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Karl Barth's View of the Humanity of Christ
as Explained in His *Church Dogmatics*

Kevin Twain Lowery

PREFACE

The mystery of the incarnation has always created special interest in my mind. It was not long after my first acquaintance with the theology of Karl Barth that I discovered his position on the fallen humanity of Jesus Christ, which was somewhat surprising to me, considering his constant avoidance of anything that hinted of anthropocentrism. As a student of Wesleyan theology, I still feel that the distinctions made between ethical and legal definitions of sin are somewhat unclear (assuming that a clearer answer does exist). I felt that by studying this aspect of Barth's theology, perhaps I might come one step closer to this clearer distinction, at least in my own mind.

The only resource utilized in this project is Barth's *Church Dogmatics*. A basic exposition of Barth's position should be more than adequate for the scope of this paper. I did not, as others have done in the past, simply refer to one or two isolated subsections in researching this topic; every effort was made to uncover additional comments or details that may clarify Barth's positions on several points, but that is not to say that my exposition is by any means exhaustive. (How could such a claim be made when studying Barth?) Nevertheless, Barth often repeats himself, since his writings are integrative and overlap one another. For that reason, it should be noted that the vast majority of the material cited in this paper is taken from three or four of the most pertinent sections. All references are taken from *Church Dogmatics*, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, eds. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1960). Substantive comments are collected in the end notes.

If this paper helps its readers gain a clearer understanding of this facet of Barth's theology, then I will consider the endeavor a success.

THE INCARNATION AS REVELATION

When discussing the theology of Karl Barth, it only seems appropriate to begin the discussion with the revelation of the Word of God. Although this theme underlies much of Barth's thinking, he does not rely upon it very heavily in supporting his views on the humanity of Jesus Christ. He does, however, begin the subsection "Very God and Very Man" with a statement that asserts the incarnation as a "sovereign divine act." It is a new creation, but it is "an act of lordship different from creation." [I, ii, 134] Hence, the incarnation originates as a sovereign act of God, not as a response to anything or anyone else.

In the incarnation, the humanity of Christ becomes the sole means of revelation of the eternal Word. It is the tabernacle of the Logos. [Ibid., 148] However, Barth denies that human nature contributes to this revelation.

In other words, human nature possesses no capacity for becoming the human nature of Jesus Christ, the place of divine revelation. It cannot be the work-mate of God. If it actually becomes so, it is not because of any attributes which it possessed already and in itself, but because of what is done to it by the divine Word, and so not because of what it has to do or give, but because of what it has to suffer and receive--and at the hand of God. [Ibid., 188]

On the other hand, Barth asserts that Christ would not be revelation if He were not human. [Ibid., 152] Most likely, this can be attributed to the fact that Jesus Christ is both revelation to humanity and of humanity.¹

¹ This creates another difficulty for Barth in his doctrine of revelation. In his debate with Emil Brunner over natural theology, Barth emphatically asserts that human nature possesses no ability to receive revelation, that revelation creates its own point of contact. (See *Natural Theology*, which contains Barth's and Brunner's positions and an introduction by John Baillie) Here, Barth concludes that human nature has no capacity for becoming the Word of God. Thus, Barth has to proclaim revelation as a triple miracle: (1) the Word miraculously becomes human, (2) the man Jesus Christ miraculously is revelation, and (3) this revelation miraculously creates its own point of contact in which it can be received by human beings.

Lastly, Barth contends that Christ reveals sin in the flesh. In his view, God does not reveal human nature as we would like to view it, in its created wholeness, but in Christ we see human nature "in its perversion and corruption." [III, ii, 26] As a matter of fact, "the existence of Jesus Christ is the place where we have to do with human sin in its absolutely pure and developed and unequivocal form." [IV, i, 397] Because of this, the human Jesus Christ reveals "that man is the man of sin, and what sin is, and what it means for man." [Ibid., 389] Thus, the human Jesus Christ becomes a mirror in which every human being can see himself or herself as this man and as a sinner. It reveals the true knowledge of sin. [Ibid., 390] As the representative of the human race, Christ reveals sin to every human being. In Barth's discussion, the sinfulness of the human race as a whole is revealed in respect to the grace of God. That aspect will be mentioned later.

THE DOCTRINE OF HUMANITY (Not Anthropology)

Humanity in General

Understanding Barth's position on human nature depends somewhat upon one's ability to understand the terminology he uses. Our first task is to determine the relationship between human nature and sin. Barth makes a distinction between what he refers to as "true human existence" and "flesh." Committing sin is not an attribute of true human existence, either before or after the fall. [I, ii, 156] However, we cannot refer to human nature as "true human existence" after the fall. The form which human nature took concretely after the fall is what is known as "flesh" in the scriptures. This describes "the being of man as corrupted and therefore destroyed, as unreconciled with God and therefore lost." [IV, i, 165] In the fall, humans do not cease to be the good creatures of God. Nothing can effect that change, but the human being can make himself or herself a stranger and an alien to God. [Ibid., 406] In this alienation, there can be no distinction between what humanity is and what it does. [Ibid., 492] Roman Catholic theology makes this distinction, separating human nature from its sinfulness. Since Barth does not see

sufficient evidence in scripture for this view, he concludes that this knowledge is derived from some other source. Therefore, he rejects any such attempt of explanation. [III,ii, 29] Barth does admit that the Bible never disputes the full and unchanged humanity after the fall, that humans continue to possess and use "all of the faculties which God has given [them]."² [IV, i, 492] This can be seen in the long history of great human achievements. [Ibid., 506]

To Barth, humans have always existed as transgressors. This is attributed to the fact that they have always been full of pride, to the very depth of being. [Ibid., 495] This pride leads to a denial of the true self, which, in turn, leads to a separation from the true self. The human nature is not substantially changed, it is relationally changed. In its corruption, however, the true human existence can never be seen. It has not been destroyed, though.[III, ii, 27] To explain, Barth states, "the ultimate fact about our human nature . . . is the self-contradiction of man, and the conscious or unconscious self-deception in which he refuses to recognize this truth." [Ibid., 47] Humans thus remain in sin as long as they continue to contradict their true selves. In fact, the true self has become hidden to humanity and it is only through the Word of God that men and women can ever hope to discover and know their true selves. [Ibid., 207]

The nature common to all human beings can be understood better in light of Adam, whom Barth says sums up the whole history of the human race. The contention is that Adam was a transgressor from the very beginning because he was proud from the very beginning, denying his God-given creatureliness and contradicting himself and God. In this way, Adam represents every human being that has ever entered the world. To Barth, the first human was a transgressor from the beginning. "There never was a golden age. There is no point in looking back to one. The first man was immediately a sinner." This assertion is made by combining Gen. 2:5-25 with Gen. 3. The creation of man had

² That is, all of the faculties except the ability to receive revelation from God.

hardly been completed through the creation of his "indispensable and suitable helpmeet" before he opposed all of these good things and became disobedient to God. [IV, i, 508f]

Nevertheless, Barth does not make Adam the scapegoat for the human race. He feels that we should make no special accusation against Adam, since what he did was only a trivial form of what all of us have done. Furthermore, the sin of Adam is not inherited by us, nor has he passed to us a nature that has been poisoned or diseased. In that regard, none of us have to be like Adam, we responsibly choose that for ourselves. The guilt of Adam is no more borne by us than our guilt is borne by him. If this is the case, why is the story of Adam even mentioned in the Bible? It is because we recognize ourselves, and the whole history of the human race, in Adam.³ [Ibid., 508ff]

The purpose of the creation of humanity is for each person to be the "covenant-partner" of God. This is how man and woman were created. [III, ii, 203] Human nature was created in the image and likeness of God for this purpose. It was not created in solitude, but in solidarity with God. Since God Himself is in relationship, humanity is likewise created in relationship. Therefore, human nature is not to be defined ontologically, but relationally. [Ibid., 323f]

This understanding of human nature provides a basis for understanding the effects of the fall upon it. Denying an ontological discussion of human nature also leads to the denial of any ontological changes made to human nature by sin.

Hence the matter must not be expressed in a way which might suggest that with the fall of man Satan has succeeded in producing a second creation, a *malum substantiale*, or that the result has been the destruction of human nature or its transformation into something quite different. The corrupted

³ Herein Barth reveals another difficulty in his view of revelation. He wants to propose that sin is only revealed in Christ. However, this is very difficult to support, since Christ remained sinless. It would seem that some reference would first have to be made to Adam, then the contrast is made between the first Adam and the Second Adam (Christ). Barth does, however, avoid the charge of Pelagianism in that he sees humanity as sinful from the beginning, even though it was not created thus. This is the absurdity.

nature of man and the sin which corrupts it are two distinct things. [Ibid., 28]

The distinction is not made between what human nature is and what it does, but the lines are drawn between corrupt human nature and the sin that brings this corruption.

However, the unrighteousness of human nature is relational, found when humans are untrue to their nature and thereby forfeit the freedom to be themselves. [IV, i, 257f]

There is nothing in human nature itself that brings this self-contradiction, because then it would be excusable to humanity and ultimately attributable to God. Therefore, sin is in itself an absurdity. [Ibid., 409f] The refusal of the good results in a choice of nothingness, the absurd, and not a choice of something substantially evil. In fact, Barth goes as far as to describe the tempter, the devil, "only as independent non-being." [Ibid., 422] Hence, the elect covenant-partner with God falls into nothingness because of pride, and is threatened with "the divine rejection, and therefore with death and destruction." [Ibid., 493] Death becomes a characteristic of human nature just as sinfulness likewise becomes inseparably linked with it. Sinful humanity estranges itself from this fact also. [Ibid., 406]

If one were able to confess this self-contradiction, he or she would essentially be able to save himself or herself.

And man's being in sin is that he will not accept that he is the rebel against God that he is, that he will not see and acknowledge his usurpation for what it is, that he will not confess it and therefore his own fall, that he wants to explain and excuse and justify himself, to be in the right against God. If he ceased to do this, He would acknowledge that God is in the right against him, thus returning to the place which is proper to him as a creature in relation to God, and reversing the fall which consists in his usurpation. His unwillingness to repent is the constant renewal of his sin. [Ibid., 258]

The ability of humanity to save itself through repentance is an impossibility to Barth, because sinful humanity is only revealed through the person of Jesus Christ, as was mentioned earlier.

Barth's treatment of "original sin" helps to clarify his position. First, he flatly denies any truth to theories which include the concept of hereditary sin. The sinful human nature is not by any means propagated by the human race. [Ibid., 500] Barth would like to discard the term "hereditary sin" and only speak of "original sin." We all are guilty of Adam's sin in the sense that the divine verdict and sentence is pronounced on humanity as a whole. However, we do not sin of necessity, but each of us re-enacts the fall in our own lives. This is not to be confused with the theories that assume that humans are born sinless and innocent and then fall into a guilty state; Barth's view upholds that every human being comes into being under the verdict given to all of humanity, because of Adam's sin. When each of us live out of the covenant, we confirm the verdict that has already been given, showing ourselves indeed to be corrupt.⁴ [Ibid., 501]

Christ as Human Representative

Jesus Christ is the Second Adam, but He is the "first and true Adam of which the other is only a type." The first Adam can only be known and understood in reference to the last Adam. [Ibid., 513] Barth feels that his conception of sin requires us to view Christ as "the creation of a new man," essentially the original human. [I, ii, 134] Christ lived an existence that was based on the result of Adam's act, but He only bore this sinful nature innocently. He did not live according to His situation and commit sin, therefore, He Himself was sinless. [Ibid., 152]

⁴ Barth's explanation is somewhat inadequate in defining "original guilt" as opposed to "original sin."

Barth quotes H. Bezzel in arguing that Christ did not merely bear a human body, but the "entire limitations of fleshly being." [Ibid., 155] Christ would not be human if He were not "flesh" in a definite sense. [Ibid., 152] Christ is both "Very God and Very Man." "Jesus Christ is not a demigod. He is not an angel. Nor is He an ideal man. He is a man as we are, equal to us as a creature, as a human individual, but also equal to us in the state and condition into which our disobedience has brought us." [Ibid., 151] We cannot, in Barth's opinion, ascribe to Jesus two natures, since this would imply two separate states. [IV, i, 133f] Jesus Christ is completely like us, but unlike us, He is at the side of God. In this way, He brings the kingdom of God from heaven to earth. [Ibid., 208] To Barth, this is the distinction of the Christian faith. We must not compromise the true humanity of Jesus Christ, because the Christian religion would be no different and no more true than any other religion. Furthermore, the weakening of this doctrine would eliminate our concern with Jesus Christ, because He would not really be like us. [I, i, 152f]

To Barth, Jesus alone "is primarily and properly man." His human nature is the key to all human nature. In this way, God's relation to humanity is only through His relationship with Jesus. [III, ii, 43] Christ became "a sinner and a debtor, but as the sinless and guiltless bearer of the sins of others, the sins of all other men." [IV, i, 512] Even though Christ bears the "way and curse" of sin, He does not live in it. In other words, He does not act in accordance with His nature, He lives in opposition to it. He had to bear sin with us to be like us, according to Barth, but He remained sinless nonetheless. [I, ii, 189]

The fact that Christ became like us allowed Him to become our representative. Barth feels that this true humanity in Christ allows us to see ourselves as we truly are, but also as ones for whom Christ has taken over responsibility. We are forgiven in Him. [IV, i, 241f] He brings salvation to us because He truly represents us. Barth agrees with

Edward Bohl that if that were not the case, then "everyone has to start all over again and to fulfill independently God's claims upon us." [I, ii, 154f]

THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The adherence to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth is something for which Karl Barth has received a great amount of criticism. Considering the shape that his theology is taking thus far in this discussion, Barth has no option but to assert the Virgin Birth. He disagrees with R. Seeberg who asserts that the redemptive work of Christ is not at all dependent on the Virgin Birth.⁵ [Ibid., 178] He does concede with Schleiermacher that the birth of Christ must involve a supernatural conception. However, Schleiermacher believes that the supernatural event does not necessitate the absence of male activity in the conception. Barth disagrees. [Ibid., 180] The connection between the sign and the thing signified is not a casual one, but a necessary one, in Barth's view. [Ibid., 189] Christ's divinity is evidenced in the resurrection, but His humanity is signified by the Virgin Birth. [Ibid., 182f]

Barth feels that this doctrine does not explain the mystery of the incarnation, it protects it. "It denotes not so much the Christological reality of revelation as the mystery of that reality . . . [it] is not, then, a repetition or description of the *vere Deus vere homo*, although in its own way it also expresses, explains and throws light on it." [Ibid., 177] In fact, Barth believes that the Christmas passages in Matthew and Luke do not attempt to explain the birth of Christ, they only proclaim it as a mystery. [Ibid., 178] The ultimate sense of this mystery lies in the fact that the incarnation is both an eternal and a temporal event. Jesus became the son of Mary in time, but He is the Son of God from all eternity. [IV, i, 206f]

⁵ This will be addressed in detail below.

Barth never rejected the use of the term "mother of God" when referring to Mary. The term first signifies that the Word became flesh in the sense that He became linked with human blood, a view corresponding to that of P. Gerhardt. In other words, Christ was "born." The term secondly indicates that the humanity of Christ was not something apart from and in addition to His Sonship to God. [I, ii, 138]

Barth believed that his view of Mary corresponded to that of Luther, who believed that the greatness of Mary "consists in the fact that all the interest is directed away from herself to the Lord." [Ibid., 140] In contrast, Barth felt that his view did not align with that of the Roman Catholic church. He felt that the "mother of God" view of the Catholics typified the one heresy from which all other heresies are formed, namely the attempt to make humanity the work-mate of God, contributing to its own redemption. [Ibid., 143] Barth described Catholic theology as attributing to Mary a "bridal relation to God which accompanies the motherhood." [Ibid., 144] For Barth, true Mariology describes a woman who is open and ready for God, and a woman who herself is also the subject of the divine redemptive activity. [Ibid., 145]

Barth gives a strong reaction against views that he labels as "gnostic and docetic." One such view was the one proposed by Valentinus which asserted that Christ received nothing from His human mother, but He assumed a heavenly body created for His life on earth. Barth feels that this would mean that Christ would have "only apparently been born and become man." He feels that this points to a mystery other than the one attested by the Scriptures. Barth believes that the symbol *ex Maria* is to be used, not *ex nihilo*. [Ibid., 185f]

Barth also criticizes the quartet of Schleiermacher, R. Seeberg, Brunner, and Althaus, who unanimously declare that Jesus cannot be understood from *ex virgine*, because he is the penetration and new creation, being free from original sin. They conclude that even apart from Joseph, Jesus would still be connected with sinful humanity from Mary. Barth counters with the following statements.

This objection can only be to the point if the miracle . . . bears the meaning that it made possible or effected the penetration and new beginning. But we can as little say that as we can say on Mk. 2:1-12 that the truth and reality of the fact that the Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins was made possible and effected by the healing of the paralytic. [Ibid., 189]

Barth then rightly asserts that the sign does not effect the thing signified.⁶ He also agrees with these men that in His descent from Mary alone, Jesus would "still stand in the context of sinful humanity even without a human father." [Ibid., 192] In fact, this statement supports Barth in his arguments for ex Maria.

Finally, whereas Barth believes in the sinfulness of Christ, He is certainly not a proponent of the immaculate conception. Since human nature is only made worthy to partake of the divine nature on the grounds of justification and sanctification, Mary was only able to receive the revelation by a miracle of grace, not because she possessed any capacity to receive it. [Ibid., 196]

THE DOCTRINE OF SIN

In order to understand what Barth means when he asserts that Jesus came in sinful flesh, yet remained sinless, we must first try to grasp Barth's full understanding of sin the best we can. He does not give any precise formula to follow, although he does discuss sin in three main expressions, in reference to Christology. Before introducing them, however, let us begin the discussion from what has already been learned from this study.

Barth thinks of sin in relational, not ontological, terms. He asserts that humans were created to be covenant-partners with God, but all have rejected that and the result is

⁶ What is lacking in Barth's argument is the fact that every sign must have a proper interpretation if it is to properly point to the thing signified. For instance, the sign of Jesus healing the paralytic points to His authority to forgive sins, because healing was considered an act of God alone. Such was not always the case when He cast out demons.

self-contradiction. By turning away from God's divine order and plan, humanity actually disobeys God, being alienated from His majesty. [IV, i, 414] In this way, sin is to be considered "an usurpation against the creative will of God." Sin is not part of God's creation, it has only "entered into" the world as an alien. [Ibid., 139] Therefore, "sin" describes that which God has not willed and will not will. "When man sins, he does that which God has forbidden and does not will." However, this possibility is not to be attributed to human freedom or rationality. [Ibid., 409]

By separating oneself from the will of God, the covenant relationship created by God is necessarily breached. Therefore, sin is a breach of the covenant between God and humanity. It cannot be described by any other law or standard, it can only be known in light of the covenant. [Ibid., 140f] Nevertheless, human beings cannot dissolve the covenant, they can only break it. Even in sin, we do not cease to be the covenant-partners of God., although we contradict ourselves in sinning against God and His grace and we thus bring divine judgment on ourselves. [III, ii, 33f] The covenant is broken, but by no means is it annulled. Sin has no creative power, therefore, "it cannot reverse the divine operation." [Ibid., 206]

Naturally, Barth turns to Christology in determining a structure for sin. He discusses three main areas. Sin in its first form is pride, the opposite of the humiliation of Christ, his condescension to us. Whereas Christ became obedient, humanity shows itself to be defiant. [IV, i, 142f] Barth feels that pride is more than just a type of sin; he asserts that "sin in its unity and totality is always pride." Pride is the basis for all of the other expressions. It is disobedience in that humanity rejects the created order of God, and it is a breach in the covenant in that humanity rejects its relation to God as His creature. [Ibid., 413f]

The second form of sin is sloth, the opposite of the exaltation of Christ. Christ first humbled Himself to link Himself to all humanity, then He was exalted so that "we may be raised to the status of children." Humanity is slothful in that it does not want to

be raised and restored as the covenant-partner of God. [Ibid., 143] The third form of sin is falsehood, "the opposite of the fact . . . that in Jesus Christ God has made Himself the witness of the truth of the atonement," the "movement from above downwards and below upwards." [Ibid.] Whereas God is the witness of what Christ has accomplished in the atonement, humanity denies what was accomplished both in creation and in the atonement, being untrue to itself and to God. [Ibid., 257f]

When we deny God and our true selves, we separate ourselves from God and, therefore, from all true being. We choose non-being over being, thus sin can be defined as "nothingness." [Ibid., 253] When we choose nothingness we forfeit the right to our true selves. It becomes hidden and inaccessible to us in disobedience. Hence, sin is also a loss of freedom. [Ibid., 257f] Nevertheless, the possibility of choosing nothingness is not found in human nature, because that would make sin excusable to humanity and its possibility attributable to God. For this reason, sin is an absurdity. [Ibid., 409f] In sin, a person makes himself or herself impossible, separating the person from the self. [III, ii, 26] The true self becomes hidden and can only be seen through the revelation of Jesus Christ. In essence, this revelation makes the impossible possible again, reversing the absurd.

Not only does Barth propose pride as the basic form of all sin, he also equates the source of all sin with unbelief. "In all sins it is unbelief which transgresses God's command, which makes man lawless, which ignores and offends the divine majesty." [IV, i, 414] However, it is in pride that unbelief appears. Pride results in unbelief, which in turn results in disobedience. [Ibid., 417] The problem is that unbelief is unrecognizable. It is thus the responsibility of the Holy Ghost to expose unbelief and to proclaim it as a sin. No one but the Holy Ghost can do this. [Ibid., 416]

In retrospect, sin must finally be viewed as a neglect of and alienation from the grace of God. There can be no rebellion if there is no grace against which to rebel. Therefore, "sin is impossible without grace." [III, ii, 35] In addition, sin can only be seen

in light of God's grace. Since this grace is to all of humanity, we see our own sin as the sin of all humanity. "In our own person we see all mankind sinful and guilty before God." [IV, i, 504]

THE SINLESSNESS OF CHRIST

Now that Barth's conception of sin and the sinfulness of human flesh have been discussed, his view of the sinlessness of Christ can be better understood. Since Barth defines sin in reference to his Christology, most of the groundwork for this discussion has already been laid.

If one word could be chosen to describe the sinlessness of Christ, it would be obedience. "In His acts He was without sin. He was perfectly obedient." [Ibid., 260] The obedience of Christ is that which no other human can render. He condemned sin in not committing it, and He substitutes obedience in the place where "otherwise sin necessarily and irresistibly takes place." [I, ii, 156] He produces what the world cannot produce of itself.

In this obedience of Christ, the lordship of God is reflected, because He submits to it. In this way He shows Himself to be the Son of God, different from all other human beings. [IV, i, 208] Christ does not reveal this obedience in "excellences of character, virtues, or good works," rather it consists in His choosing to be the only divine bearer of the burden of sin, being God in the flesh. [I, ii, 156] Even though He took our place as sinners, He was able to be obedient because of "His actual freedom from sin itself . . . That is why He was not a transgressor and committed no sins." [IV, i, 258]

Not only did Christ bear the burden of sin, He also bore all of its consequences. [I, ii, 156] Furthermore, His obedience is rendered in that "He did not refuse to be delivered up and therefore to take the place of us sinners." [IV, i, 237] In other words, His obedience includes His submission. He submitted Himself so that He could "fulfill

all righteousness" for all of humanity. He acted in behalf of and for the sake of the human race. [Ibid., 259]

Although Christ bore the sinful nature, He bore it innocently in that it was not His own. His disobedience would have rendered it as His own. He was not a sinful man. But inwardly and outwardly His situation His situation was that of a sinful man. He did nothing that Adam did. But He lived life in the form it must take on the basis and assumption of Adam's act. He bore innocently what Adam and all of us have been guilty of." [I, ii, 154] In assuming and adopting our unholy human existence, Christ hallows it and it becomes a sinless human existence. [Ibid., 156] Even though He is bound by sin in His humanity, He still remains free from it because He is not bound to commit it. [IV, 1, 131]

Barth did not feel that Christ remained sinless because of an ascetic lifestyle which separated Him from the possibilities of sin. "He is sinless not in spite of, but just because of His being the friend of publicans and sinners and His dying between the malefactors." Christ recognized the divine order of reconciliation and submitted Himself to it. He did not deny His sinful position as we do. [I, ii, 157]

He was a man as we are. His condition was no different from ours. He took our flesh, the nature of man as he comes from the fall. In this nature He is exposed every moment to the temptation to a renewal of sin--the temptation of impenitent being and thinking and speaking and action. His sinlessness was not therefore His condition.⁷ [IV, i, 258f]

Thus, the constant temptation that Christ faced was that of being an impenitent man, refusing to accept the divine order of reconciliation. Barth makes this assertion because he fully believes that Christ possesses a "true, human will, different from the will of God

⁷ Essentially, whereas Adam denied his created self and became sinful, Christ accepted both His divine and His sinful human self and thus became (?) sinless. Christ's obedience to His sinfulness is evidenced through His destiny on the cross.

although never independent of it." However, Barth does believe that the New Testament meaning is "that Jesus cannot sin, that the eternal Word of God is immune from temptation in the flesh, that Jesus is bound to win this struggle. But that . . . is the mystery of revelation which it attests." In effect, Christ was bound to win before the battle ensued. [I, ii, 158f]

CHRIST'S HUMANITY IN REFERENCE TO SOTERIOLOGY

Christ Bore the Wrath of God

To understand this concept, we must again begin with the fundamental definitions. Barth considers humans as the good creatures of God, but this natural goodness has been covered and corrupted by sin, becoming flesh. In some cases, Barth uses man in the same context. Consider the following statement: "To say man is to say creature and sin, and this means limitation and suffering."⁸ [IV, i, 131] For Christ to be truly human, He must assume human existence as known after the fall, since human beings are sinners from the beginning, according to Barth. This likewise includes all of the consequences of being human, especially suffering and death. He agrees with H. F. Kohlbrugge that in His birth Christ was "utterly emptied of God, removed from the sphere of God's glory; held in the same condemnation or eternal death and curse as we are from our birth; given over to him that hath the power of this death, that is the devil, as we are from the start." [I, ii, 154]

Barth adds that the New Testament word *sarx* incorporates sin and its consequences. It is the "concrete form of human nature marked by Adam's fall." This brings Christ under the judgement and verdict of God, becoming one who must incur the wrath of God. [Ibid., 151] He acknowledges this position as an Adamic being and submits to it. Thus, He assumes the state and position of fallen humanity and "bears the

⁸ Evidently, Barth associates creatureliness with limitation and sin with suffering, and not vice versa. There is no reason to assume that he crosses these boundaries.

wrath of God that must fall upon [humanity], not as fate but as a righteous necessary wrath." He does this willingly. [Ibid., 157] Nevertheless, Barth see the wrath of God as the only righteous response to sin. Jesus not only bore this wrath in His passion, but during His entire life on earth. [IV, i, 165]

Now we have come to the point that I raised earlier. Barth is obliged to affirm that the wrath of God incurred by Christ is the means by which His sinful humanity is revealed to all people. First, we see ourselves as sinful beings in the offering and death of Christ. Also, the very Christ who was put to death is continually revealed in His resurrection from the dead, unmasking the "old man." [Ibid., 390f] "The Christian's comfort is not that He was a man, but that He ceased to be the man with whom God was well pleased and was forced into the caricature of man produced by sin." [I, ii, 155]

Christ as the Reconciler

Barth's entire doctrine of reconciliation is again based on his Christology. Christ was: (1) very God, (2) very human, and (3) the guarantor of the atonement, being the union of the two. This reveals the knowledge of sin: (1) pride, (2) sloth, and (3) falsehood. The same is true for reconciliation: (1) justification, (2) sanctification, and (3) calling. Also, the work of the Holy Spirit is known on these terms: (1) gathering, (2) upbuilding, and (3) sending forth the community. Finally, it describes the being of Christians in Jesus Christ in: (1) faith, (2) love, and (3) hope. [IV, i, 79]

The first thing that is to be learned is that the reconciler must of necessity "be of Adam's race." It is only in this fact that the sufferings of Christ have any effect concerning us. [I, ii, 147f] He must exist "in the place where we exist. Otherwise His action would again not be a revealing, a reconciling action. Otherwise He would bring us nothing new. He would not help us. He would leave us in the remoteness." [Ibid., 155] Furthermore, Christ must be entirely human if He is to be the mediator of election. God can only elect all of humanity through His election of Christ if Christ is truly our

representative. [III, ii, 42] However, Christ does truly represent us, and He reconciled us as a human being. "He did not stand in need of exaltation, nor was He capable of it," because He remained as the eternal Word, the eternal Son of the Father. [IV, i, 135]

In the reconciling work of Christ, He brings God to man. "In our unholy human existence the eternal Word draws near to us." [I, ii, 156] This movement is one of self-humiliation and is a direct answer to sin in the form of pride. This is actualized in justification. [IV, i, 145]

In the same way that Christ brings God to man, He also brings man to God. "As in Him the Lord became a servant, so too in Him the servant has become a lord." This exaltation of Christ answers sin in the form of sloth and is actualized in sanctification. [Ibid., 131,145] These two movements of Christ do not describe two states of being, but they are the two directions in which reconciliation takes place. They do not occur in stages, but they describe His two-fold existence. [Ibid., 133]

The fact that Christ is the unity of these two movements makes Him the guarantor of the atonement. This directly answers sin in the form of falsehood and it is actualized in the calling of humanity. In this way, it can be seen that Jesus is the "author and finisher of our faith." [Ibid., 145f] To Barth, this reconciliation in Jesus between God and man removes the distinction between "a sinner and his sins as between a subject and predicate, a substance and accidents. [Ibid., 405f]

Christ "fulfilled all righteousness" for sinful humanity, itself being incapable of any righteousness. [Ibid., 237] He did this by overcoming sin in the flesh. Even though His condition was that of sin, He was not bound to it, but He crushed it and condemned it once and for all. [Ibid., 134] He has the ability to take our sins away because He takes His rightful place as Judge, the place which is His from all eternity. By becoming the representative for sinners, he removes our liability to be judged. He executes righteous and sinless judgement, unlike ours. [Ibid., 235f]

The atonement is the means by which Christ retains humans as subjects in relation to God. Since we have surrendered ourselves as subjects in the fall, the atonement makes possible our being newly created and grounded from above. [Ibid., 89] This is occasioned due to the fact that the work of reconciliation "took place in the blood, in the cross, in the death of Jesus Christ and not in any other place, at any other time or in any other way."⁹ [Ibid., 252] In the blood of Christ, we become righteous before God, have forgiveness of our sins, become His children, have access to Him, and have freedom for Him. [Ibid., 283]

Barth did not like the satisfaction view of the atonement. Although he could not deny his own emphasis on the wrath of God in Christology, he felt that it should not have major emphasis in the atonement. To Barth, the key to the atonement was the representation of humanity by Christ. [Ibid., 253]

Christ also reconciled humanity to God by fulfilling the covenant. To Barth, this fulfillment of the covenant is to be equated with the atonement, just as it is with reconciliation. Christ completed the covenant both in His obedience, which humanity could not render in itself, and by "suffering the punishment which we have all brought on ourselves." [Ibid., 252f]

By fulfilling the divine will, the atonement was not something provisional, but it is "entire and perfect, that which cannot and need not to be continued or repeated or added to or superseded," and its force and power are ever new and eternal. [Ibid., 281] It is not "an 'as if,' beyond which we still need something more perfect, a real reconciliation which has still to come." [Ibid., 283] In other words, the atonement did not only make reconciliation possible, it made it a present reality. The work of Christ is complete and finished, rendered once and for all.

⁹ Considering Barth's strong emphasis on the entire earthly life of Christ, it might be more appropriate to say that the atonement and the resurrection were the consummation of the covenant and of reconciliation.

The reconciliation is not a response to individual situations or to sin in general. "The grace of God, the covenant of God with man, is primary. The sin of man is secondary. It is not ultimate, and therefore it is not primary." [III, ii, 32]

Since the reconciliation is a present reality, the responsibility of our salvation has been taken by Christ alone. We are those who are forgiven and liberated in Him. When we see Christ, we see ourselves as sinners, deserving of God's wrath. The only possibility for us is to repent, to turn from our self-contradiction and sin, submit ourselves to the will of God in reconciliation, and turn to Christ, who has borne the responsibility for us.

If we want to be careful and anxious about it, we are back again on the crooked way of inquiring concerning our own self-justification and therefore on the way of sin; and if we take this way again, our sin will inevitably cause us fresh care and anxiety. As we look at Jesus Christ and ourselves in Him, we are prevented from doing either and both. There is no "way back." [IV, i, 242f]

CONCLUDING REMARKS

When reading Karl Barth, it can prove rather laborious to try to systematize his theology. That is probably the way he wants it, because he did not like the term "systematic theology." However, Barth is very thorough in his presentation and those who will take the time to dig and sift through the mountains will find his theology to very helpful, especially to those who are on a conquest with Barth against anthropocentrism. All of Barth's theology is Christocentric, therefore, any proper understanding of his thought should begin with his Christology.

Although I have tried to occasionally insert some objective critiques, I did not attempt to compare or contrast Barth's positions with those of other thinkers. Such is a worthy endeavor, especially considering the impact that Barth had on twentieth century

theology. All things considered, I believe the following elements to be the crux of any discussion of Barth:

1. *Revelation* - How does God reveal Himself to humanity and how are we able to receive it?
2. *View of the atonement* - What theory or theories are believed? How does that impact the nature of the sacrifice?
3. *Doctrine of sin* - How is sin defined? How are we both sinful and sinners?
4. *View of human nature* - Is it to be defined ontologically or relationally? How was it created? How was it affected by the fall? How is it redeemed?
5. *Contribution of Christ's life to redemption* - Was his entire life "for our salvation" or just His passion and resurrection?
6. *Monergism or synergism* - How much are humans responsible for their own salvation? THIS IS THE KEY QUESTION FOR BARTH

Karl Barth emerged in reaction against a type of Christianity which placed humanity at its center. He sought to avoid the slightest hint of humanism, even to the point of embracing some positions that are extremely difficult to defend. Nevertheless, I have great admiration for anyone who fights the current of popular opinion in a sincere effort to glorify Christ. May his example encourage each of us to do the same.