

CONCEIVING MARY'S AGENCY: TOWARDS A BARTHIAN MARIOLOGY

CHRISTOPHER PAUL DE STIGTER 

Abstract

This essay argues for the possibility of a 'Barthian' Mariology particularly through an analysis of human agency. I first show that Karl Barth's articulation of Mary in I/2 of the *Church Dogmatics* marginalizes Mary's agency in part due to his anti-Roman Catholic polemic and his gender binary. I then correct Barth with Barth by showing how his mature Christology advances an account of human agency commensurate with Mariology. With this Christological account of human agency established, I construct a genuinely 'Barthian' Mariology that shows her as the eschatological and prototypical human agent.

Introduction¹

Can there be a Barthian Mariology? Karl Barth was well known for his condemnation of Mariology. He was insistent that it was an 'excrescence' on theological thought,² and that at no 'point a door is opened which can lead to Mariology'.³ This rejection of Mariology remained throughout his life, as evident in his critical letter on Mariology in *Ad Limina Apostolorum*.⁴ Indeed, Mary was not a tangential issue for Barth, but representative of the whole nature of his 'Reformation protest'.⁵ Chiefly, it was Mary's 'co-operatio in our salvation' that Barth found so objectionable.⁶ His rejection of cooperation with God entails that the question of agency—the status of creaturely action—takes center

Christopher PAUL de Stigter

Department of Theology and Religion, Durham University, Abbey House, Palace Green, Durham DH1 3RS, UK
 Email: christopher.de-stigter@durham.ac.uk

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² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley et al., vol. I/2 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 139. Hereafter cited as *CD* followed by volume and page number. German from Karl Barth, *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (13 vols, Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1932-70). Hereafter referred to as *KD*.

³ *CD* I/2, 196.

⁴ See Karl Barth, 'A Letter about Mariology', in *Ad Limina Apostolorum: An Appraisal of Vatican II*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 57-62.

⁵ Andrew Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation: An Essay on the Mother of God in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Oxford: S.L.G. Press, 1977), 8.

⁶ *CD* I/2, 145.

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stage in his criticisms of Mariology. On the surface, a Barthian Mariology seems not only unthinkable, but utterly objectionable.

However, the story of Barth's antipathy towards Mariology takes on a few twists and turns. As in his response to the *analogia entis*, his theology matures and, in so doing, opens doors that had previously been shut.⁷ In light of these maturations, could the prospect of a Barthian Mariology finally take shape? As one might expect, scholars have been split. Dustin Resch,⁸ for instance, sees no room for such a project because it abstracts grace from Christ. Grace, in his reading of Barth, is not given to humanity 'and left for them to use'⁹, but is given to impoverished humanity moment by moment.¹⁰ Thus, Mary cannot be uniquely honored as if she 'put grace to good use'. Then again, as we will see, Barth's portrayal of human agency in *CD II-IV* speaks in just this way, wherein the independent human agent in Christ is responsible to use the freedom graced to them.¹¹ Thus, scholars like Paul Fiddes, Andrew Louth, and Gordon Tait see potential in Barth's theology for fruitful Mariological reflection.¹² Mary's grace-filled 'human cooperation'¹³ in the incarnation provides ground for her exaltation and synergies with Catholic Mariology.¹⁴

As can be seen, the legitimacy of Barth's rejection of Mariology functions as a kind of scholarly Rorschach test—if one looks long enough at Barth's theology, multiple pictures emerge. Nevertheless, there is a real question, a tension, lurking over both sides.¹⁵ What is the *true significance* Barth gives human activity? To press the question concretely: did Mary's 'let it be' *affect* anything, or not? Did Mary's grace-filled decision ultimately matter, or is all of Barth's talk of human autonomy and freedom just that, 'talk'? As we will see with Barth's description of Mary, John Macken is not totally unfair to conclude that, yes, it is just 'talk': 'Barth affirms ... [that] the human being has a proper sphere of activity. But this is admitted at the cost of *allowing*

⁷ Barth's mature understanding of the *analogia relationis* and *analogia fides* led him to reconsider the exact nature of his disagreement with the *analogia entis*. (See Karl Barth, *Gespräche 1959-1962*, ed. Eberhard Busch [Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1995], 499-501). See also note 23, 112, and 117 for further discussion.

⁸ Not only is Resch one of the most detailed commentators, but he also focuses extensively on Barth's portrayal of Mary's agency. See Dustin Resch, *Barth's Interpretation of the Virgin Birth: A Sign of Mystery* Oxford (Abingdon: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 165-98. For briefer treatments, see Faye Bodley-Dangelo, *Sexual Difference, Gender, and Agency in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2020): 32-34; Paul Fiddes, 'Mary in the Theology of Karl Barth', *The Month* 22, no. 1 (September 1989): 304-6.

⁹ Resch, *Barth's Interpretation of the Virgin Birth*, 198. For similar conclusions see Tim Perry, "'What Is Little Mary Here For?'" Barth, Mary, and Election', *Pro Ecclesia* 19, no. 1 (February 2010): 46-68. Resch does qualify this by noting that 'Barth's own position is not entirely antithetical to Roman Catholic Mariology' (Ibid., 197). Nevertheless, Resch is too uncritical of Barth's handling of Mary. He takes most of Barth's claims at face value and undersells the deleterious effects his Catholic polemic and gender binary have upon his description of Mary's agency.

¹⁰ Ibid., 172.

¹¹ Resch does briefly note that Barth might not have always been consistent with his teaching on human agency in *CD III/3*, for if he had been he might not 'critique Mariology so harshly'. (Ibid., 172n30). Parts I-II are a detailed expansion of this point.

¹² See Fiddes, 'Mary in the Theology'; Louth, *Mary and the Mystery*; L Gordon Tait, 'Karl Barth and the Virgin Mary', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 4, no. 3 (1967): 406-25.

¹³ Fiddes, 'Mary in the Theology', 304.

¹⁴ Tait goes as far as to say that 'any difficulty between Barth and Catholic theology in this area is basically a terminological one' (Tait, 'Karl Barth', 423). As will be evident in Part III, Catholic Mariology and a Barthian one have substantial differences, primarily as related to an epistemology of creation.

¹⁵ Of those who interrogate Barth's views of Mary's agency, Fiddes is the one who most sees this tension within Barth's own theology. See Fiddes, 'Mary in the Theology', 305.

nothing of ultimate significance to happen within this sphere'.¹⁶ Here Macken raises a fundamental issue: In Barth's theology, is the creature, for all intents and purposes, just 'along for the ride'? Or is human activity, exemplified in Mary's *fiat mihi*, significant in an ultimate way?¹⁷

It is the task of this essay to answer 'yes' to this latter question; in fact, Mariology simply is the *way* we say 'yes' to this question. To accomplish this, I proceed in three parts. First, I show that Barth's wholesale rejection of Mariology exhibits a marginalization of the human agent and, in turn, a competitive construal of the divine and human encounter. Despite Barth's claims in *CD I/1* to think non-competitively,¹⁸ he tilts into a competitive description of God and Mary on account of two distorting weaknesses: 1) An anti-Roman Catholic polemic associated with his rejection of the *analogia entis*. 2) A rigid gender binary which leads to an impoverished account of Mary's agency.¹⁹ These tendencies led him to attenuate Mary's activity in the incarnation. Second, I deconstruct Barth's criticisms of Mariology with his own mature Christology detailed throughout *CD II-IV*. The human agency of Christ grounds the truly free human agent as one who cooperates non-competitively with God and is exalted by God. Jesus Christ's action *as human* reveals the profound and ultimate significance Barth gives human activity. Third, pressing further upon Barth's mature understanding of the human agent in Christ, I construct a Barthian Mariology that is with and beyond Barth. Mary's particular *and* representative activity reveals her significance as the prototypical and eschatological human agent. As one indwelt by the Spirit, she is actively receptive to her new being in Christ. Mary proclaims God's desire to include the creature's humble activity *within* God's ultimately significant activity—the birth of Christ. God will not do this without her. Finally, I conclude by noting the promise of a Mariology in a distinctly Barthian key, and the additional paths of inquiry available in gender, ecumenical, and anthropological studies.²⁰

¹⁶ John Macken, *The Autonomy Theme in the Church Dogmatics: Karl Barth and his Critics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 181 (emphasis mine).

¹⁷ As this could mean many different things, 'ultimate' here means that Mary's activity, as her *own* action, is irreplaceable and nonaccidental to the event of the incarnation.

¹⁸ In the early *CD*, Barth is clear that there is no competition between divine and human actors (*CD I/1*, 200), and he can speak of the creatures seeking, hearing, and confessing. However, Barth's theology was at times plagued by this kind of competitive description, something he himself acknowledged (see Part II below).

¹⁹ Barth, of course, had other reasons for rejecting certain versions of Mariology, but his rejection *tout court* was ultimately unwarranted.

²⁰ All three of these areas of discourse are prominent in recent Barth scholarship. For ecumenical examples see Matthew Levering, Bruce L. McCormack, and Thomas Joseph White, eds., *Dogma and Ecumenism: Vatican II and Karl Barth's Ad Limina Apostolorum* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020); Thomas Joseph White, ed., *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011); George Hunsinger, *Evangelical, Catholic, and Reformed: Doctrinal Essays on Barth and Related Themes* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015); Keith L. Johnson, *Karl Barth and the Analogia Entis* (London: T&T Clark, 2010). For ethical-anthropological examples see John B. Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology: Human Action in Barth's Thought* (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Paul Dafydd Jones, *The Humanity of Christ: Christology in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Joseph L. Mangina, *Karl Barth on the Christian Life: The Practical Knowledge of God* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2001); Marc Cortez, *Embodied Souls, Ensouled Bodies: An Exercise in Christological Anthropology and Its Significance for the Mind/Body Debate* (London: T&T Clark, 2011). For gender examples see Bodley-Dangelo, *Sexual Difference*; Christopher Chenault Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in and for the Moral Theology of Marriage* (London: T&T Clark, 2007); Jason A. Springs, 'Following at a Distance (Again): Gender, Equality and Freedom in Karl Barth's Theological Anthropology', *Modern Theology* 28, no. 3 (July 2012): 446–77; Lisa P. Stephenson, 'Directed, Ordered and Related: The Male and Female Interpersonal Relation in Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61, no. 4 (November 2008): 435–49.

Part I: Marginalized Mary

Barth's longest discussion of Mary takes place in the context of his doctrine of revelation in CD I/2. Here he betrays a tendency towards a competitive account of divine and human agency. More specifically, Barth's description of the annunciation is such that Mary is disregarded for the sake of exalting God. Barth repeatedly stresses that Mary does nothing and brings nothing to the event of revelation.²¹ Mary does not act within God's action, rather God acts *in spite of* Mary. For this reason, no *true* encounter takes place between God and Mary. In this section, I will show how specifically Barth's polemic against Roman Catholic Mariology and his gendering of revelation incline him into this competitive portrait of human agency.²² Both propensities operate together to pit Mary's significance against God's significance, resulting in a marginalized Mary.

Mariology as Heresy: Barth's Anti-Catholic Polemics

Barth's polemics against Roman Catholicism have been well documented. It suffices to say that, in the eyes of his Catholic colleagues, Barth's early arguments were often misguided caricatures.²³ As Hans Urs von Balthasar said in a letter to Barth, 'I had the feeling that you were often battling against a phantom or, to be honest, against a misuse of Catholic theology'.²⁴ This misuse of Catholic theology spread to Barth's theologizing about Mary. Such is evident when he raises Mariology to the level of heresy:

In the doctrine and *worship* of Mary there is disclosed the one heresy of the Roman Catholic Church which explains all the rest. The 'mother of God' of Roman Catholic Marian dogma is quite simply the principal type and essence of the human creature cooperating [*mitwirkenden*] servantlike [*ministerialiter*] in its own redemption on the basis of prevenient grace.²⁵

The polemics are clear. By claiming that Catholic dogma promotes the 'worship' of Mary, Barth unfairly caricatures Catholic Mariological teaching with little room for

²¹ Pace Resch who says that 'Barth affirms that Mary actively participates with God in the economy of salvation' (Resch, *Barth's Interpretation*, 198). In the aggregate, Barth does not give Mary an active role, but repeatedly asserts her passivity.

²² Given Barth's anti-Roman Catholic polemics, it should come as no surprise that he reasons most competitively in discussions of the sacraments and ministry of the Church. As John Yocum has noted about Barth's tendency to make human and divine agents competitive, 'It manifests itself most strikingly wherever there is a question of sacramental mediation or ecclesial participation in the divine act of revelation' (John Yocum, 'The Ecclesiology of Karl Barth', *Ecclesiology* 4, no. 3 [2008]: 343).

²³ Keith Johnson has argued that Barth did not caricature the Catholic teaching on the *analogia entis*, but accurately rejected it on theological grounds. Johnson emphasizes the importance of Barth's mature Christology which alters the exact reasons he disagreed with the *analogia*. However, Johnson also shows how the maturation of Barth's theology still does not lead to the adoption of the same *analogia entis* he once rejected (Johnson, *Karl Barth*, 11). This essay, in kind with Johnson, argues that a Barthian Mariology cannot be easily married to a Roman Catholic one. Nevertheless, regardless of Johnson's claims about the *analogia entis*, Barth's claims about the independence and worship of Mary *do* caricature Catholic Mariology. Moreover, one wonders, if the *analogia entis* and Mariology were so close would not the reconsideration of one require the reconsideration of the other?

²⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, Letter from May 4, 1940; Quoted in John R. Betz, 'Translator's Introduction', in *Analogia Entis: Metaphysics: Original Structure and Universal Rhythm*, by Erich Przywara (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 101. See also Erich Przywara, *In und Gegen: Stellungnahmen Zur Zeit* (Nürnberg: Glock und Lutz, 1955), 278.

²⁵ CD I/2, 143 (emphasis mine).

nuance.²⁶ Moreover, creaturely cooperation on the basis of prevenient grace is certainly no bridge to heresy. Barth's hostile and polemical language creates a pressurized discourse surrounding Mary—one almost destined to minimize her agency and significance.

Crucially, Barth's polemic is motivated by his perception that Mariology represents the exact same risk of human openness to God that so incensed him in the *analogia entis* and natural theology. Erich Przywara, a key formulator of the *analogia*, explicitly links the *analogia entis* with Mary. For the 'ultimate essence' of the creature already cries out: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord: may it be done unto me according to Thy Word!'²⁷ Creation is pregnant with Mary's *fiat mihi* waiting to be expressed. To Barth, this amounted to the triumph of anthropology—the possibilities of the human spirit—over theology. To be fair, there were key political and historical reasons for Barth's position. In the wake of the German Church's collaboration with Hitler in 1933 (*Deutsche Christen*), Barth was again highly attuned to the dangers of emphasizing human 'experience' and 'potential'.²⁸ Thus, in 1937 when he is writing *CD I/2*, Barth saw this turn to anthropology and natural theology 'as the real source of the catastrophe in the German Church, which was greeting Adolf Hitler as a new messiah'.²⁹ With this association in mind, we can further understand Barth's intense polemics against Mariology. It is a matter of social and political importance that the *virgo* does not represent inherent capacities within human nature.

Barth's solution to this danger in Mariology was to establish the utter sinfulness of the creature. The chief fact about the human agent in revelation is that they are disobedient. In his discussion of Mary, it is sinful incapacity that he regards as the 'actual' creature:

To the roots of his being he lives in this disobedience. It is with this disobedient creature that God has to do in His revelation ... And this human nature, the only one we know and the only one there actually is, has of itself no capacity for being adopted by God's Word into unity with Himself.³⁰

The issue is not Barth's regard for human sin, but the way sin dominates his narration of revelation. In this story, the 'actual' creature starts in isolation from grace. Disobedience is primary to the being of the creature. Therefore, revelation *negates* the creature and happens

²⁶ As claimed in *Lumen Gentium*, the Catholic church has proclaimed that the veneration due Mary 'differs essentially' from the veneration due God (Paul IV, 'Lumen Gentium', November 21, 1964. [emphasis mine]). Additionally, Barth's early critique of Catholic Mariology engages a rather short list of theologians (see *CD I/2*, 141). Consequently, Barth's 'objections lack specificity in proportion to the importance he attaches to Mariology in Catholic thought' (Resch, *Barth's Interpretation*, 166). It is no surprise that some Catholic theologians found Barth's comments on Mariology to be exaggerated and unfounded. See Thomas A. O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1966).

²⁷ Erich Przywara, *Schriften*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1962), 441–42. Quoted in Betz, 'Translator's Introduction', 98.

²⁸ It was after all the reliance upon the 'German experience' that was the justification for war used by many of Barth's theological contemporaries. See Christophe Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians: Wilhelm Herrmann, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2005), 85–93.

²⁹ Chalamet, *Dialectical Theologians*, 263. However, as Chalamet notes, 'Barth was a little too quick at interpreting the events of 1933 within the Protestant Church as a consequence of some unclarity on the question of natural theology' (*Ibid.*, 264).

³⁰ *CD I/2*, 188–89.

not 'through it' but 'in spite of it'.³¹ Applied to Mary, the incarnation happened through her, but, more precisely, it happened *in spite of* her.

This framing of Mary's sinfulness serves to reject her unique significance and counter her 'independent' status in Catholic theology: 'Every word that makes her person the object of special attention, which ascribes to her what is even a relatively independent part in the drama of salvation, is an attack upon the miracle of revelation'.³² Not only has Barth mischaracterized Catholic teaching,³³ but he has unnecessarily placed dependence and significance in an antinomy. Barth does not explore the possibility that God desires to give Mary a place of special attention, nor does he consider that *through* her dependence on Christ she becomes an 'independent' agent. In other words, Barth does not consider the possibility that Mariology can be safely qualified with Christology.

Barth's polemical and theological moves against Mariology led to the frequent occurrence of competitive language, and an either-or logic between human and divine actors. This is evident in his reading of Marian exaltation. Whereas Catholicism saw Mary's exaltation established *in Christ*,³⁴ Barth perceives a 'rivalry with Christ'.³⁵ He reiterates this concern in his reflections on Vatican II: 'It appears to me that the Church, or the Church's theology, deprived this handmaid of her best possession by making her a queen, the 'queen of heaven', in unavoidable *competition* with 'our Father who art in Heaven''.³⁶ As Barth would later argue himself, human exaltation is by no means *necessarily* competitive. However, in regard to Mary, Barth sees red. To protect against this rivalry, Barth makes God the *sole* actor in revelation: 'actually *no one* is left to be God's fellow-worker [*Werkgenosse*]. All that "Mary the *virgo*" actually signifies is that man is really the other upon whom ... God acts in His revelation'.³⁷ Mary, under this description, is a passive and accidental human agent, for it is not as though the 'virgin human being as such can have brought anything to the *active* God as her own'.³⁸ Barth abstracts the relation between God and Mary. They are not two subjects who truly meet one another. Mary's obedience and faith, no matter how they might appear, do not make her an actor alongside God. She is only the one upon whom God acts: 'The form of the *virgo Maria* [is] only in the form of non-willing, non-achieving, non-creative, non-sovereign man, only in the form of man who can merely receive, merely be ready, merely let something be done to and with himself'.³⁹ Barth reduces Mary to a receptacle of divine action and a bystander to divine purpose. In his attempts to protect against the perceived dangers in Catholic theology, Barth has fallen into an either-or of divine and human agency: either God is acting, or Mary is acting. 'It is God's own act, the free disposing of the Creator over the creature, without cause or co-operation [*Mitwirkung*] on the part of the creature'

³¹ CD I/1, 166.

³² CD I/2, 140.

³³ Rome, contrary to Barth's assumption, insists that 'In the Virgin Mary everything is relative to Christ and dependent upon him' (Paul VI, 'Apostolic Exhortation: *Marialis Cultus*', February 2, 1974). See also Louth, *Mary and the Mystery*, 17.

³⁴ Mary's significance 'flows forth from the superabundance of the merits of Christ, rests on His mediation, depends entirely on it and draws all its power from it' (Paul IV, '*Lumen Gentium*').

³⁵ CD I/2, 145 (emphasis mine).

³⁶ Barth, *Ad Limina*, 61 (emphasis mine).

³⁷ CD I/2, 196 (emphasis mine).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 191-92 (emphasis mine). See also CD IV/3, 605.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

for it was not 'Mary who acted [*handelte*], but God'.⁴⁰ By the end of his competitive description, Barth has thoroughly stripped Mary of particular significance and agential status. She is no longer Mary but an abstract form, a cipher for 'non-willing' humanity.

The 'Simple Little Maiden': Barth's Gendering of Mary's Agency

Barth emphasizes Mary's passivity also in relation to her gender. He does this through mapping Mary onto his understanding of gender norms. As Faye Bodley-Dangelo outlines, men 'lead, direct, and inspire'⁴¹ and women are 'in a state of passivity' wherein they 'follow, obey, and respond'.⁴² Thus, Mary is portrayed as the 'simple little maiden [*einfachen kleinen Mädchens*]' known less for her active obedience than her simple submission and receptivity.⁴³ Barth genders receptivity as uniquely feminine, symbolized in female virginity: 'To her there belongs, as already stated, that which in the form of receptivity, readiness, etc., represents the human possibility of female virginity'.⁴⁴ Receptivity becomes not a general human posture, but one that is coupled to femininity. The female virgin represents a complete lack of potency and is thus an ideal symbol for the human side of revelation.⁴⁵ To Barth, 'it is the very absence of masculine action that is significant here'.⁴⁶ Initially, it might seem that Barth has inverted his preference for the masculine by gendering humanity as feminine. But, again, the importance is placed on the *passivity* of humanity—its lack of agency in the event of revelation.⁴⁷ On the other side of the event is God who is tacitly gendered as masculine in Barth's construal. The masculine represents 'willing, achieving, creative, sovereign man', and, for this reason, Barth celebrates the male absence.⁴⁸ God is active, willing, and effectual and is, thus, the only active agent in the event of revelation—God has no 'male rival'.⁴⁹

Barth also utilizes his gender norms to describe the Christ-Mary relationship. He pits the activity of Christ (the male) against the passivity of Mary (the female). He compares their relationship to the instruction in 1 Timothy 2:13 to underline Mary's

⁴⁰ CD IV/2, 45.

⁴¹ Bodley-Dangelo, *Sexual Difference*, 1.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 176.

⁴³ Karl Barth, *The Great Promise, Luke I* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 32.

⁴⁴ CD I/2, 194-95.

⁴⁵ Thomas Arentzen has helpfully noted how Aristotelian reproductive science has informed devaluations of Mary in the Annunciation: 'The male provides the "form" and the "principle of the movement", the female provides the body, in other words, the "material". The father sows the seed into the moist but completely passive ground of the female womb, the unformed material' (Thomas Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist* [Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017], 55n47 [emphasis mine]).

⁴⁶ CD I/2, 194.

⁴⁷ To Barth's credit, he does not view the subordination of woman to man as a part of the 'order of creation'. Rather, 'it is definitely part of the curse imposed on male and female in consequence of the fall that the male becomes lord of the woman' (*Ibid.*, 193-94).

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

⁴⁹ My argument here is not particularly targeted at Barth's use of male terms, like Father, for God. Some of these terms are given by God, as Jesus taught us to pray, 'Our Father...'. See Robert W. Jenson, 'The Father, He...', *Speaking the Christian God*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 95-109 for further discussion. The issue is the rigid and absolute association of male and female with specific characteristics like passive and active. This connection paints God's fatherliness with a western patriarchal hue, and so makes God a certain *kind* of agent rather than God's own kind of agent—God's own way of being a Father.

‘quietness [ἡσυχία]’ contrasted to Christ who ‘takes authority [αὐθεντεῖν]’.⁵⁰ This serves to support Barth’s larger point that Mary’s significance is wholly accidental to Christ: ‘Mary is spoken of partly for the sake of Christ’s true humanity, partly for the sake of His true divinity, but not for her own sake’.⁵¹ This statement is even more striking when Barth compares Mary to Eve: ‘Eve does not play an independent part alongside of Adam in the story of the fall’.⁵² Barth thus paints a male-centric picture of creation and incarnation as Eve and Mary merely follow the lead of their male counterparts.⁵³

Though Barth is fond of identifying Mary’s passive femininity with humanity, she is still not the ideal picture of the church. Problematically, Mary’s role in the incarnation is not passive *enough*. It is Joseph, the ‘foster-father’ of Jesus, who better displays the place of the church. He stands idly by from a distance, seeing God working. Here, Barth’s polemical attitude toward Rome and his gender binary merge into his overall preference for Joseph over Mary as a symbol of the church. Barth held this view as a badge of honor.⁵⁴ He says in a letter to Hans Küng: ‘Do you know I am one of the few Protestants who is not annoyed but pleased that Joseph has been put in the canon of the mass? His function as foster-father of Christ makes him a much more appropriate patron of the church than the *theotokos*’.⁵⁵ He reiterates this again in a letter to Oscar Cullman: ‘Is not the relationship between Joseph and Jesus Christ (“foster-father”) a much more exact model for the church than Mary’s relationship is?’⁵⁶ Barth found Joseph more fitting as a type for the church because he is even more removed from the event of the incarnation. Mary as a type for the church can too easily lead ‘to a doctrine of the independent holiness of the Church’.⁵⁷ Barth, in the end, regards a distant and masculine conception of the church as more fitting of its actual relationship to Christ.

Barth also leverages his gender binary in his description of the *activity* of the Church. Because activity is gendered masculine, Barth finds another advantage in Joseph as an image of the Church. Joseph is a protector and provider, and so a preferable model of the Church’s activity. These masculine stereotypes lead to the disavowal of Mary’s own ethical exemplarity.⁵⁸ As he writes to a colleague in the Netherlands, ‘I find [Joseph], movingly

⁵⁰ CD I/2, 141.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 140 (emphasis mine).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵³ As those who occupy relatively parallel positions, there is a noted contrast in Barth’s description of Adam in CD III/1 and Mary in CD I/2. For in Adam, ‘only with man’s exclamation, with the declaration of his free choice and decision, will God’s own work have reached its goal’ (CD III/1, 298). This is Adam’s role and responsibility: to confirm the work of God, and God does not compel him but asks him (*Ibid.*, 299).

⁵⁴ On the surface it might seem like Barth’s rendering of Joseph as passive destabilizes his gender norms. However, we remember that Barth’s norm for male agency is that of one who *inspires*. Thus, Joseph functions as an *inspirational exemplar* who teaches humanity its true passivity before God and their true activity towards humanity.

⁵⁵ Karl Barth, ‘Letter to Hans Küng’, in *Letters 1961-1968* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 127 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁶ Barth, ‘Letter to Prof. Oscar Cullmann Rome’, in *Letters*, 76.

⁵⁷ CD I/2, 196.

⁵⁸ As Bodley-Dangelo has noted, Barth is unable to prevent his divine command ethic from becoming conflated with a specific culture’s stereotypes and norms: ‘[Barth] abstracts the binary of sexual difference from its instantiation in such conventions and renders it an unassailable law, detached from the social sphere of conventions and mores, but always to be expressed, enacted, and shored up within that sphere. In this way, then, he unwittingly makes recourse to a natural theology by transforming cultural assumptions into a divinely imposed ought’ (Bodley-Dangelo, *Sexual Difference*, 160).

obedient and ministering, much more suited to be the protector (and exemplar!) of the church than Mary, with whose function that of the church is not to be compared'.⁵⁹ Or as one Catholic theologian relayed about Barth's advice to him: 'If I were a Catholic theologian, I would lift Joseph up. He took care of the child; he takes care of the Church'.⁶⁰ Joseph is given more credit for taking care of Jesus than Mary herself.⁶¹ With his anti-Catholic polemic and rigid gender binary, Barth has securely marginalized Mary's agency leaving her as one who is merely 'acted upon'.

Part II: Clearing Ground for a Barthian Mariology

As I have shown, Barth's account of Mary presents a marginalized and passive agent. Mary's activity must shrink so that God's activity might grow. This is a telltale sign that a competitive account of agency has worked its way into Barth's description. As Kathryn Tanner has so helpfully emphasized, 'A non-competitive relation between creatures and God means that the creature does not decrease so that God may increase. The glorification of God does not come at the expense of creatures'.⁶² A truly non-competitive account of Mary's agency does not need to minimize her to emphasize God's grace.⁶³ For even in the covenant of grace, there is more to be said than that 'the creature can *only be the object* of the divine activity ... even in the utter humility of its spiritual existence [the creature] acquires an *active* function within the history of the covenant'.⁶⁴ Thus, there is at *no point* a need to assert the passivity of the creature in Barth's theology. The creature has its own agency and action alongside and within God's action. The grammar of non-competitive agency enables us simultaneously to say that 'God's will accomplishes everything' and 'the creature works freely with God'.⁶⁵ In his treatment of Mary, Barth gives a resounding 'yes' to the former, and a strident 'no' to the latter.

⁵⁹ Barth, 'Letter to Dr. B. A. Willems O.P., Nijmegen (Netherlands)', in *Letters*, 143.

⁶⁰ Francis L. Filas, *Joseph: The Man Closest to Jesus: The Complete Life, Theology and Devotional History of St. Joseph* (Boston, MA: St. Paul Editions, 1962), 462.

⁶¹ Scripturally, both Mary and Joseph are shown to protect Jesus. Joseph follows God's instruction to flee from Herod to Egypt (Matt. 2:13-14). Mary leads the search to find and protect Jesus when he is 'lost' in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-52).

⁶² Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity, and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 2-3.

⁶³ Although many of these will be discussed below, there are several examples of modern Mariologies that do not fall into a competitive description. See especially Sergius Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 168-81; Robert W. Jenson, 'A Space for God', in *Mary, Mother of God*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 49-57; Jane Petkovic, *Body-Poetics of the Virgin Mary: Mary's Maternal Body as Poem of the Father* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2003). Of note in these examples is the consistent recognition of the priority of God's establishing grace and Mary's *own* activity in the event of the incarnation. Because Mary's particular decisions are noted, these Mariologies, to varying degrees, take this activity as requiring *unique* theological reflection. In other words, because of the nature of the event and Mary's active role within it, reflection on Mary is not equivalent to reflection upon other 'saints' or 'apostles'.

⁶⁴ CD III/3, 64 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁵ It is for this reason that the antinomy of 'monergism' and 'synergism' is ultimately unhelpful, as Barth himself was aware (See CD III/3, 113-15). Both, when viewed from a certain perspective, are true. There are *two* answers to the question of 'who works?' As Jenson concludes in regard to Mary: 'By what will and power did Mary conceive? If we are to follow the suggestions of Luke's narrative, the answer must be double'. (Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997], 200).

Barth himself was aware that his early emphasis on the ‘wholly other’ God was an abstraction which left the human agent in a state of hopeless insignificance. ‘We viewed this “wholly other” in isolation, abstracted, and absolute, and set it over abasing man, this miserable wretch ... What if the result of the new hymn to the majesty of God should be a new confirmation of the hopelessness of all human activity [*alles menschlichen Tuns*]’.⁶⁶ Barth acknowledges that he had unwittingly and unnecessarily minimized the creature for the sake of maximizing the creator. Barth had stripped Mary’s agency of *any* significance. How can this be remedied? Primarily, we need to clear some theological ground, and to do so, ‘sometimes we need to read Barth against Barth’.⁶⁷ It is within Barth himself that we find resources to critique and correct his presentation of Mary’s agency.

Christology, Agency, and Mary

Barth’s doctrine of election and his mature Christology are the starting points for deconstructing the theological deficiencies in his earlier construal of Mary. It is Barth’s *own* theology that not only rejects the marginalization of the creature, but, in fact, permits her exaltation in Jesus Christ. The relationship Barth imagined between Mary and God, creation and reconciliation, creator and creature, divine and human agency must be reorganized in light of his mature Christology.⁶⁸ To start, we recognize that the person of Jesus Christ, as fully human and fully divine, entails that a real meeting has taken place between the creature and the creator. As Barth says in his posthumously published fragments on the Christian life: ‘Let it be asserted primarily that God and man are two subjects in genuine encounter. God and man do in fact confront one another: two partners of different kinds, acting differently, so that they cannot be exchanged or equated’.⁶⁹ Jesus Christ grounds the non-competitive encounter between God and humanity, but he does not collapse them. John Webster rightly notes that Barth leaves no room for an ‘ethical docetism’ in which God is the only agent present in the activity of the creature.⁷⁰ How, then, do we describe, in detail, the encounter that takes place between God and humanity? How do these two active agents relate? I take each agent in turn.

⁶⁶ Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London: Collins, 1961), 44–45 (emphasis mine).

⁶⁷ Willie Jennings, ‘Another Knowledge of God Is Possible: Barth Among Post-Colonial Epistemologists’, (lecture, 2018 Annual Karl Barth Conference, Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kq2dixOGAwk> [accessed February 3, 2022]). Jennings’ presentation wants to reframe what Christian knowing looks like, and he sees in Barth’s epistemology a decolonial option. He reads Barth’s doctrine of God and providence against Barth’s own participation in colonial forms of knowledge possession and domination. For it is knowledge understood *as possession* and *commodity* which is the ‘deeper problem that constitutes the problem of natural theology’ (Ibid.). We could say that Barth, at points, views Mary as a colonized *virgo*. He instrumentalizes Mary as ‘one who is merely acted upon’. Here both Jennings and I find corrective resources in CD III, which reveals that ‘God focuses on the creature in appreciation and joy not in contemplating [the creature’s] instrumental value’ (Ibid.).

⁶⁸ Bruce McCormack has shown persuasively that Barth’s doctrine of election reframes his prior understanding of creation. See Bruce L. McCormack, *Karl Barth’s Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 460.

⁶⁹ Karl Barth, *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatics IV/4. Lecture Fragments, Other Writings* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 27. For further discussion of the significance of *The Christian Life* see Eberhard Jüngel, ‘Invocation of God as the Ethical Ground of Christian Action: Introductory Remarks on the Posthumous Fragments of Karl Barth’s Ethics of the Doctrine of Reconciliation’, in *Theological Essays I* (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 154–72.

⁷⁰ Webster, *Barth’s Moral Theology*, 169.

God's Agency

To describe God's agency, we must take care not to slip into an abstract view of sovereignty, as Barth admitted he had. Rather, 'who God is and what He is in His deity He proves and reveals not in a vacuum as a divine being-for-Himself, but precisely and authentically in the fact that He exists, speaks, and acts as the partner of man, though of course as the absolutely superior partner. He who does that is the living God'.⁷¹ God's sovereignty cannot be abstracted from God's living relationship with humanity, and this relationship is revealed in the concrete dealings and actions of the Son who is the 'full and direct witness' to God's sovereignty.⁷² From this, we see that God has patience with the creature and this patience means that God does not ever destroy or negate the other: 'to allow to another ... space and time for the development of its own existence, thus conceding to this existence a reality side by side with His own, and fulfilling His will towards this other in such a way that he does not suspend and destroy it as this other but accompanies and sustains it to develop in freedom'.⁷³ God's dealings with Israel, chiefly in sending Jesus Christ, reveal a God who exercises sovereignty *with* the other. God relates to the creature as an empowering, jealous, and long-suffering covenant partner.

God's concrete sovereignty also reveals that these two agents are not symmetrical. God's history with humanity affirms that God grounds, precedes, and establishes this covenant partnership. They are not two equivalent agents but exist in different realms of agency. We cannot arrive at a place in which we can see exactly how God and human willing relate because they are 'not two species of the same genus'.⁷⁴ This asymmetry, rather than obliterating human agency, establishes it by ensuring the creature is granted its own kind of action. The earlier noted tendency by Barth to gender the event of revelation is problematic for these reasons. Because God exists as an agent on another plane, God is not a 'kind' of agent that we would identify with supposed male or female traits. As Eugene Rogers summarizes, 'God is not under the category of gender; God is beyond gender as the source of it all. Furthermore, if God is not in a category, God is not binary'.⁷⁵ God, who is beyond gender, is not the masculine actor upon human feminine passivity. God's partnership with humanity means that God's dealings with Mary can be described as active and receptive, commanding and listening, empowering and patient.

Once these different levels of agency are established, the way is paved to develop a non-competitive encounter between God and human. God as a distinct agent is the extrinsic source of all human activity: 'it is absolutely the will of God alone which is executed in all creaturely activity and creaturely occurrence'.⁷⁶ God's will grounds and establishes all creaturely willing, while also creating a legitimate encounter between the two. God empowers humanity from outside (*extra nos*): '[the individual] has found in Him the true centre of himself which is outside himself'.⁷⁷ God surrounds the creature, and gives humanity the capacity for their partnership, and, so, realize that they have nothing that is not a gift.

⁷¹ Barth, *Humanity of God*, 45 (emphasis original).

⁷² CD IV/2, 161.

⁷³ CD II/1, 409-10.

⁷⁴ Paul T. Nimmo, *Being in Action: The Theological Shape of Barth's Ethical Vision* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 123. Nimmo's work, as well as Paul Jones's, establishes the impact Barth's mature doctrine of election has on human agency. This central connection is critical to understanding how Mary can herself be regarded as an exalted human agent. Missing this connection will lead to a warping of my argument as 'Pelagian'.

⁷⁵ Eugene F. Rogers, *Elements of Christian Thought: A Basic Course in Christianese* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2021), 116 (emphasis original).

⁷⁶ CD III/3, 115. See also CD I/2, 199.

⁷⁷ CD IV/1, 744.

Critically, with Jesus as the ideal example, dependence on God is not a colonizing of the human or the treating of the human as a mere puppet. God's lordship is something that works with the creature not 'in spite of it' or 'against' it: 'The gracious God acts not only towards the creature but also ... with the creature. His lordship is not despotism'.⁷⁸ The God who meets Mary is open to her and desires to fulfill the promises of Israel with her. The 'witness' of God means that competition is not God's fear. Rather, as Barth unfolds, God coronates humanity in freedom:

The perfection of God's giving of Himself to man in the person of Jesus Christ consists in the fact that far from merely playing with man, far from merely moving or using him, far from merely dealing with him as an object, this self-giving sets man up as a subject, awakens him to genuine individuality and autonomy, frees him, makes him a king, so that in his rule the kingly rule of God Himself attains form and revelation. How can there be any possible rivalry here, let alone usurpation?⁷⁹

Barth's concern of a rivalry between God and creature, one that so animated him in Roman Catholic Mariology, is here absent. God, in Christ, shares kingly rule with no fear of rivalry. God is not an insecure Lord. With this in mind, Barth's condemnation of the 'queen of heaven' is altogether unnecessary. The same God elected her, created her, loved her, freed her, commanded her, and exalted her.

Human Agency

Looking now to the human agent, we are also careful not to engage in abstract theorizing. Instead, we look to Jesus Christ as the elected 'true and new man'.⁸⁰ Jesus Christ is the one who shows us the breadth and depth of human agency. Eberhard Jüngel's oft repeated statement again applies: 'The being of the man Jesus is the ontological and epistemological ground of all analogy. So the original form of humanity ... is seen and described "in light of the humanity of Jesus"'.⁸¹ Therefore, to understand human convergence and cooperation with God (the *concursum divinum*), 'we have not to begin with empty concepts but with concepts which are already filled out with Christian meaning'.⁸² This Christian meaning is none other than the human agency of the person Jesus Christ. For, just as Jesus is not 'a mere puppet moved this way and that by God',⁸³ so too the creature 'is not subject to [God] like a puppet or a tool or a dead matter'.⁸⁴ Jesus's human agency establishes a non-competitive account of human and divine wills:

Jesus lives. He lives as the Doer of this act of the free and victorious human will breaking the circle of sinful human action and being, the will of the new man ... As such, He lives for us. And in Him we also live as men of the *same* free will, as those

⁷⁸ CD III/3, 93.

⁷⁹ CD II/2, 179.

⁸⁰ CD IV/2, 155.

⁸¹ Eberhard Jüngel, 'Die Möglichkeit Theologischer Anthropologie Auf Dem Grunde Der Analogie', *Evangelische Theologie* 22, no. 10 (1962): 538 (my translation) here quoting KD III/2, 291.

⁸² CD III/3, 117.

⁸³ CD II/2, 178.

⁸⁴ CD III/3, 93.

who break through that circle, who overcome and conquer our misery, as free men.⁸⁵

Jesus Christ breaks the hold of sin and establishes the *same* free will of eschatological (new) humanity. Mary, like her son and because of her son, is not one whom God merely 'acts upon'.

Crucially, Jesus does this *as a human*. There is no competition because the human is joined with God in the Son. Paul Jones observes the consequence of this claim: 'the preventive incarnational action of God qua Son includes the distinctive action of Christ qua human The salvation achieved by Christ, in other words, is a divine and human achievement'.⁸⁶ In the Son, the divine and human asymmetrically participate in the salvation of humanity. God's action is primary but human cooperation in salvation, what Barth so greatly condemned in Mariology, is true of his own Christology. Jesus Christ, as human, reveals the ultimate significance of human activity: salvation.

With Christ as the ground of human agency, the way is now opened to speak of the 'autonomous', 'independent', 'cooperating', and 'free' human agent. In the words of Saint Paul, 'we are God's coworkers [συνεργοί] (1 Cor 3.9).⁸⁷ Because these terms can be rightly applied to the human Jesus, they can also rightly be used of Mary. The language that Barth was so incensed about with Mary, he now applies to the creature with full confidence. 'To the creature God determined, therefore, to give an individuality and autonomy'.⁸⁸ God graciously gives the creature 'independent activity'.⁸⁹ God is 'cooperating [zusammenwirkt] with them' and giving humanity the opportunity 'to cooperate [zusammenzuwirken] with Him'.⁹⁰ Because God is always the gracious ground of human cooperation, Barth speaks of human 'capacities [Fähigkeiten] and possibilities [Möglichkeiten]' which are 'due him because he is the being whom God willed to exalt as His covenant-partner'.⁹¹ In this partnership, humanity is called earnestly to take the gift of agency: 'No less serious in his place than God in his, man must be present and at work in it according to the measure of his human capacity'.⁹² God's relation to the creature is here about an empowering presence that truly calls the agent to live in freedom, the freedom that is already actual in Christ. Mary did just this when she, in faith, trusted that God could use the capacities of her womb to birth the Son. Mary exercised her own free autonomy and independent activity to cooperate with God.

We are beginning to see that Barth's doctrine of election, eschatologically situated in the unveiling of God's Son, allows us to speak of God working something *intrinsic* to humanity.⁹³ Barth's fears over inherent or intrinsic capacities are reframed around the fact that Christ begins a work *in our very being*. Although our agency begins and is established *extra nos*, it goes on to become established in us (*in nobis*):

⁸⁵ CD IV/2 493 (emphasis mine).

⁸⁶ Jones, *The Humanity of Christ*, 125.

⁸⁷ All Bible translations are my own.

⁸⁸ CD II/2, 178.

⁸⁹ CD III/3, 118.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹¹ Barth, *Humanity of God*, 52.

⁹² Barth, *The Christian Life*, 42.

⁹³ Pace Johnson who says that the relation of God and creation is 'always extrinsic' in Jesus Christ (Johnson, *Karl Barth*, 225).

[the history of Jesus Christ] having taken place *extra nos*, it also works *in nobis*, introducing a new being of every man ... if He acts *extra nos pro nobis*, and to that extent also *in nobis*, this necessarily implies that in spite of the unfaithfulness of every man He creates in the history of every man the beginning of his new history, the history of a man who has become faithful to God.⁹⁴

God's work begins extrinsically but does not just remain outside as he works Christ's own history in us.⁹⁵ The human on the other side of the event of revelation has an intrinsic capacity—the history of one already faithful to God. Christ's work in us brings about our shared exaltation with him. The exalted person of Jesus reveals the possibility of the 'exaltation of human essence to fellowship with the divine nature'.⁹⁶ Human exaltation and glorification in Christ is not only possible but promised.⁹⁷ 'God humbles Himself to man ... to exalt him to perfect fellowship with Himself'.⁹⁸ This double participation of us in Christ and Christ in us opens up the exaltation of humanity as Christ inaugurates a new creation.

A pause at this point is now necessary: How can Barth speak of the exalted, cooperating, and active human agent? Was not this language ruled out because of human sinfulness? Did Barth not say that the creature comes to the grace of revelation bringing only their sin and incapacity without any prior created grace still intact? Indeed, Barth spoke of the sinful human nature as 'the only one we know and the only one there actually is'.⁹⁹ However, his doctrine of election requires the amendment of this claim. In Christ, there is no moment in which the creature is 'apart from grace'.¹⁰⁰ Mary does not approach God with sinful incapacity, but with Christ's own history. The creature always and already stands in the gracious election of Jesus Christ. Thus, the true Mary is the one elected in Christ to be the *theotokos*, not the 'simple little maiden' who is negated by God's action. Rather than being the only 'actual' nature we know, it is the 'sinful nature' that is an abstraction.

Sinful man in himself, without regard to the fact that he is also this covenant-partner and as such still the creature of God, is an abstract concept which must be excluded ... Even the fact that he is a sinner is true only when seen in connection with the truth that he is the object of the grace of God ... The grace of God, the covenant of God with man, is primary. The sin of man is secondary.¹⁰¹

Because grace and partnership with God is primary to the creature, sinful incapacity cannot be the preeminent human fact in the event of revelation. Mary comes to the moment of revelation with actual freedom in Christ.¹⁰² This fact shifts the impor-

⁹⁴ CD IV/4, 21.

⁹⁵ On this ground, it rightly follows that Mary is 'our mother'. For by inheriting Christ's own history, we share Christ's mother. Mary mysteriously shares 'Christ's own history' while also being a part of his history.

⁹⁶ CD IV/2, 103.

⁹⁷ See John 5:44; Rom. 8:17, 29-30; Eph. 5:27.

⁹⁸ CD IV/2, 117.

⁹⁹ CD I/2, 191.

¹⁰⁰ CD II/2, 92.

¹⁰¹ CD III/2, 32.

¹⁰² Barth does still hold to a version of Luther's *simul justus et peccator*, but this cannot be 'taken to mean that the totality with which we are righteous and sinners involves an equal and equally serious determination of our existence' (CD II/1, 627). For further discussion see Jeff McSwain, *Simul Sanctification: Barth's Hidden Vision for Human Transformation* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2018).

tance from God's action in revelation to humanity's response to God—to the recognition of their election. Bruce McCormack draws out the attendant consequence: 'The election of the individual has already been decided in Jesus Christ. What is decided in the revelation-event is not whether the individual is elect or not, but whether she will respond to her election in faith and obedience; whether, in other words, she will live as one who is elect'.¹⁰³ The question of great significance is placed: will the human live as an abstracted sinner, or in their identity as a justified child of God? Mary did respond to her election in Christ. The form of the *virgo* is thus not best characterized as 'non-willing' humanity, but as 'actively receptive' humanity—the human agent freely receiving the miracle of their already won election.

With this Christological constitution of human agency, we have identified the profound significance of human activity, and, so, identify the flaws in Barth's characterization of Mary's feminine passivity. Jesus Christ is not passive in relation to the Father. Nor is Jesus's human will (gendered feminine in Barth) passive or uncooperative next to the divine will (gendered masculine in Barth).¹⁰⁴ Barth makes clear that the true human is 'characterised by action'.¹⁰⁵ Yet, Mary is never given this active status. In reality, 'Barth's asymmetrical ordering of the relationship between the sexes ultimately produces a truncated model of female agency lacking Christological grounding'.¹⁰⁶ According to Barth's own portrayal of human agency in Christ, it is impossible for a woman, like Mary, to be a full agent. Restoring Mary's agency with Barth's Christology, as we have done, means that she simultaneously transcends and inverts Barth's gender binary. She is active, involved, and influential and so inverts the binary. As an active agent, Mary represents all humanity, and so transcends it.

Finally, human activity, grounded in the above Christology, begins definitively with prayer, thanksgiving, and praise. It is in the invocation of God that our active life is at once revealed as a receptive life. Jüngel, the ever-helpful interpreter of Barth, summarizes: 'For Barth, where God acts, we are seen to act—precisely in receiving'.¹⁰⁷ Prayer is an encounter, a back and forth between Father and child, even a codetermination. It is not a self-help monologue or a path to self-realization, for such a definition 'cannot speak at all of a corresponding hearing on God's side'.¹⁰⁸ In prayer, we once more reject an abstract view of God's sovereignty—a misguided monergism. As Barth says in one of the more powerful passages in *The Christian Life*:

It must be stated that the God who is known as 'our Father' in Jesus Christ is not this supreme being who is self-enclosed, who cannot be codetermined from

¹⁰³ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 459.

¹⁰⁴ Of particular interest here is Bruce McCormack's recent Christological proposal which argues that the 'assumption might be construed as an act of receptivity on the part of the Logos' (Bruce L. McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021], 11 [emphasis original]). Under this construal, the incarnation is the Logos's active receptivity to the human Jesus. McCormack acknowledges that Barth 'did not get this far' (*Ibid.*, 12), and 'he sometimes spoke of the Logos as the "active subject" and sometimes as though the Son and Jesus were two subjects whose actions were parallel, standing in a relation of correspondence' (*Ibid.*, 119).

¹⁰⁵ CD III/4, 3.

¹⁰⁶ Bodley-Dangelo, *Sexual Difference*, 175.

¹⁰⁷ Eberhard Jüngel, *Karl Barth: A Theological Legacy* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1986), 124.

¹⁰⁸ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 102.

outside, who is condemned to work alone. He is a God who in overflowing grace has chosen and is free to have authentic and not just apparent dealings, intercourse, and exchange with his children. He is their free Father, not in a lofty isolation in which he would be the prisoner of his own majesty, but in his history with them as his free children whom he himself has freed. He does not just speak to them. He wills that he also be spoken to, that they also speak to him. He does not just work on and for them. As the Founder and the perfect Lord of this *concursum* (cf. *CD* III, 3 § 49, 2), he wills their work as well. He for his part will not work without them. He will work only in connection with their work. Thus, he is not so omnipotent or, rather, so impotent, that as they call upon him, liberated and commanded to do so by him, he will not and cannot hear them, letting a new action be occasioned by them, causing his own work and rule and control to correspond to their invocation. His sovereignty is not an abstraction.¹⁰⁹

God, who is Father, is self-limiting and willingly codetermined in his care of humanity. God *wants* the human agent to work together with Godself. In prayer, God is receptive to humanity's work and will. The great import of humanity's prayerful work is in its correspondence to God's response. Prayer speaks both to humanity's dependence on God, and to God's desire to be influenced by humanity. God does not *want* the creature to be passive in this relationship, to be merely the one acted upon. God listens, responds, and empowers. Barth is unworried about human pride and presumption because the very heart of prayer is an act of service to God. 'As [Christians] call upon him with confidence, they do not gain the mastery over him or acquire control over his gift or his giving, let alone himself as the Giver. As they invoke him as their partner, they stand and act in his service'.¹¹⁰ The invocation of God in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving summarizes the active receptivity of the human agent and the ultimate significance of its freedom.

Part III: Eschatology and Agency: A Mariology with and beyond Barth

With Barth's polemical and problematic tendencies 'excised', the way is now paved for an unfettered Barthian Mariology. We have seen how human activity is given ultimate significance in and through the human Jesus Christ. Mary provides the capstone to this point, for her absolute dependence on Christ *includes* her unique importance to God. However, before filling out this picture, it behooves me to define exactly what is meant by Barthian Mariology. I now consider both terms in succession. By Barthian I mean something that is with and beyond Barth. It is with Barth in that it seeks to examine where his own insights about Mary testify to a deeper appreciation for her theological significance. He does not unanimously marginalize Mary as will be evident in his commentary on Luke 1.¹¹¹ And, in good Barthian fashion, this same biblical material will feature heavily in my theological exposition. However, we must go beyond Barth by (theo)logically *extending* his own Christological claims into Mariology. 'Beyond' also

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹¹¹ It is telling that it is in his biblical commentary that Barth comes closest to the Mariology I articulate here. Barth, when guided by the biblical narrative, is far more careful and complimentary about Mary's action.

means that this Mariology will bear a resemblance to Barth but *not* a correspondence.¹¹² Barth gives us many tools; we must use them.

The next term, Mariology, is a bit thornier. No doubt, Barth's engagement with Mariology is almost exclusively with nineteenth- and twentieth-century Roman Catholic dogma.¹¹³ However, my use is more basic than this. I explore Mary's unique and particular significance with a mind towards her Christological grounding.¹¹⁴ Such an exploration began very early in the Church's life through the establishing of her title, *theotokos*.¹¹⁵ If such an attribution, as Robert Jenson observes, 'is justified, it must also be right for there to be a subdepartment of theology called Mariology'.¹¹⁶ Mary's particular role makes available a distinct realm of theologizing. By arguing this, we insist, *contra* Barth, that Mariology can legitimately spring from as well as be subservient to Christology. The scriptural witness intimates such a possibility. Elizabeth, upon hearing Mary, is 'filled with the Holy Spirit' (Luke 1:41), and shouts 'you are blessed among women, and the fruit of your womb is blessed! Why is this happening to me? That the mother of my Lord [ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ κυρίου μου] would come to me?' (Luke 1:42b-43). Within a Spirit-inspired confession of Jesus as 'my Lord',¹¹⁷ Elizabeth gives the concurrent confession of Mary as 'mother' and 'blessed among women'. The recognition of Christ as Lord is *interwoven* with the claim that Mary is the mother of that Lord. A Mariology cannot be suppressed in Christology.¹¹⁸ Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov is thus right to conclude: 'Mariology is a chapter of Christology, a chapter without which Christology itself would be incomplete'.¹¹⁹ The Scriptures attest to Mary's particular significance as one who is 'highly favored' (Luke 1:28) and whom all nations will 'call blessed' (Luke 1:48). Barth, departing from his predominant stance, also recognizes Mary's *unique* import, 'For *particularly* Mary, *particularly* as forming the extreme end in the line of those who have received the promise and wait for the Lord, is characterized as unmistakably human, as a person who is opposite to God, who is in need of grace and receives grace'.¹²⁰ Mariology reveals that the ultimate significance of human freedom in Christ is to actively receive our place with God—a place God has willed to need. A Barthian

¹¹² The relative absence of the Spirit in the previous section is a conspicuous hole in Barth's discussion of the human agent. As I will discuss below, the indwelling Spirit in Mary is a key facet of her agential status.

¹¹³ Unlike his more mature perspective of the *analogia entis*, Barth never comes to see Mariology as a spectrum of possible theological stances.

¹¹⁴ For those who argue against the idea that Barth's theology rules out the significance of particularity, see Tom Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 32, and Webster, *Barth's Moral Theology*, 175.

¹¹⁵ See for example Saint John of Damascus, 'Orthodox Faith: Book Three', in *Writings* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1981), 267-334.

¹¹⁶ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, II., 200.

¹¹⁷ In Luke's gospel the word *κύριος* has to this point only been used to reference the God of Israel. Of course, such a correspondence does not immediately mean an identification between the two (See Acts 25:26 where Nero is called *κύριος*). However, as Kavin Rowe has shown, 'Taking into account Luke's frequent use of *κύριος* for the God of Israel ... it becomes possible to draw the conclusion that the dramatic moment of 1:43 in the narrative bespeaks a kind of unity of identity between YHWH and the human Jesus within Mary's womb by means of the resonance of *κύριος*'. C. Kavin Rowe, *Early Narrative Christology: The Lord in the Gospel of Luke* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 45.

¹¹⁸ This operates in parallel to Barth's admission about analogy: 'I began to see that the notion of analogy cannot totally be suppressed in theology' (Barth, *Gespräche*, 499).

¹¹⁹ Paul Evdokimov, *La nouveauté de l'Esprit*, 267 quoted in Kalistos Ware, 'The Sanctity and Glory of the Mother of God: Orthodox Approaches', *The Way*, Supplement 51, (1984): 81.

¹²⁰ Barth, *The Great Promise*, 19-20 (emphasis mine).

Mariology is attuned to her unique place with God as the one who in body and mind *conceived* God. It is to the eschatological and ethical nature of these themes that I now turn.

Mary the Eschatological New Creature

So, how are we to conceive of Mary's unique significance? Primarily, Mary is the preeminent eschatological new creature. Mariology of a Barthian flavor begins with the eschatological coming of Christ. Mary is significant not for what she reveals about creation but about new creation. She stands at the start of the end, the dawn of the new age inaugurated by the life, death, and resurrection of the Son. A Barthian Mariology does not, and cannot, rest on the presupposition of created grace as it does in Catholic theology. Nor does it rest on the assumption of an inherent capacity given to humanity *in creation*. Instead, we must reverse the Catholic order. It is eschatology—the existence of the new creature revealed in Jesus Christ—that grounds any discussion of human cooperation and capacity, not what we take 'creation' to be.¹²¹ Reconciliation is the precondition of creation, not in the temporal order but in the elective order. Mary's womb was elected 'before' Adam's rib. Her election in Christ establishes this eschatological importance and her exaltation as *theotokos*. This eschatological ordering means that 'Mary gives birth to Christ, but in another, more profound sense, it is Christ who "gives birth" to Mary and, through her, to all humanity'.¹²² Christ is always and already the ground of everything Mary has, and as Mary's *mother*, he places her in this exclusive position.¹²³ Mysteriously, Mary, having already been birthed by Christ, is asked to birth Christ.

Because of Mary's eschatological and historical station, 'she stands representatively at the *head* of the whole Advent community'.¹²⁴ Mary's representative headship includes her particular and historical person. Amongst all of the symbolizing of Mary, we must not forget her concrete person.¹²⁵ This principally includes her place in Israel. Jesus, as the one 'born of a woman, born under the law' (Gal. 4:4), is born of *this* woman, this *Israelite* woman whose journey with God began under the old Covenant. Mary's *own history* is not erased by the inheritance of Christ's history but is sanctified through its Christological interpretation. For in her role as *theotokos*, God has 'remembered Israel' (Luke 1:55). By her historical and eschatological location, as Jenson argues, she embodies Israel:

The whole history of Israel had been God's labor to take Israel as his space in the world. And it was indeed a labor, for Israel by her own account was a resistant

¹²¹ As Barth says, 'What we consider to be the truth about the created world is one thing ... Quite another is the covenant of grace, the work of Jesus Christ, for the sake and in fulfillment of which creation exists as it is' (CD III/1, 370).

¹²² John Panteleimon Manoussakis, 'Mary's Exception', in *For the Unity of All: Contributions to the Theological Dialogue between East and West* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 13.

¹²³ That Jesus and Mary are both mothers is most famously articulated by Julian of Norwich: 'So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ ... and our Saviour is our true mother, in whom we are endlessly born, and out of whom we shall never come to birth' (Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015], 126).

¹²⁴ Barth, *The Great Promise*, 32 (emphasis mine).

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Johnson has helpfully cautioned against merely symbolizing Mary apart from her concrete person: 'approaching [Mary] as an actual human being surprises us with the discovery that she too struggled, that her own life's journey, in Vatican II's poetic phrase, was a pilgrimage of faith, including sojourning in faith's dark night' (Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, xiv).

people: again and again the Lord's angel announced his advent, begged indeed for space, and again and again Israel's answer was 'Let it be, but not yet'. Gabriel's mission to Mary was, so to speak, one last try, and this time the response did not temporize. As the created space for God, Mary is Israel concentrated.¹²⁶

Through Mary, God reaches out yet again to Israel, yet again to be present with her, yet again to ask her repentance. Mary's *fiat* also enacts the life of Israel: praising God with the Scriptures (Luke 1:46-55) and bringing forth the word like a prophet. Mary, the pneumatically inspired prophet of Israel, bears the word of God in mind and body so to deliver it to the people of God.¹²⁷ She is the 'archprophet' of the new age announcing to Israel: 'Immanuel, God with us'.¹²⁸ In this way, Mary is the forerunner of the forerunner—John the Baptist. Her presence announces to him that the Lord has come, and he leaps in agreement (Luke 1:41).

Mary's particular journey with God is one of exaltation precisely in her lowliness and humility (Luke 1:48a). In a world fixated on the value of social and economic stature, she stands exalted on behalf of the downtrodden.¹²⁹ Mary as a young woman from Nazareth,¹³⁰ disgraced with an extramarital pregnancy (Matt. 1:19) and displaced from her home in Egypt (Matt. 2:13-14), gives further reason to honor her. She proclaims the inverted values of the eschatological new creation in which the poor are blessed and those who hunger are filled (Luke 6:20-25). Mary's exaltation, like her son's, is not one of regal superiority but of humble servitude.

Mary is further exalted because, as the first to participate in the new eschatological humanity disclosed in Christ Jesus, she was the first to *conceive* it body and mind. A Barthian Mariology recognizes the close relationship between epistemology and eschatology. This epistemological situation constitutes the 'new creature'. As McCormack summarizes, 'The subject of the knowledge of God is the new creature'.¹³¹ In the Gospel of Luke, it is not Zechariah, not John, not Joseph, but *Mary* who is the first to know and receive the promise of the Son of God. Moreover, Mary reveals that this eschatological knowing is an embodied knowing. Mary's body, as Jane Petkovic articulates, is a 'living poem' which is 'the site of the Word's gestation'.¹³² Mary's knowing is the unity of *soma* and *logos* through the *pneuma*. Thus, as the first to know in both body and mind, she is the *de facto* first new creature.

Though conceiving Christ, Mary also reveals the inexhaustibility of God's revelation in the Son. She conceives the inconceivable. As Mary asks the angel: 'how can this be

¹²⁶ Jenson, 'A Space for God', 55-56.

¹²⁷ As said in *Lumen Gentium*, '[Mary] received the Word of God in her heart and in her body' (*Lumen Gentium*, 53).

¹²⁸ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, II, 202. For further exploration of Mary as a prophet see Johnson, *Truly Our Sister*, 305-25.

¹²⁹ This aspect of Mary's significance has been rightly noted by liberation theologians. See for example Fr. Virgilio Elizondo, 'Mary, Icon of Evangelization: Queen of Heaven and Earth, Hope of the Downtrodden', *Church Life Journal*, August 15, 2016, <https://churchlifejournal.nd.edu/articles/mary-icon-of-evangelization-queen-of-heaven-and-earth-hope-of-the-downtrodden> (accessed July 20, 2022); Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor* (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1989).

¹³⁰ As the gospels attest, this was not a good thing: 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' (John 1:46).

¹³¹ McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, 256 (emphasis mine).

¹³² Petkovic, *Body-Poetics*, 230-31. Petkovic, in conversation with John Paul II, fascinatingly develops a Mariology specifically based on Mary's female body and the 'language' her body communicates.

since I have not known a man?' (Luke 1:34). Such a question, Barth explains, 'is the great question which we have to ask. We do not know how this is to come about ... we can only ask, how shall it happen?'¹³³ Mary is in awe of the impossible possibility of revelation. Jesus must teach her the true nature of his identity.¹³⁴ This is not to deflate Mary's significance, but unveils her as 'a model disciple who consents to what is not yet fully understood'.¹³⁵ She testifies to the eschatological reality of encountering Christ in a real yet incomprehensible way.

Mary may not fully comprehend the Son of man, but she knows Christ in a unique way, as mother. Because of this, she shows the profound significance God gives to the human. Principally, Mary teaches us that God wills to need the human. God will not become human without a human partner. It is theologically significant, not only that God became human, but that God came alongside this human and asked her to become God's mother.¹³⁶ For the mystery of God's embodiment is revealed in the twice-born Son of God. God the Son does not wish just to be begotten of the Father but to be begotten of Mary. This twofold 'coming' is located in the language of 'womb', as the Vulgate of Psalm 109 reads, 'From the womb, before the morning star, I begot you'.¹³⁷ Augustine, commenting on this passage, concludes that 'we must take the psalm's word to be those of the Father addressing his Son'.¹³⁸ God the father, figuratively speaking, has a womb. The eleventh Council of Toledo picked up on this Augustinian line of thinking and concluded, 'One must believe that the Son is begotten and born not from nothing, nor from some other substance, but from the womb of the Father'.¹³⁹ Just as the Son was begotten from the womb of the Father before time began, so too he was begotten from the womb of Mary before the dawn. The womb of Mary speaks to the mystery of God establishing and desiring the involvement of the creature in God's very self. As Proclus says in his homilies, 'Had the Word not dwelt in a womb, the flesh would never have sat on the throne'.¹⁴⁰ In this way, Mary is uniquely connected to the eschatological mystery of the incarnation. God is no tyrant. God does not force this role onto Mary. Rather, she freely consents to bear the Son in her womb. This is the human side of the eternal incarnate decision. God's desire to involve Mary in this way testifies to the deep mystery that God has willed humanity to codetermine with God. She operates as the 'head' of the whole community as she obeys God's call. Indeed, we are left to wonder whether there

¹³³ Barth, *The Great Promise*, 32 (emphasis original).

¹³⁴ See Luke 2:41-52; John 2:1-5.

¹³⁵ Beverly Gaventa, *Mary: Glimpses of the Mother of Jesus* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1995), 55.

¹³⁶ As Elisabeth Behr-Sigel says, 'Mary is not a feminine divinity. She is the completely human mother of God who, in order to save humanity not as a *deus ex machina* but from within it, assumes all of humanity. In witness to his full humanity the Son of God and God-man was born of a woman' (Elisabeth Behr-Sigel, 'Mary and Women', in *Discerning the Signs of the Times: The Vision of Elisabeth Behr-Sigel*, ed. Michael Plekon, Sarah E. Hinlicky, and Elisabeth Behr-Sigel [Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001], 108).

¹³⁷ This is a translation from Psalm 109 in the Vulgate which is the same one used by Augustine in *Exposition of the Psalms*. The corresponding Hebrew text of Psalm 110 reads, 'From the womb of the morning, like dew, your youth will come to'. The Hebrew is here notoriously difficult to translate.

¹³⁸ Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms 99-120*, ed. Ramsey Boniface, trans. Maria Boulding, vol. 5 (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1990), 278-79.

¹³⁹ Quoted in Theresia Hainthaler, 'God the Father in the Symbols of Toledo', *International Journal of Orthodox Theology* 1, no. 1 (2010): 130.

¹⁴⁰ Proclus, 'Homily I', in *Proclus of Constantinople and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Antiquity: Homilies 1-5, Texts and Translations*, trans. Maximos Constas (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 139.

would be a world at all without Mary's *fiat mihi*, without her consent to birth the Son of God.¹⁴¹ We might only reply that Mary, formed in the being of Christ and full of the Spirit, made the only *truly human* decision she could make.

Mary the Prototypical Human Agent

Mary, as the eschatological new creature, is also the prototypical human agent of the new age. Mariology therefore has a distinct ethical, ecclesial, and anthropological content. Her eschatological uniqueness, as the *theotokos*, includes her status as exemplar—as one in whom all humanity finds itself. John Manoussakis recognizes this central connection: 'Mary is revealed as the example, if you wish, of the new humanity in Christ—an eschatological person, or rather, the kind of person we are all destined to be eschatologically'.¹⁴² Mary testifies to the exact type of human agency *all* humanity has in Christ. Mary proclaims non-competitive logic herself when she says, 'for behold from now on all nations will call me blessed because the Mighty One has done great things for me' (Luke 1:48-49). Mary's exaltation and cooperation is God's act on her behalf. Indeed, not only is Mary's action included in her election by God, but so too is her exaltation. In accord with Barth's own description, we can now construct how Mary works non-competitively with God and reveals the shape of the truly free human agent.

First, Mary shows us the real encounter that takes place between God and humanity. God comes to Mary and Mary responds to God. The God who meets Mary is open to her. Her faith and obedience are taken seriously by God as a response to God's invitation. God *will not work* without her. Just as Mary is receptive to God, so too God is receptive to Mary.¹⁴³ Here again the gender norms fall apart, for it is not just Mary as a female who is receptive but also God who is receptive. God not only addresses humanity, but desires to need humanity. God listens to what Mary desires. It is in Mary's story that we discover afresh the 'self-limiting' God. Barth deduces this from Mary's role in the incarnation: 'that I indeed encounter God, that God concerns himself with me, and that God wants something from me, that I am not too small for it, that God *needs* me'.¹⁴⁴ Mary, therefore, is the truest picture of our freedom and agency that is established by God's self-limiting desire to need the creature. God desires Mary to take part in God's action in the world, to exercise authority, and to actively participate in God's journey with her.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴¹ Jenson, too, asks the question. 'What if Mary had refused her calling?' (Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, II, 203). To this he answers, 'At every step of the way, Israel's *fiat mihi* was the possibility of the Incarnation; whenever its refusal threatened, judgment had indeed to begin with Israel to bring her to repentance, lest the Son fail of actuality. When Gabriel challenges Mary, the issue is put to Israel once and for all, with no future for repentance. It is for her obedience at that moment, the climactic obedience of Israel, that we not only invoke Mary but revere her' (Ibid., 203-4).

¹⁴² Manoussakis, 'Mary's Exception', 11.

¹⁴³ Such gender inverting language is also obvious in the discussion of the 'Father's womb' detailed above. As Eugene Rogers concludes, 'In good, orthodox fashion, the Father is not male, but the source of human characteristics, male and female in God's image' (Eugene F. Rogers, *After the Spirit: A Constructive Pneumatology from Resources Outside the Modern West* [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005], 117).

¹⁴⁴ Barth, *The Great Promise*, 24 (emphasis mine).

¹⁴⁵ Although Barth saw only Christ as the authority over Mary, it is right also to see Mary as having authority over Christ. As Petkovic notes, 'Mary's maternal vocation means she is entrusted with authority over her developing child; an authority that derives from, and is confirmed by, her willingness to discern and serve the child's needs, upon which, she acts. In her maternal relation of support, Mary acts for the benefit of Christ's body, and in so acting, she grows in knowledge, love, and wisdom' (Petkovic, *Body-Poetics*, 211). Even as an adult Jesus is receptive to Mary's lead, of course, with his own messianic reservations (see John 2:1-8).

Second, in her representative role, Mary shows humanity how to receive and be obedient to their election in Christ. Mary is actively receptive to God. God's grace inspires her to cooperate with God in an obedient response of belief and confession. Mary is in the place of receptivity, but *she must still receive it*. In one of the rare places Barth talks about Mary's own action, he sees her as 'a model and example for all Christians called and ordained to faith and therefore to obedience and service ... [she] works together with Him'.¹⁴⁶ Mary shows eschatological humanity how to live in the freedom that is given through Christ.¹⁴⁷ Mary is blessed not for her passivity but for her faithful response to God's word; 'Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill that which was spoken to her' (Luke 1:45). In this way, Mary is an agent exactly in line with Barth's own definition: 'Man is an active, not an inactive recipient, yet even in his activity he is still a recipient ... man can exercise his responsibility only by obeying God's command'.¹⁴⁸ Mary shows all of humanity the posture of activity within receptivity.

Third, because Mary represents all humanity, she is not in isolation from the rest of sinful humanity. It is here we see why Mary's immaculate conception cannot be admitted to a Barthian Mariology. The immaculate conception makes her a wholly unique human agent—one who, at the moment of revelation, is free from sin. It is because Mary is under the power of sin and vulnerable to death that she is able to represent all humanity. Vladimir Lossky is here instructive:

she who was chosen to become the Mother of God—heard and understood the angelic word in the state of fallen humanity. That is why this unique election does not separate her from the rest of humanity, from all her fathers, mothers, brothers, and sisters, whether saints or sinners, whose best part she represents.¹⁴⁹

If we separate Mary from the state of fallen humanity we separate her also from Christ, who took on *sinful* flesh.¹⁵⁰ The immaculate conception and assumption diminishes her significance, for her *fiat mihi* becomes an isolated strip of Eden upon which no one else may reside. Mary's *fiat* is, rather, a testament to her own obedience to God within a fallen world that plagues her.

Fourth, as an agent who is actively receptive to God, Mary speaks to the grounding, surrounding, and inhabiting action of God the Spirit. Mary, to use a phrase from

¹⁴⁶ CD IV/3, 603 (emphasis mine). It should be noted that even in this context Barth is intending to *minimize* Mary's particular significance.

¹⁴⁷ Mary's representative and active role in salvation history opens further doors into a constructive Mariology: 'an anthropology with human-centered characteristics is the only kind that will enable us to work out a Marian theology that can recover the historic activity of women for the sake of the Kingdom and which consequently can do justice to Mary, women, men, and ultimately to humankind created in the image and likeness of God' (Gebara and Bingemer, *Mary, Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, 4).

¹⁴⁸ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Vladimir Lossky, 'Panagia', in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 203-4. It is this same cutting off of Mary from humanity that feminist scholars have criticized. Particularly, it makes Mary an unattainable image of feminine humanity, and so an impossible ethical ideal leveraged against women. See Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Towards a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (London: Women's Press, 1986), 83. For a response to this concern see Sarah Jane Boss, *Mary* (London: Continuum, 2004), 139-44.

¹⁵⁰ Rom. 8:3. See also Sergei Bulgakov, *The Wisdom of God: A Brief Summary of Sophiology* (New York, NY: Paisley Press, 1937), 174.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians, is a *πνευματικός*, a spiritual person who discerns all things (1 Cor. 2:15). The Spirit 'overshadows' Mary (Luke 1:35), inhabits her womb, and fills her with grace. This Spirit empowered state illustrates that God is the one outside us (*extra nos*) who comes and dwells within us (*in nobis*). Mary is a testament to the creative and resurrecting power of the Spirit. The same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead¹⁵¹ made Mary's womb alive.¹⁵² Mary's womb is uniquely her own, but it nevertheless symbolizes the Spirit-inspired formation of Christ *in us* (*in nobis*). In one of the more fascinating New Testament passages, Paul writes 'My children, with whom I again suffer labor pains, until Christ be formed [*μορφωθῆ*] in you' (Gal. 4.19).¹⁵³ Amidst the turmoil in the Galatian church, Paul speaks to his own suffering and labor as he seeks to birth again the Galatians. However, such labor is not so that the Galatians be born *from him*, but that Christ be formed *in them*. Gaventa summarizes the curious imagery well: 'Paul remains in labor, not until the child is born, but until Christ is born in the child'.¹⁵⁴ Paul's use of the maternal imagery evinces a deeper commitment to the formation of Christ *in* believers.¹⁵⁵ Christ, as the new creature, forms himself in the creature. Mary's womb therefore represents the way in which Christ forms and is formed in humanity—the unity of the extrinsic and intrinsic.¹⁵⁶

With Mary as an example, we can reframe Barth's fears over 'intrinsic' and 'inherent' human capacity. At heart, these are questions of *ownership* and *necessity*. Mary never owned the child nor was the formation of Christ in her womb a necessary outworking of nature. She reveals that grace is never possessed by the creature such that it becomes an unfolding internal process. The intrinsic grace of Christ's own being is always extrinsically oriented and, thus, never ceases to be gift. Mary's grace does not occur by necessity but corresponds to the Spirit's power. The Spirit awakens the creature to God's command and thus makes it responsible to its new being. Our agency, like Mary's pregnancy, is not one of possessing by right, but one of perpetual gift.¹⁵⁷

Finally, Mary testifies to the Christian ethos of prayer. She praises God: 'My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked upon the humble state of his servant' (Luke 1:46-47). Her prayerful song invokes the God who has loved her and blessed her. Her life with God is full of surprise, thanksgiving, and wonder. Upon the spreading of the news of the child by the shepherds, Mary 'treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart' (Luke 2:19). Mary is

¹⁵¹ See Rom. 8:11.

¹⁵² Paul makes this same connection with Sarah's womb. See Rom. 4:17-19.

¹⁵³ This passage is unique within the Pauline corpus for it is also the only place Paul uses the verb *μορφόω* which means literally to 'give form'. For a full treatment of this passage and Paul's maternal imagery, see Susan Grove Eastman, *Recovering Paul's Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), and Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007).

¹⁵⁴ Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 5.

¹⁵⁵ See 2 Cor. 3:18; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 12:2.

¹⁵⁶ Barth's preference for Joseph is therefore deficient. For Joseph, the miracle of the incarnation never moves to the internal and so he does not represent the full work of God.

¹⁵⁷ As Willie Jennings asks, can we 'disentangle processes of subjectivity formation ... from the energy and intellectual inertia of the white masculinist knowing subject?' (Jennings, 'Another Knowledge'). Mary provides just such an option, for she shows that the glorified image of the independent and possessing masculine agent is to be rejected. For it is this posture of receptivity that is how *all humanity* stands before God as *empowered agents*. For further discussion, see Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Mary: the Feminine Face of the Church* (London: SCM Press, 1979), 63-67.

thankful and contemplative.¹⁵⁸ She shows the advent community how to live with God in an active state of humility, praise, prayer, and thanksgiving. Barth summarizes the Christian life with these precise terms: 'We are speaking of the humble and resolute, the frightened and joyful invocation of the gracious God in gratitude, praise, and above all petition Man is empowered for this, and obligated to it, by God's grace'.¹⁵⁹ Barth's words could be an exact commentary on Mary's action in the annunciation. She, as one opposite God, is empowered and in joyful praise lives in God's grace. She stands as one with profound responsibility having been given truly significant freedom.

Conclusion

Upon his visit to Rome towards the end of Vatican II, Barth recalls an interaction with Pope Paul VI:

The Pope had heard that I preferred Joseph, the foster father of Jesus, as the prototype of the nature and function of the church, to the 'handmaiden of the Lord' who was subsequently elevated to the position of Queen of Heaven. He assured me he would pray for me, that in my advanced age I would be given deeper insight into this problem.¹⁶⁰

Barth unfortunately never arrived at this 'deeper insight'. Instead, Mary presented an opportunity to emphasize the uncooperative and insignificant human agent. This focus upon human agency has helped to locate the exact problems in Barth's engagement with Mary and build a Mariology that utilizes Barth's own language about the human elected in Christ. Because of this grounding, there is at no turn the possibility to reply, 'Mariology takes away from the significance of Christ', nor a need to retort, 'but what about grace!?' Rather, Mariology has been the answer to the question of human agency in Christ. She testifies that *through Christ* and *in Christ* God desires ultimately significant human activity. Such is the fruit of a distinctly *Barthian* Mariology.

As gestured to throughout, Mariology in this trajectory contains new avenues for readers of Barth with gender, ecumenical and anthropological interests. Mary's agency, articulated in light of Barth's mature Christology, inverts and transcends the gender binary that plagued Barth's portrayals of her femininity. This opens further doors for an account of gender in Barth that does not require an unequal ordering of the sexes.¹⁶¹ Mariology also need not invoke fear and puzzlement amongst Protestants but provide an opportunity to engage the theological traditions of Mariology in the history of the Church. By situating Mariology in Christology, as I have, we can see now a 'door opened' to examining Mary's real and ultimate significance. Her role as a preeminent member of the Church shows *all Christians* the prayerful response to their election in Christ. Of course, these suggestions have been merely a start, a jumping off point, but I

¹⁵⁸ Barth is noticeably silent on Mary's internal and prayerful obedience. Louth is right to be critical here: 'by ignoring the inner meaning of Mary's part in this mystery, Barth does here separate inner and outer, and in so doing he, in effect, foreshortens his understanding of God's mysteriousness' (Louth, *Mary and the Mystery of the Incarnation*, 15).

¹⁵⁹ Barth, *The Christian Life*, 43.

¹⁶⁰ Barth, *Ad Limina Apostolorum*, 15.

¹⁶¹ For an attempt to do just this, see Springs, 'Following at a Distance'.

have undertaken to arrive at a deeper, yet still Barthian, insight about Mary. Nevertheless, Mariology is not a matter of dogmatic assertion or proclamation. We agree with Lossky's exhortation to focus on Mary as a mystery of the Church, not as a central tenet of its evangelistic ministry:

The mystery of his Mother was revealed only to those who were within the Church ... It is not so much an object of faith as a foundation of our hope, a fruit of faith, ripened in Tradition. Let us therefore keep silence, and let us not try to dogmatize about the supreme glory of the Mother of God.¹⁶²

Therefore, we must take care not to say *too* much, for the mystery of the incarnation extends into the mystery of Mary. A Barthian Mariology is not an attempt to incorporate a series of ideas into a larger system but to enable the deepening of the mystery of God's embodiment through an exploration into the Mother of our Lord.

¹⁶² Lossky, 'Panagia', 210.