of himself is rejected, who has fallen a prey and is delivered up to absolute destruction. But the concrete form of the purpose of the Gospel is its proclamation and faith in it, the work of the Holy Spirit in the summoning of the elect man, in which his whole determination to blessedness, thankfulness and witness has its basis and origin." (457)

It [the rejected person's individuality] consists in the fact that the 'individual' does not accept as grace, and gratefully correspond to, the distinction and dignity conferred on him by the one and only God. Instead, he desires and attempts to make and vindicate them as his natural possession, as a right which is inherent in his human existence, and therefore as his claim upon God: as if the fact that God regards, intends, wills, loves and chooses him rested upon his own abilities and merits; as if God did not do this for His own will's sake; as if the covenant – the covenant of grace – which God has made with him were one of those groups; as if he could therefore exist on his own account in relation to God, as a partner in God's covenant, in the same way as he is able – by the goodness of God – to do so in relation to the many and even the totality of his fellow-men, with all his obligations and duties towards them.³⁴

Said in a style that is typical of Barth, Judas does live in this “as if” condition, but he does live it. The rejected are those who do subjectively live in a manner that is isolated from their objective election. In this sense, the rejection of Judas is the false basis for the sinful actions that the Gospels record. Judas's sin is not the universal basis of his rejection, as if God merely left Judas on his own apart from Jesus Christ. Rather, Barth's Christocentric doctrine of rejection shows that Jesus Christ is the real reason why Judas lives as the rejected. After all, the offensive wickedness of his service can only appear in his direct confrontation against the grace of God in Jesus Christ.³⁵ It is in the grace of the rejection of Jesus Christ that the lie of Judas's own rejection appears as a shadow, having form but no content.

2.3 Judas and the Cleansing of the Elected Apostles

Barth uses Judas's rejection as a witness to the non-synergism of God's will in his Christocentric approach by focusing on Judas's role in the “traditioning” or handing-over of the gospel in the apostolic witness. Barth's case that rejection serves the cause of the blessing of humanity is based first upon his insightful reflection on Jesus's footwashing

³⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 315-6.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 480.

of the disciples, which is a sign that the uncleanness of the apostles will be overcome. Barth shows secondly that Judas's rejection will be overturned by grace in his attention to the word, *παραδοσις* (tradition, handing-over). If rejection is described by the use of this word, it positively defines not only Judas's betrayal and the witness of the Apostle Paul to the Gentiles, but also, and, primarily, God's own handing over of the Son to rejection.

The "traditioning" of the gospel witness begins, for Barth, by understanding that the footwashing of the Apostles is a sign that their rejection is overcome. They too must have their feet washed because their witness to rejection as Israelites must be passed over by acknowledging the fulfilment of the covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. Barth's case for rejection begins to turn in a positive direction when Mary's footwashing is also seen as a revelation of the rejection which makes all the Apostles unclean, not just Judas. For Barth, if the Jews are the rejected community finding their head in Judas, the Apostles are the brothers of Judas, finding him to be one just like them. The connection of the Apostles to the sin of Judas is clear to Barth: "What was done here, as the work of Israel from within the apostolic group, the Church, was really work which belonged to the night. As the representative of Israel within the apostolic group, within the Church, Judas is indeed the 'son of perdition,' the man into whom the Satan has entered, himself a devil."³⁶ When Barth connects Judas's sin to the uncleanness of the Apostles, we begin to notice the faint appearance of light shining through all the darkness of historical inevitability and twisted human life. The positive light comes from the possibility that, if the rejection that Judas represents is removed, the apostolic group may be clean of the sin of human judgment. This sin is shown in Judas as he attempts to keep himself separate

³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 471.

from the elect by judging Mary and Jesus according to his own pious principles as if they are rejected by God.

The apostolic group is unclean because it too is set against the testimony of Mary's footwashing. The first evidence of this comes from the discrepancy between those who judge Mary's anointing negatively in John 12:4-5 and in the synoptic gospels, Mark 14:4-5 and Matthew 26:8-9. In John (also the only gospel that speaks of Satan entering Judas at the Passover meal, in John 13:27), Judas alone is identified as the one who sets himself in opposition to Mary's act. However, in the synoptic accounts, there is a larger group ("some") who also dissent from Mary's devotion. For Barth, this textual inconsistency shows "how even in its misunderstandings and confusions the Bible is usually more instructive than other books in their accuracy."³⁷ That is, the New Testament finds its judgment set against all the other disciples just as much as it is certainly against this man Judas. Secondly and more briefly, the Apostles stand under the possibility of alignment with the rejection of Jesus just as much as does Judas, for each one of them asks, "Lord, is it I?" when Jesus says that one of them will betray him (Matthew 26:22, Mark 14:19).³⁸ Lastly and most irrefutably, all the disciples are in need of cleansing from that which sets them apart and against Jesus, because each one, including Judas, receives the footwashing of Jesus Christ (John 13:5-11).

The problem of rejection comes to a moment of intense concentration in Jesus's footwashing of the disciples, because the rejected Judas is included in the cleansing of the elected Apostles.³⁹ Barth's first step into this problem is to make clear that the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 468.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 472.

³⁹ Anthony Cane finds it to be a weakness of Barth's excursus on Judas that Barth is not able to make any sure conclusion on what it means that Judas is included in the signs of God's free grace (footwashing,

footwashing is done on behalf of all the Apostles, Peter included.⁴⁰ Jesus's footwashing is a repetition of Mary's, but this time taken up in the humility and service of the Lord to those whom he loves. When understood in the light of Christ's election of the Apostles, this points to the nature of Jesus's lordship over the rejected rather than to the fact that somehow only eleven are elected by him and one passed over. It speaks of what is undeniably true about the grace of election in Jesus Christ, regardless of the rejected Judas. The inclusion of Judas in Jesus's foot washing is explained by Barth as follows:

The basic flaw was revealed in Judas, but it was that of the apostolate as a whole. At this decisive point the apostolate was also Israel, and Israel was the world and therefore of the night. The elect were also rejected and as such elected. This was why Jesus had to 'love them unto the end,' to die for them, and as the One who died for them to be theirs. Their rejection required judgment upon them ... which made it [their rejection] subjectively impossible, which could in fact, take place in vain, as the case of Judas showed.⁴¹

In this situation, Judas refuses to acknowledge the judgment of God that he is the rejected Apostle. But this refusal is shared by all the Apostles who attempt to use the cover of

Lord's Supper). Cane would like this to mean that Judas's rejection is more of a tragedy than a triumph. He makes this criticism in light of the historical difficulty of interpreting what Judas's free participation in the 'means of grace,' that is, baptism (footwashing) and the eucharist, means for his rejection. (*The Place of Judas Iscariot in Christology*, 86-88) Is God's grace ineffective for Judas? Is it necessarily ineffective or accidentally so? The problem for Cane is that God's grace is unsuccessful in Judas, and therefore it leaves the Judas story to be one over-determined by providence and does not reveal the sense of tragedy within it. He says, "The tension between wickedness and grace, despite Barth's exegetical labours, remains unresolved and arguably unresolvable by him as Barth cannot accept any suggestion of tragedy.... The biggest difficulty in Barth's account is that he does not adequately show how Judas' fate remains an 'open question', or how God's grace might prevail." (*ibid.*, 128) For this reason, Cane prefers the rendering of Judas by Donald MacKinnon, who emphasizes the story of Judas as a tragic consequence of the power of God being brought upon a man by the ethical evil of humanity. (*ibid.*, 76-80) For another reader of Barth who is firmly dissatisfied with Barth's harsh and unsympathetic portrayal of Judas, see William Klassen, *Judas: Betrayer or Friend of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 182-192.

⁴⁰ Barth's attention to the pair of Judas/Peter is disclosed when Barth places their respective 'big' sins next to each other. "Does not the treachery of Judas compare with Peter's denial in the same way as Saul's ritual offences compare with David's adultery?" (*ibid.*, 466) Or in the same light, Barth speaks of Peter's repentance compared with that of Judas's. Judas 'perfect penitence' is set against Peter's in this way: "Is it not in its way more complete than that of Peter, of whom we are told in Mt. 26⁷⁵ only that after his threefold denial he went out 'and wept bitterly'?" While the comparison of Judas and Peter is only lightly treated in this excursus, it does add credence to the level at which Barth is able to read 'between' the lines of Scripture and yet stay wholly within the theological trajectory of its meaning.

⁴¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 475.

darkness to leave and deny their association with their Lord on the night of his betrayal. All twelve are guilty and are, in this sense, a part of the same rejection as Judas.

Even though Judas's sin, as we have seen, is representative of the Apostles's uncleanness, it is, it would appear, something that is declared void and overcome in the footwashing performed by Jesus. The footwashing is the sign of that cleansing from sin which comes from Jesus's rejection on the cross. What is a sign at this point will be fulfilled when Jesus's rejection takes away the rejection of the disciples, those who will later declare to sinners the love and grace of God in Jesus Christ. For now, we must discuss the negative act of Judas's betrayal. In all its evil and perversion, it is still the delivery or handing-over and, therefore, the basis upon which Jesus's rejection graciously triumphs over Judas's rejection.

In the betrayal enacted by Judas, the sign of the Apostolic uncleanness is raised to an act of judgment against the elect. It is certainly a false human judgment by Judas, but also, as we shall see, it is the righteous judgment of God's covenantal decree. Barth shows that the one who stands above the apostolic group and carries forward that which all the apostles stand in need of is Judas. He is the one, like all the disciples, who needs mercy in order to be delivered from his rejection and included in election. On the night of the betrayal, the sinfulness of humanity is lifted up in Judas far beyond what even it can sustain. All the bloated pride of evil finds its repulsive representation in Judas. Yet Barth has this to say of him:

Is not Judas also, in his own place and after his own fashion, *the* outstanding apostle? Is he not the holy one among them (the apostles) – 'holy' in the old meaning of the term, the one who is marked, branded, banned, the one who is burdened with the divine curse and thrust out...? For all the dissimilarities, is it possible to overlook the likeness in which Judas alone of the apostle stands face to face and side by side with Jesus? *Mutatis mutandis*, could not the famous

utterance of the high-priest in Jn. 11⁵⁰: “It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not,” be said of Judas too in his relationship to the other apostles?⁴²

Exalted to this place on his own, the heroic or prudent Judas might attract a cult of followers, were it not for the fact that the story of Judas tells also the hollow lie of the false human, the one determined by God’s grace to be overcome in the forsakenness of Jesus Christ.⁴³ Even though he attempts to elevate himself, he cannot do this apart from his election to serve the superior event of Jesus’s rejection. Judas is limited by the positive will of God to be the rejected. In Jesus, the eternal God has come as the electing servant, a man who chooses to wash the feet of those who will be witnesses to God’s triumph over their rejection.⁴⁴ The difference between the rejected and elected could not be more apparent, yet God has removed the possibility for Judas’s rejection to stand on its own by determining to suffer rejection in Jesus Christ. The difference between election and rejection in Barth’s Christocentric doctrine is, in a manner of speaking, as large as the difference between the divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ. Judas’s act of betrayal is the eruption of the apostolic uncleanness; it tells the truth that if God’s ways were left in human hands it would be completely undone in corruption and chaos. However, in the promise of Jesus’s footwashing and in the event of his openness to the kiss of his betrayer, Jesus Christ reveals that he is for those who oppose him by taking the reward of their evil. In the next point, we will see how Jesus’s sign of overcoming rejection is completed in the act of Judas’s *παραδοῦναι* (betrayal, handing-over).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 479.

⁴³ Barth shows how close he understands the temptation the ‘Cainites’ faced in venerating Judas Iscariot by their ‘Gospel of Judas.’ Nevertheless, he knows this adulation of the man to be inconsistent with the actual meaning of his task as the executor of the New Testament in respect to the betrayal, however mighty the title and act of this man may appear. *Ibid.*, 480, 502.

⁴⁴ Wolf Krötke, “Karl Barth’s Anthropology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth*, ed. John Webster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 163.

2.4 The Death of Judas for the Elected

Barth's account of the doctrine of rejection is more about an event and movement than it is about static realities. Although separated, election and rejection are subjects of divine agency, and therefore, Barth sees them as ordering theological reality in unexpected ways. Sonderegger speaks about the proper understanding of Judas's rejection when she warns against confusing such a dynamic movement of divine will with dialectical theories about it, and says, "Christ is not a 'principle'... and Judas, though a double, is never Jesus' equal. Barth's world is one of rank and order."⁴⁵ In his rejection and its consequence, Judas does not merit his place as the head of the whole line of rejected figures: Cain, Ishmael, Esau, and Saul. To the contrary, in his endeavour to separate himself from the grace of Christ, Judas receives the radical reversal of his own expectation. Judas in fact serves the *παραδοσις* (betrayal, "traditioning") of the gospel, and so becomes a means by which the grace of God will be proclaimed to Jew and Gentile. Judas is, against all his intentions to the contrary, transformed into a faithful disciple. This is not due to Judas's service as the rejected at all but, rather, to Jesus as the subject and object of the decree of rejection. In this way, Barth's Christocentric interpretation of rejection is superior to the traditional Reformed doctrine of rejection because it is sensitive to this important aspect that, where sin triumphed, grace triumphed all the more. Although "*the great sinner of the New Testament,*" therefore, Barth is able to speak of Judas also as "*the most important figure in the New Testament apart from Jesus.*"⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Sonderegger, *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew*, 102.

⁴⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II.2, 461, 502.

Barth knows that Judas's importance does not depend on his role as the rejected. After his hand has been played against Jesus and Judas is left to himself, the New Testament records that he dies by passively judging himself because he could do nothing else. His rejection cannot stand on its own apart from the elect. Judas dies, however, not because of some psychological hopelessness that befell him, or because of the impending doom that unavoidably awaited him in God's judgment after his betrayal of Jesus. For Barth, the death of the rejected and their divine judgment in grace can only be spoken about as an eschatological hope, as something that lies beyond them and outside of their power. For Judas, as for all the rejected, his death is a true estimate of his isolated status apart from the work of Jesus Christ in divine predestination. However, by grace, the death of the rejected always stands under the possibility that it will and can emphasize the atoning death of Jesus. By this possibility, Barth's Christocentric predestination emphasizes divine grace. In Barth's dialectical fashion, this occurs in the case of Judas just as in the *Epistle to the Romans*, predestination is sovereign grace which must reveal God's judgment against the best works and concealed pride of humanity. That is, for Barth, the rejected must witness until their death that the sum of the gospel is the impossibility of rejection for anyone other than Jesus Christ.

2.5 Judas's Rejection and the "Traditioning" of the Gospel

The delivery of Jesus by Judas to his enemies, which has its end in Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection, is not a witness to rejection apart from God's election in Jesus Christ. Judas is included as an object of the gospel because God's elect Son has already determined himself in grace to become the human person who lives for and is

punished as the rejected man not willed by God. Judas's inclusion as a faithful witness to the mercy of God's ways and works is set in the context of the positive accomplishment of God's will. For Judas, this means that his work in delivering Jesus by betrayal into the power of human hands is taken up in the "traditioning" of the apostolic witness. In the aftermath of the accomplishment of God's will on earth, the Apostles take up the tradition of passing on the Word of God to sinners in the same manner in which Judas betrays Jesus. To this end, Barth says, "[i]t is necessary that Jesus Himself should now become the subject of the 'tradition of the men,' that His Church should be built by His delivery from one human hand to another."⁴⁷ The sinful delivery of Jesus to death by Judas is included in both the content and event of the gospel. It is a part of the apostolic transmission and cannot be seen only as a devilish act that speaks against the power of election for the Apostles. Judas is *the* disciple who fills up the New Testament witness concerning who the elected are by God's grace and what the basis of the apostolic witness is. That is, Judas shows the eternal decision of God to be gracious to sinners by giving his Son for the forgiveness of their sins. As the head of Israel, Judas does sin when he hands over Jesus to sinners instead of doing what the apostles will yet do, deliver sinners to Jesus. Barth, however, makes it clear that this sin is in union with God's will for the justification of all sinners by grace. When Jesus is held powerless before his enemies and hangs dead on the cross, he is no less mighty to save than as he is in the apostolic witness when he is put into the hands of sinners by the gospel. God's election of Jesus Christ accomplishes the fulfilment of righteousness that God's will would be done on earth — as it certainly is in the case of Judas.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 482.

Barth redefines the word *παραδοσις* (handing-over, “traditioning”) from the negative delivery of Jesus by Judas to the positive delivery of Judas from his rejection. Judas’s negative calling as head of the rejected is equal to his positive calling as the one elected to be rejected; this is just the opposite side of the same coin.⁴⁸ It is not too much to say that this is the “objective justification” of Judas.⁴⁹ Judas and Jesus form a core doublet in the description of what handing-over or betrayal means. Judas’s rejection is the lie of human sinfulness against the truth of the divine grace of Christ’s election. Nevertheless, he is justified despite his betrayal as the one for whom Christ died.

Barth maintains that the meaning of the human delivery of Jesus in the twofold form of betrayal and of apostolic tradition is grounded in the precedent of the divine delivery. The handing over of Jesus by Judas comes only after the handing over of Jesus Christ to covenant partnership. The order is as follows:

Before Judas had handed over Jesus, God had handed Him over, and Jesus had handed over Himself. Before Jesus was the object of the apostolic delivery, God had delivered Him, and He had delivered Himself. Before the wrath of God handed over Jews and Gentiles, abandoning and yielding them to themselves, He had not spared His only Son, but had delivered Him up for us all (Rom. 8:32).⁵⁰

That rejection is controlled in this instance by God’s justification of Judas means that God condescends and conceals his glory in Christ, to the point that sinful humans have power over him and even rejoice in the apparent absence of Christ’s glory. Nevertheless, sinful humanity seemingly triumphs over the Son of God on earth, believing that human action can judge and limit the divine will. Judas really does believe that he can sanctify

⁴⁸ As the one elected to be rejected, like the calling of Israel in general, the rejection of Judas can only itself be rejected as his final condition and service. One side considers Judas as falsely isolated from his predestination in Christ; the other considers Judas united to Christ’s freely given forgiveness. Of course, only one side is real, though both are true. This is because Judas’s rejection can only be a mirror to what is definitively given as its basis in the rejection of Jesus Christ — that God has taken away his wrath from creation by the offering of his Son.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 488.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 489.

himself as a man who stands for Israel and God's will. Along with Israel, he thinks he positively upholds the scribal tradition of passing on the witness about what a man must do before the commands and promises of God. As such, Judas represents precisely the rejected man who is delivered by God's mercy in Jesus Christ. It is in his place that Jesus Christ stands as the covenant partner bearing the unworthiness and unrighteousness of his rejection in order that he may be cleansed from it. Because Jesus Christ has been elected to overcome the rejection of rejected humanity, the echo of the gospel set in the eternal will of God cannot be absent from Judas's inclusion in God's election. In what flows from his rejection, the "apostolic 'tradition' takes place because there has taken place once and for all this divine 'tradition', and it has now found its echo in these particular human words."⁵¹

The covenant obedience of Jesus Christ to die in the place of the rejected is the divine tradition that is placed in human hands in the gospel, and it is the guarantee that the apostolic tradition will never again, in its uncleanness, be used as a means to affirm rejection apart from God's will in election. The danger for the Apostles who "tradition" the gospel by handing-over the forgiveness of sins to those isolated in their "rejection" is that the divine tradition may once again be treated as Judas and Israel's scribes desired. This tradition may become the perverse "tradition of humans." (Mark 7:6) However, Barth denies this possibility because "the story of Judas Iscariot and what follows at Gethsemane and Golgotha will not be repeated.... What cannot be reversed is the fact that Jesus is Victor. And this emerges decisively at the point where the news of Him, of the divine self-surrender, is met by faith and is proclaimed and by proclamation awakens

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 498-499.

new faith, that is, in the act of the apostolic tradition.”⁵² The apostolic tradition is radically transformed by the death of Jesus. The scribal tradition once kept the gracious promise of God’s deliverance for sinners, but now the apostolic tradition points to the powerlessness of the human side of that deliverance and to the faithful eradication of human forsakenness in the death of Jesus. The uncleanness of Judas covers the Apostles with the shadow of their sin and rejection. But this No, when interpreted as the chosen will of Jesus Christ in the apostolic tradition, is the light of Judas’s election in the void left by his rejection and in the Yes of God’s promised deliverance of his Son as the judgement upon the faithless, disobedient creature.

To conclude the argument that Judas’s rejection is not the sum of his will added together with God’s will, we will briefly survey the results of what it means to suggest that Judas enacts the “traditioning” of the gospel. The first result is that Barth has united Judas’s rejection to the definition of the apostolic tradition and, therefore, made it secure in the hands of weak humans. The tradition must be carried out in the hands of sinners who acknowledge the “divine tradition” as it displays the glorification of God in the death of Jesus Christ for sinners. Barth says that, if it ceases to be faithful to this content, “it necessarily ceases to be apostolic — the human proclamation which lives by the divine tradition. It makes no difference that its bearers are sinful men like Judas. Because they hand on the accomplished death of Jesus, their activity can only be the exact opposite of that of Judas.”⁵³

The second result is that, because Jesus’s rejection is the content of the gospel, Judas “cannot degrade himself lower than to be a *locum tenens* [place holder] for the true

⁵² *Ibid.*, 500.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 500-501.

bearer of the New Testament apostolate [Paul], a negative type of Paul.”⁵⁴ What Barth is pointing out is that he finds the story and ministry of the elected Apostle Paul to be the complete reversal of the rejected Apostle Judas. The grace of Jesus’s rejection is able to overturn Judas’s negative apostleship by its positive reversal in Paul’s apostolic witness. Barth outlines their roles as follows: “He [Paul] fulfils the handing-over of Jesus to Gentiles: not this time in unfaithfulness, but in faithfulness to Israel’s calling and mission; not now aiming at the slaying of Jesus, but at establishing in the whole world the lordship of this One who was slain but is risen.”⁵⁵ On the one hand, against the rejection that Jesus Christ chose to endure in order to cleanse fallen humanity, Judas’s rejection appears empty and even worthless. On the other hand, the continuing apostolic tradition in the Apostle Paul reveals that this not the case for Judas. As the person who “holds the place” for the greatest of New Testament voices, Judas serves an even greater role than he could ever have chosen.⁵⁶ Such is the operation of grace in Judas’s rejection. This point and Barth’s positive evaluation of Judas are summed up nicely in Barth’s words on Romans 8:31, “If we are to make Paul’s defiant questions our own: ‘If God be for us, who can be against us?’, the genuineness of our use of Paul’s words can be tested by whether, thinking and speaking in faith, we can go on to say even in respect of apparent

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 503.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 478.

⁵⁶ Barth’s theological reading of the apostolic succession after Judas’s death is original and certainly controversial. Barth boldly attempts to properly orient our understanding of Scripture, even as he clearly disagrees with it, when he claims that Paul takes the place of Judas not Matthias, as recorded in Acts 1:15-26. His clearest statement of this is as follows: “... although Judas was *de iure* replaced by Matthias, he was *de facto* replaced by Paul, so that his later degradation was to be the *locum tenens* for this supernumerary among the twelve.” (*Ibid.*, 479) The claim that Paul restores to life the place and witness of Judas in the apostolic group is first brought up on pages 477-479 and is assumed and used throughout the rest of the excursus. Barth’s position appears convincing on a number of levels, not the least of which is that it provides a succinct scheme for reading *the* apostle of election within the unity of the New Testament canon.

or obviously real Judases: ‘If God be for them, who can be against them?’”⁵⁷ This is the tradition that Judas is called and elected to advance in his rejection.

3. Chapter Summary

The argument of the chapter has incorporated two main questions into the evaluation of Barth’s doctrine of rejection. The questions are intended to evaluate the results of Barth’s Christocentric doctrine of predestination, and they are as follows: Is Barth’s doctrine of predestination within the bounds of Reformed theology, and if it is within these bounds, does it correctly make a case for the singular will of grace in the doctrine of rejection?

The chapter has set forward the argument that Barth’s doctrine of election in Jesus Christ is Reformed and that it expresses God’s singular will to be gracious to both elected and rejected individuals. This argument is adjudicated in the case study of Barth’s doctrine of rejection in Judas Iscariot. To justify the adjudication, two conditions are taken from what the *Canons of Dordt* establishes on the doctrine of reprobation. These conditions are that rejection is enacted on a completely different basis than that of election (asymmetry) and that rejection is God’s entirely free and irreproachable decision which is made apart from human intention in sin and unbelief (non-synergism).

These two conditions are concerns taken up as main points in the evaluation of Judas’s rejection. In regards to asymmetry, the dialectical methodology of Barth’s doctrine of rejection explains that Judas’s rejection, so far as it depends on his choices and sin, is completely negative. Judas witnesses to the fact that “human-willed” devotion

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 497.

to God is that which is not willed by God. As the head of the rejected, Judas exalts himself in proud human judgment of Jesus, betraying him to protect his own fragile religious status. However, Barth's account of Judas reveals that, against the traditional view, rejection does not depend on the absence of grace but on direct confrontation and opposing alignment in the presence of grace. For Judas, this opposition means his death, but, for the elected, this opposition means the enlargement of God's mercy to the rejected.

The case of Judas also establishes the non-synergism of Barth's doctrine of rejection. Judas's rejection is the achievement of God's singular will in the election of Jesus Christ. In Barth's reading of the New Testament, Judas is placed here not as the disciple who stands apart from Christ, as if his opposition to the will of God is too great. Instead, the double predestination of Jesus Christ is the overarching reality that correctly interprets Judas's rejection as his joining with God's will in giving to Jesus the service that was eternally chosen for and by him. Because Judas did not actively pursue this course of service to election and because he did not intend for this service as the "traditioning" of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Barth has, indeed, shown that the election of Jesus Christ is able to overturn God's judgment of sinners from condemnation and death to grace and life.

Summary and Conclusion

A Limited Doctrine of Rejection

Barth's dogmatic theology is made up of calm and patient explanations of its subject matter. His arguments circle with ever smaller circumference on the matter that he must reestablish after having questioned and opened up a theological position. The doctrine of rejection is presented in this manner in Barth's theological work. In the preceding chapters, Barth's doctrine of election has been portrayed in its achievement of a consistent dialectical methodology with an appropriate material focus in Jesus Christ. Barth has achieved this in his reorientation of the Reformed doctrine of predestination because he has justified the graciousness of God's ways and works *ad extra* in the case of Judas Iscariot's rejection.

In the first chapter, Barth's dialectical theology was presented as the basic consistency of his early doctrine of election. Barth's concept of predestination was actualistic and theocentric because it concerned God's breakthrough into the objective world of fallen humanity by revelation. Three highlights from the early form of the doctrine can briefly be reviewed. To begin with, the doctrine of rejection at this time was simply the inverse of election. It meant that the rejected remained passive before the inscrutability of revelation, which was only overcome in the elect. Secondly, the rejected remained in the confines of sinful human objectivity not in the sense that they acted without religious motivations and were unaware of Jesus's death on the cross. Rather, Barth disturbed liberal religious sentiments by making the reality of rejection the solidarity in which religious individuals organized and practiced their moral behavior. Rejection speaks of the primal fall of humanity from a gracious relationship with their

Creator. Lastly, Barth established the actualistic nature of predestination. God's purpose in election is teleological in that the complete nature of God's work in creation is not ordered by providence but by the freedom of his love for the creature. Therefore, Barth argued against a separation of humanity based on the absolute decree of election and rejection.

The second chapter presented Barth's Christocentric predestination not only as the dialectical methodology of election but also in connection with the dogmatic content of the doctrine of God. Here Barth's doctrine functions constructively by resisting the temptation to speculate on the relationship between the being of God and God's will *ad extra*, as in the Reformed theologian, Alexander Schweizer. Instead, Barth united the knowledge of God *in se* with God's will to be the subject of election in Jesus Christ. The Christocentric reorientation of election is of primary importance in the interpretation of double predestination. A second point follows upon this. The eternal covenant of reconciliation is encountered in the history of the Jewish man, Jesus Christ. As the electing God, Jesus takes upon himself the punishment of the rejected human. This is the blessing given to sinners, and it is known as the 'sum of the gospel.' The trustworthy God and the faithful elected human are found in a single person. This reality finds an appropriate home in the dialectical treatment of Jesus Christ, as elected and rejected.

The third chapter concentrated on the Christocentric doctrine of election as it is adjudicated in Judas Iscariot's rejection. Barth locates Judas within the dialectical content of election, showing his election in Jesus Christ by means of his rejection. In the first section, Barth's dialectical methodology is used to illuminate the asymmetrical relationship between election and rejection. Reprobation properly confronts its opposing

form in election because God wills to establish his lordship over the entire creation, even over the shadow of sinful human freedom. Rejection gives God's merciful lordship a representation in the creaturely sphere in the form of Judas, the head of the rejected people Israel. Judas's rejection appears in his uncleanness, which is shown in his willingness to be the man given over to himself, apart from Jesus Christ and the elect. Nevertheless, according to Barth's doctrine of rejection, Judas is not the man to whom grace is never given, just as he is not the man given to a different will in the predestination of God from that of the elect. Rather, his rejection is negatively constituted by the rejection of Jesus Christ being ever for him by grace.

The second section overturns the sin of Judas's rejection into the blessing of his election. By God's grace, Jesus Christ is betrayed into the hands of his enemies by the rejection of Judas. Barth elaborates extensively on the meaning of the word *παραδοῦναι* (handing-over, delivery, "traditioning"). It is in the doublet of Judas and Jesus, both men seen in the gospels as elected to be rejected, that the positive and objective cleansing of the apostles occurs. This is because Jesus's rejection makes final the fact that the apostolic tradition is faithfully defined in Judas's betrayal. That is, because the eternal election of Jesus Christ to be the one punished by God's wrath against the rejected is determinative of rejection, it is Jesus who "hands-over" Judas's betrayal as the content of the gospel that will display the mercy of God to sinners. Although Judas was against the elected by his works and since God is known by grace, Judas's rejection does have as its goal the witness to the election of grace in Jesus Christ. The rejection of Judas verifies that Barth's doctrine of rejection is coherent with God's willingness to have mercy on all his creatures in the eternal election of Jesus Christ.

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